



## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON THE ENVIRONMENT: CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES



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### ABSTRACT

*The coronavirus has already been described by many scientists as the third world war that caused the greatest damage to the world economy. The coronavirus took not only weak, vulnerable states but also developed and rich states hostage. Today, these powerful states are experiencing a collapse in the grip of the COVID-19 epidemic. The virus has fundamentally changed today's global order with this effect. This article aims to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the world economy based on the importance of coronavirus-related issues. More specifically, the study focuses on the role of coronavirus in the context of the environment where we live.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, pandemic, economy, ecology, environment.

### INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was announced on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organisation. It brought considerable human suffering and marked a turning point for the political and economic system of the world. The virus not only travelling to different countries but is now circulating in those countries. According to the World Health Organisation, coronavirus is affecting more than 200 countries, out of which more than 2 000 000 people worldwide have died with the virus and there are almost 94,414,991 confirmed cases of the Covid-19 [23]. As of January 15, 2020, the U.S., Brazil, India and Russia have seen the highest number of reported fatalities.

Thus, the sudden spread of a new type of COVID-19 has become a major challenge to the world. For the first time since World War II, political and scientific elite once again faced the issue of saving humanity and civilization. Unlike World War I and World War II, in the twenty-first century, the enemy is "invisible", and it simultaneously poses a serious threat to strong and developed as well as economically weak and less developed countries. Recent events have clearly shown the failure of the world economic policy of today and

reflectively demonstrated that if not the coronavirus outbreak, those deficiencies would have gone unnoticed further for millenniums. Considering the high relevance of the topic, the present paper aims to review the impact of COVID-19 on the world in the political and economic context, and analyses the transformation of the world order in the post-pandemic era [11]. The most obvious illustration of this view is the "new earth" seen after the quarantine and self-isolation of millions of families in more than 200 countries around the world, in which there is a real possibility of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Coronavirus was first discovered in China in February 2003. It is one of the groups of viruses, which consists of genetic material surrounded by protein tentacles and resembles a crown, hence its name – corona means „crown“ in Latin. It causes mild or severe respiratory syndrome in an infected body and is transmitted from person to person through the airways. In 2003, the virus spread from China to various countries in Europe and Asia, killing hundreds of people. It also significantly hampered China's economic development, which at the time accounted for 4% of the world GDP [24]. However, the extent of the previously unknown

strain of the new coronavirus is unprecedented in recent history. There is an opinion that the main disease carriers are wild animals and it has initially been spread to the Chinese city of Wuhan, where trade in wild animals is considered a legal activity. However, this view has not yet been scientifically substantiated until today [18]. The second part of the scholars develops the idea that the coronavirus reservoir is a bat [3]. Whilst, the third part of the scientists believe that it is an artificially created bio-weapon that was purposefully created and distributed to reduce the number of population on Earth. However, it has not been scientifically substantiated either. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the hitherto unknown strain of coronavirus a global threat, and on March 11, a pandemic.

Widespread restrictions on labour mobility and travel, closed borders and rising number of an unemployment rate, following the coronavirus pandemic, have adversely affected the world economy since many countries are experiencing a deep crisis and a severe economic recession [4]. The UN's Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to the COVID 19 Crisis warns that "The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core. While the impact of the pandemic will vary from country to country, it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale, making the achievement of SDGs even more urgent" [22].

As mentioned above, since the governments implemented widespread restrictions on social contact to stop the spread of the virus, there is a common agreement among economists that as a consequence of this, most major economies are estimated to lose approximately 2.4 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) over 2020 [5].

#### COVID-19 AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The new coronavirus pandemic marked the beginning of a major shift in political and economic power and demonstrated the failure of great nations which reportedly failed to effectively fight against the virus. More specifically, following the coronavirus outbreak, the number of eurosceptics has particularly increased. Those radical groups criticize the EU policy and argue that that organisation could not or (did not) provide sufficient financial assistance to the member states and demonstrated less effectiveness in a battlefield.

However, Euroscepticism started earlier in the 2010s, following the Arab Spring in the Arab-majority states of North Africa and the Middle East, which began in response to oppressive regimes, high level of corruption and a low standard of living in Tunisia. The mentioned, in turn, caused the issues of migration from the Arab-countries to the European countries. In addition to that, Brexit (the EU leaving the EU) and a rise of populism has also posed a major threat to the Eurointegration process.

In parallel with the severe economic, political, and social crisis caused by the coronavirus, on March 1, 2020, the article published by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), got the world's attention. The article was based on NASA (The National Aeronautics and Space Administration). In the photos taken by the satellite, it can clearly be seen that after the quarantine of millions of people throughout China, and suspended transport and industrial activities, the rate of air pollution has hugely been reduced due to the sharp decline in nitrogen dioxide levels in the air. According to the study, the air had initially been cleaned in the territory of the city of Wuhan, after which it spread to other major cities in China [1].

As it is well-known that nitrogen dioxide in the air is mainly caused by harmful substances emitted by motor vehicles, as well as industrial and construction facilities, which in turn, has a negative impact on human health and contributes to various deadly diseases. According to a study conducted by Belgian scientists in 2019, polluted air in the body of a pregnant woman from the lungs enters the bloodstream and causes a violation of placental norms between the mother and the fetus, which slows down the natural process of perfect fetal growth and development [16].

According to the British publication "The Independent", after the quarantine of India's 1.4 billion of population, the level of air pollution in the country has dropped significantly and for the first time during the thirty years, it became possible to see the peaks of the Himalayan range from different parts of northern India. Across the country, the air quality index improved by about 33% compared to the same period last year [8].

In an article published by SNN on March 16, 2020, the authors, Jack Guy and Valentina Donato, focus on a fact recorded in one of the most popular tourist cities in Italy, Venice, which had initially been spread on Twitter, and it attracted the attention of influential American publications later on. As a consequence of the reduction of the flow of visitors, the air in Italy has





been purified and then fish and swans appeared in it. Previously, due to the high rate of pollution, it was practically impossible to see fish in the canals of Venice [6]. Nowadays, travel and tourism are considered to be one of the largest industries in the world [25]. The number of international tourists is growing regularly, however as has been demonstrated it might have a negative impact on the environment as well. The British publication "The Guardian", based on data obtained from the European Space Agency, published a visual material that shows the improved ecological situation in Europe and Asia as a result of suspended flights and closed factories in many of the countries of the world.

Rume and Islam (2020) argue that "the pandemic situation significantly improves air quality in different cities across the world, reduces GHGs emission, lessens water pollution and noise, and reduces the pressure on the tourist destinations, which may assist with the restoration of the ecological system. In addition to that, there are also some negative consequences of COVID-19, such as increase of medical waste, hazardous use and disposal of disinfectants, mask, and gloves; and burden of untreated wastes continuously endangering the environment. It seems that economic activities will return soon after the pandemic, and the situation might change".

A large proportion of researchers believe that one of the main sources of coronavirus spread may be human pollution, which took on a global character in the era of globalization and led to catastrophic climate change. Numerous scientists believe that at various stages of time, it was the gross interference in human nature that led to the worldwide spread of deadly diseases such as Bird flu (avian influenza), Ebola, SARS and others. A striking example of the above view is the large-scale fires in Brazil (Amazon rainforest) and Australia in late 2019 [11].

Called the "Lungs of the Earth", the Amazon forest, covers the territory of nine countries. This basin encompasses 7,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The majority of the forest is contained within Brazil, with 60% of the rainforest, followed by Peru with 13%, Colombia with 10%, and with minor amounts in Bolivia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela. The forest absorbs up to a million carbon dioxide annually and releases 20% of the world's oxygen into the atmosphere. In 2019, a fire burned more than 9,060 square kilometres of Amazon rainforest. Many species of animals and plants have been destroyed. According to the National Space Research Institute (INPE), fire cases in the Ama-

zon rainforest increased to 85% and reached a record high in 2019 [7]. Human pollution of the natural environment, and negligence of the human being toward nature, and gross interference in it should also be taken into consideration. It is a man, who for the sake of a personal gain, treats nature harshly, while the jungle has its own laws.

According to a study by the BBC, based on studies by European, American and Chinese scientists, by 2070, as a result of climate change and global warming, temperatures in the habitats of some 3 billion people will be unbearably warm. The changes will particularly affect the population of Latin America, Central Africa and Australia. Researchers believe that it will bring enormous damage to the environment we are living in, later on [2].

### CONCLUSION

Ecologists suppose that in terms of environmental protection, the continuation of the current trend in the world may lead to the extinction of mankind after some centuries. That is why it is critically important for people to think about what damage they are doing to the natural environment and realize its bitter consequences in the long run. In the modern era of globalization, in parallel with the development of industry, climate change, caused by daily human activities also led to large-scale fires in Australia, which unlike the Amazon fires, raged for several months. The fire killed 23 people, completely destroyed more than 1,500 homes and more than 500 million animals, especially the unique species of koalas.

The crisis caused by the coronavirus has clearly shown us the shortcomings and deficiencies of the global economy of today that is suffering from a significant stagnation following the COVID-19 crisis. It is also a unique lesson to the people. They have to realize that harmful interference of humans in nature will, sooner or later end in disastrous consequences for humanity. The European Union has hugely been criticised as well. Eurosceptics continuously argued that despite the EU financial assistance to its member or non-member states, the largest economic organization failed to use all the effective leverage to support Italy in the most difficult situation when it needed help badly.

The economy should primarily focus on human benefit, and the governments should serve this purpose as well. It is necessary to draw attention to the urban greenery policy, raise public awareness on the environment

issues (such as: climate change, pollution, environmental degradation, and resource depletion etc.). Furthermore, coordinated work of states to protect the environment and improve the ecological situation is becoming of a critical significance, which, above all, requires more at-

tention from the side of the EU since real, effective steps to be taken by the organisation on this issue. Otherwise, humanity will be in danger of ecological catastrophe which has unanimously been acknowledged by many of the leading ecologists of the world.

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## COVID-19-ის გავლენა გარემოზე: გამოწვევები და სირთულეები

ტარიელ ლომია

ეკონომიკისა და ბიზნესის ფაკულტეტის დოქტორანტი  
ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

### აბსტრაქტი

კოვიდ-19 (კორონავირუსი) ბევრმა მეცნიერმა უკვე აღიარა, როგორც მესამე მსოფლიო ომი, რომელმაც უდიდესი ზიანი მიაყენა მსოფლიო ეკონომიკას. მან „მძევლად აიყვანა“ არა მარტო სუსტი და დაუცველი, არამედ განვითარებული და ეკონომიკურად მდიდარი სახელმწიფოებიც, რომლებიც, ფაქტობრივად, კოვიდ ინფექციის კოლასში აღმოჩნდნენ. ვირუსმა არსებითად შეცვალა დღევანდელი მსოფლიო წესრიგი. კორონავირუსთან დაკავშირებული თემატიკის აქტუალობიდან გამომდინარე, წინამდებარე ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს Covid-19-ის გავლენის მოკლე მიმოხილვას მსოფლიო ეკონომიკაზე. სტატიაში ყურადღება გამახვილებულია კორონავირუსის როლზე იმ უპრეცედენტო გამოწვევების ფონზე, რომლის წინაშეც ჩვენი პლანეტა დგას 21-ე საუკუნეში.

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