Legitimacy and Political Leadership in the New Era

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We will remember 2020 as a year of whirlwind challenges that befell a relatively calm world. *COVID-19* has changed practically all aspects of life. The apprehensions regarding a possibility of a global pandemic that had been growing in the expert community for several decades, have been confirmed by millions of infected people, tens of thousands dead and enormous strain on global healthcare. The pandemic triggered one of the most serious crises in recent history. All these problems have been aggravated by a drop in oil prices coupled with a predicted recession and socio-political instability.

The 2020 crisis will inevitably have an impact on political processes as well. The pandemic's economic consequences have already led to electoral changes. The opportunity of direct communication with the voters is disappearing and elections are being suspended. The priorities and demands of the voters are also subject to change. The election campaign in the United States is indicative in this respect. The coronavirus has completely reshaped the presidential race. Thus, *COVID-19* pushed Bernie Sanders out of the presidential race. The series of his defeats at the Democratic Party primaries and subsequent withdrawal from the race reflects a growing demand for more conventional nominees. For many Democratic voters Sanders probably proved to be too experimental a figure who did not demonstrate a readiness to act as a crisis manager.

The influence of the current situation on politics may be much deeper and more lasting. The usual course of life has been upset by lockdown measures that were unprecedented in recent history. They have put health and economic welfare, freedom and security on different scales. The pandemic-provoked differences are challenging the legitimacy of the established institutional order and established political practices.

The symbolic universe of the existing institutions and relations around them took shape in completely different conditions. In daily life, large epidemics and associated restrictions were ousted to the periphery of the security agenda. The dominant Western approach constructed a standard perception of reality in the context of democratic freedoms, representation and welfare state. Any departures from these values, to use the terms of sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann[1], were at best subjected to "therapy" or, at worst, received a negative ontological status. The criticism of the systems different from Western democracies, primarily Russia and China, has been built on this precept throughout the past few decades. However, during the current crisis the leaders have to make unpopular decisions that can hardly match the logic of the modern perceptions of the optimal socio-political order. Importantly, this concerns not only the West with its typical accent on freedoms and acceptable limits of interference by the state. The economic aspects of the crisis and universal demand for the growth of welfare put the leaders in an equally difficult position all over the world.

The situation is complicated by the multitude of competing interpretations of what is happening and response strategies. At least three paradigms about the pandemic clash at the international level and in domestic political space: it is perceived as a considerable threat requiring extraordinary decisions; as a threat that can be neutralised by the existing practices; as a false or exaggerated threat. However, regardless of interpretation, the authorities must legitimise their vision of the crisis and adopted decisions. Brazil offers an indicative example. The open conflict of the president, who denied the danger of COVID-19, and the medical community led to the resignation of the health minister. The legitimacy of decisions is an equally urgent issue in the countries that have opted for tough restrictions. Against the backdrop of the loss or reduction of incomes, a part of society starts protesting against quarantine measure even though initially they accepted them as necessary.

In this context, the institute of political leadership deserves special mention. During crises, it is political leaders that are at the focus of attention

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[1] *Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the authors of the book "The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge,"1996.*

as the main decision-makers and symbols for the people to rally around. One of the main functions of a political leader, especially during a crisis and post-crisis management, is to define and formulate meanings[2]. An effective leader generates a dominant narrative and formulates a paradigm for perceiving reality. During crisis situations, it is a leader that is expected to explain the essence of the crisis, its limits and consequences, and ways of overcoming it. A leader is called upon to reduce uncertainty, explain what is happening, describe the reasons for a crisis and suggest a specific plan for responding to the challenge.

Unpopular anti-crisis measures test the legitimacy of different regimes and the limits of trust in them. In this respect, a high level of legitimacy provides political leaders with the necessary support for adopting unpopular decisions or implementing long-terms strategies. The greater the legitimacy of the political power, the more support it can rely on during a crisis and the more flexible it can be in distributing resources. The high level of voluntary agreement with the adopted decisions allows the leaders not to spend extra funds on maintaining public order and to concentrate on long-term interests[3]. The latter is particularly important in the light of populist appeals to spend all national resources on maintaining the usual living standards and production levels.

Sustainable legitimacy is also required for the current and future leaders to adopt post-crisis decisions and determine a system of the post-pandemic world. Importantly, the current mechanisms of legitimisation are subject to erosion against the background of long-term socio-political consequences of the current crisis and a risk of the emergence of new powerful epidemics. Political leaders of the new era will have to fight to gain and preserve power in the realities that require reinterpretation of two key aspects of legitimacy: achievements and correspondence to procedures[4].

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[2] *Boin A. et al. The politics of crisis management: Public leadership under pressure. Cambridge University Press, 2016.*

[3] *Tyler T. R. Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. Annu. Rev. Psychol, 2006. Vol. 57. P. 377–378.*

[4] *For more details about the legitimacy components, read M. Stephen Weatherford's article.*

"Measuring political legitimacy" in the American political science review, 1992. Vol. 86. № 1. P. 149–166.

Performance of Political Leadership

According to modern political theory, one of the main sources of political legitimacy is the authorities' performance. Consent to voluntary obedience is determined by the citizens' recognition of the authorities as a source of individual or group welfare. To ensure and maintain their legitimacy, political leaders must formulate the common welfare, establish its own dominant vision of it, demonstrate the competences required for its achievement, work for specific results and, finally, convince their citizens that these results have really been achieved.[5]

Formulating the common good

The point of departure for sustainable and legitimate political leadership is the belief that the authorities can ensure the achievement of individual and collective benefits and meet common interests, which would be impossible without it. The general contour of these benefits and interests and their specific meaning is a product of joint efforts by the political elite and the public. The authorities offer their vision of common benefits, trying to detect the key demands of society.

The crisis provoked by the coronavirus has led to the restructuring of the hierarchy of values and requirements. The obvious attention to security issues put into a new bio-political context is supplemented by the requirement to ensure economic stability and financial sustainability. To ensure their own legitimacy, the political leaders must consider these transformations in elaborating their vision for the future and suggested decisions.

COVID-19 is noticeably different from the last pandemic – the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918. On the one hand, their spread and mortality rates are incomparable. On the other, the general global context

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[5] *Greene A. R. Consent and political legitimacy. Oxford studies in political philosophy, 2016. Vol. 2. P. 71–97.*

and the development and intensification of information flows change the perception of the threat and the assessment of the current events.

Spanish flu broke out amid World Warf I and numerous civilian conflicts. The threat to life became one of the vital challenges along with the risk of being killed in an armed conflict and the general deterioration of the sanitary-epidemiological situation and other concomitant war threats. A hundred years ago, death emerged from behind but it had many faces among which Spanish flu was important but not unique. Against the backdrop of other privations, the pandemic-provoked restrictions fit in with the common logic of necessary and inevitable hardships.

The *COVID-19* pandemic and its economic consequences are unfolding in other conditions. In recent time, the world economy was steadily growing. In general, in the past fifty years the living standards in the world have reached a completely different level. Modern conveniences, the way of life and patterns of behaviour compel people to react badly to the coronavirus-related restrictions. Thus, residents of large cities demand stable access to high resolution video streaming, something that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. The forced limitation on video quality in online services and a decrease in the quality of wireless connection in residential blocks have caused irritation. Discontent has been also caused by inevitable restrictions on movement, social contacts and access to services. People used to live the life of Riley, were suspicious of and displeased with government initiatives in the early stages of the crisis.

This is explained by the discrepancy between the internal healthcare logic that implies the securitisation of epidemics and the broad perception of virus infections. Since the late 1990s, political leaders have viewed epidemics as security threats that imply a possibility of exclusive and extraordinary measures and responses[6]. The public, on the contrary, tends to regard the threat of infection as insuperable and usually builds its own strategy of protection by enhancing immunity in the face of the inevitable infection. That said, despite the acceptance of basic hygiene requirements, civil strategy

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[6] *Kamradt-Scott A., McInnes C. The securitisation of pandemic influenza: framing, security and public policy. Global Public Health, 2012. Vol. 7. № sup2. P. S95-S110.*

includes the consumption of immune-boosting products and "immune-cosmopolitism" – the conviction in the need to train the immune system by contacting a "dirty" environment[7]. It is this idea (herd immunity) that was the foundation of the approach initially used by Britain for countering the novel coronavirus infection.

There are reasons to believe that the COVID-19 pandemic, which is far superior in scale to all recent crises caused by virus infections, will lead to the revision of individual strategies in favour of greater securitisation and consent to tougher state-imposed restrictions and use of power mechanisms by the state for the sake of common benefit, including the use of the military command and control systems that are traditionally used in conditions of the pandemic. Indicatively, there is already a division between "immune-cosmopolitans" that tend to reject the declared scale of the threat and those who consider the coronavirus to be a serious risk. Mutual dislike between these groups and sometimes even aggressive rhetoric towards each other contribute to the appearance of new tensions both within society as a whole, and between society and the authorities.

From the political and psychological viewpoints, the effect is enhanced by the ambivalence of the position of each individual, who is simultaneously subjected to objectification and subjectification. The individual and society as a whole act as subjects in whose interests a package of measures on countering the virus infection is being implemented. At the same time, they are also a source of threat and an object of regulation. People are urged to comply with restrictions and to act in the interest of individual and public benefit and are also viewed as potential carriers of the infection [8].

As the number of infected people throughout the world grows, the pandemic is increasingly perceived as a substantial threat. According to Gallup polls in 28 countries, in March, 67 percent of respondents were afraid of contracting the novel coronavirus[9]. As expected, these fears were

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[7] *Davis M. et al. Immunity, biopolitics and pandemics: Public and individual responses to the threat to life. Body & Society, 2016. Vol. 22. № 4. P. 130–154.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Snap poll on Cov19 in 28 Countries. Gallup International Association, 2020. URL: https://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GIA_SnapPoll_2020_COVID_Tables_final.pdf/*

even stronger in the countries that were the hardest hit by COVID-19. In Italy, 90 percent of respondents were afraid of catching the infection, in Britain and France the relevant figures were 78 and 76 percent, respectively[10]. In the United States, this figure in March was 52 percent[11], but rose to 77 percent in April[12] due to the deterioration of the situation. Moreover, according to the Pew Research Center, in April Americans saw the spread of infectious diseases as the biggest international threat[13]. The third wave of Gallup polls on COVID-19 showed that the apprehensions were strong in June as well. In the United States, Britain and Italy, where the death toll was 40 percent of the total deaths from COVID-19, the fear of contracting the coronavirus stayed at 71, 70 and 79 percent, respectively[14].

This is probably the first time since the Spanish flu pandemic that the threat to health is so clearly perceived by so many people throughout the world. People are increasingly concerned for their lives with the growth of the threatening figures, and this inevitably affects their views as well.

The empirical material accumulated by political science and social psychology makes it possible to speak about the transformation of political values and demands in an environment where existential threats are becoming urgent[15]. The fear of death is a tangible factor in human behaviour. According to the *Terror Management Theory*[16], when

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[10] *Snap poll on Cov19 in 28 Countries. Gallup International Association, 2020. URL: https://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GIA_SnapPoll_2020_COVID_Tables_final.pdf/*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Second Wave of Global Polling. Around the Globe: Worries about the Disease and Poverty. Gallup International Association, 2020. URL: https://www.gallup-international.bg/en/43197/second-wave-of-global-polling-around-the-globe-worries-about-the-disease-and-poverty-support-for-the-authorities-same-in-bulgaria-with-some-important-specifics/*

[13] *Poushter J., Fagan M. Americans See Spread of Disease as Top International Threat, Along With Terrorism, Nuclear Weapons, Cyberattacks. Pew Research Center, 2020. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/13/americans-see-spread-of-disease-as-top-international-threat-along-with-terrorism-nuclear-weapons-cyberattacks/*

[14] *The Opinion across the Globe is Equally Divided on Whether Life Will Return to Normal in 2021 or Not. Gallup International Association, 2020. URL: https://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Summary_Covid19wave3.pdf*

[15] *See, for instance, Harmon-Jones E. et al. Terror management theory and self-esteem: Evidence that increased self-esteem reduced mortality salience effects. Journal of personality and social psychology, 1997. Vol. 72. № 1. P. 24.*

[16] *Greenberg J., Koole S. L., Pyszczynski T. A. (ed.). Handbook of experimental existential psychology. Guilford Press, 2004.*

facing the threat of death people seek to rely on a symbolic immortality, trying to prove their importance through ties with their closest social groups. A feeling of belonging to a community calms them down and helps survive the period of turbulence. Religion, their nation and the state are obvious landmarks on this road. Moreover, in conditions of the pandemic and restrictions on religious group practices, the state and a feeling of patriotism are particularly in demand. The so-called effect of rallying around national symbols, leaders and rituals gives them the necessary feeling of hope and helps them find a badly needed foothold amidst fears and inner turmoil.

The demand for order, characteristic in crises, is enhanced by the information exchange and exaggerated panic waves in the mass and social media. Observations of people, far from all of whom are ready to abide by tough quarantine restrictions, are adding fuel to the flames. Thus, 87 percent of British people believe that their compatriots do not take the pandemic seriously enough. That said, about 60 percent of them violated the lockdown themselves[17]. The illusions of large-scale conscientiousness are destroyed by tough reality and it seems that the way out lies in clear-cut managerial decisions.

Now that the ways of ensuring security and economic prosperity are subject to revision, political leaders are facing a difficult task of legitimising their rule. The pandemic has aggravated the already obvious gap between public expectations and the real potentialities of national economies. In the past few years, the interpretation of the welfare state was only broadening due to the demands of greater spending on healthcare, pensions, childcare and the social sphere as a whole[18].

The new reality demands that political leaders come up with new ideologemes. Old concepts and proposals are losing their effectiveness in the pandemic-transformed world. The crisis has dealt a blow at the established but obsolete sets of proposals based on the dichotomies of "left vs right," "authoritarianism vs democracy," and "democracy vs populism." As British political philosopher

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[17] *Smith M. How is COVID-19 affecting British opinions, jobs and wellbeing? YouGov, 2020. URL:https://yougov. co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/03/24/how-covid-19-affecting-british-opinions-jobs-and-w*

[18] *Chung H., Taylor-Gooby P., Leruth B. Political legitimacy and welfare state futures: Introduction. Social Policy & Administration, 2018. Vol. 52. № 4. P. 835–846.*

Michael Oakeshott wrote, government initiatives must be based on the established practice rather than religious or philosophical precepts and they should be guided by the need to establish peace and order rather than the quest for truth and perfection[19]. Thus, the transformation of the discourse of many political leaders is already obvious. A search for ways to overcome the crisis prompts them to seek any effective solutions, even if they are suggested by their opponents. Similar solutions are being proposed by different camps and ideological blocs. In particular, the demand for an unconditional basic income in the form of direct payments or a substantial increase in the minimal wage and benefits is occupying an increasingly important place in the political agenda.

Demonstrating capabilities

Proposed by the authorities and supported by the majority, the concept of common good is just the first step on the way to a stable legitimacy of political leadership. It is also necessary to convince the public that there is a sufficiently high level of competences and resources to meet the expressed public interests and ensure the benefits offered.

As *COVID-19* spreads far and wide, there is a clear effect of nations rallying behind the current leaders. Faced with a common threat, even groups critical of the authorities have put aside their political grievances and opposition views, with the patriotic feeling and solidarity with the people rising to the fore. According to Gallup, the growth of Donald Trump's approval rating in March was due to a changed attitude among independents and Democrats. By late March, Democrats' approval of his performance was up six percentage points from 7 to 13 percent. The rise was even higher – from 35 to 43 percent – among independents[20].

Against the background of a difficult epidemiological situation and the lockdown, the March support for national leaders surged in Europe as well. In the UK, Boris Johnson gained the highest approval

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[19] *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays," translation from English, Moscow, Idea-Press, 2002, p. 83.*

[20] *Jones J. President Trump's Job Approval Rating Up to 49%.Gallup News, 2020. URL: https://news.gallup.com/poll/298313/president-trump-job-approval-rating.aspx*

indicators of his premiership, mostly owing to changed attitudes among the opposition. His approval increased from 11 to 24 percent in the Labour camp and from 18 to 38 percent among the Liberal Democrats[21]. Similar dynamics could be observed in France, where Emmanuel Macron's approval skyrocketed 13 percentage points to 51 percent, with the biggest increment – up to 20 percent – chalked by the electorate of the Socialist Party[22]. In March, the Italian government headed by Giuseppe Conte enjoyed its highest support rating (71 percent) as well[23], with his personal popularity indicator rising from 38 percent in February to 60 percent in April[24].

Far from all leaders, however, managed to retain the same level of support by early autumn. Both Donald Trump and Boris Johnson have lost practically all of their extra points. The US President's rating, which had long hovered around the record high level of 49 percent, went back to his presidency's average of 40–42 percent by late August[25]. Democrats' approval sunk even deeper to 5 percent[26]. A similar dynamics was demonstrated by the British PM's ratings, which dropped to 44 percent[27] in August. Labour reverted to its former figure of 12 percent[28]. But the Liberal Democrats stayed true to their original approval rating of 30 percent[29].

But the rallying effect may have a long-term positive influence on how current authorities are perceived by the public. For example, after

[21] McDonnel A. Coronavirus reaction pushes PM's popularity into positive territory. YouGov, 2020. URL: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/03/24/coronavirus-reaction-pushes-pms-popularity-positiv

[22] Baromètre de confiance politique LCI – Epoka – Mars 2020. Harris Interactive, 2020. URL: https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-de-confiance-politique-harris-interactive-epoka-pour-lci-analyse-de-jean-daniel-levy/

[23] De Feo G. Sondaggio Demos: gradimento per Conte allestele. YouTrend, 2020. URL: https://www.youtrend.it/2020/03/20/sondaggio-demos-gradimento-per-conte-alle-stelle/

[24] Varrella S. Trust in Prime Minister Conte in Italy 2019–2020. Statista. August 2020. URL: https://www.statista.com/statistics/977223/support-for-prime-minister-conte-in-italy/

[25] Presidential Approval Ratings –Donald Trump. Gallup News. URL: https://news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx

[26] Presidential Job Approval Center. Gallup News. URL: https://news.gallup.com/interactives/185273/r.aspx

[27] Boris Johnson Approval Rating. Yougov 2020. URL: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/boris-johnson-approval-rating

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

9/11, George Bush's job approval reached the historical maximum of 90 percent and, despite an expected rollback, remained at a high level until the end of 2003[30]. So far, this trend includes Emmanuel Macron and Giuseppe Conte. By early August, the French president's rating remained around 50 percent, but support continued to grow among the Socialists, reaching 56 percent[31]. Despite certain adjustments, the Italian PM's personal rating was also at a record high level of 56 percent[32].

For the current leaders, much will depend on the retrospective efficiency assessments of past decision-making. At the same time, retaining the height-of-the-crisis positions and legitimising a new generation of leaders will hinge on their ability to convince the electorate that there are the needed resources and technologies for implementing post-crisis projects. In the current situation, the political leadership is duty bound to display the ability to concentrate the specialists and technologies (including managerial ones) that will make it possible to more effectively address the old tasks and respond to new challenges in the changing world.

The crisis caused by *COVID-19* has brought to the fore the complex nature of the present threats. Vulnerability to the pandemic and the need to take difficult decisions increase the demand for a savvy understanding of complicated processes and the technocratic component of political leadership to an even greater extent[33]. The economic aspects of the crisis highlight the importance of maintaining the existing socioeconomic balance. The electorate demands the same level of living standards, businesses require subsidies, and the new threats dictate the need for allocating additional funds to contain or prevent pandemics. Considerable resources must be accumulated to address these problems. It is obvious that the case in point is not material support alone. Technology, knowledge and a competent team are emerging as key resources.

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[30] *Presidential Approval Ratings - George W. Bush.Gallup News. URL: https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx*

[31] *Baromètre de confiancepolitique LCI – Epoka – Juillet 2020.Harris Interactive, 2020. URL: https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/barometre-de-confiance-politique-lci-epoka-juillet-2020/*

[32] *Varrella S. Trust in Prime Minister Conte in Italy 2019–2020.Statista. August 2020. URL: https://www.statista.com/statistics/977223/support-for-prime-minister-conte-in-italy/*

[33] *Pinto A. C., Cotta M., de Almeida P. T. (ed.). Technocratic ministers and political leadership in European democracies. Springer, 2017.*

Under the modern conditions, the legitimacy of political power is inseparable from the introduction of new technologies and managerial solutions. Political leaders will have to demonstrate awareness of technological trajectories, redefine priorities, and redistribute resources in favour of innovations. The pandemic has accelerated the flow of time. Until recently, the world of digital non-contact future was creeping into our life, prepared to please us, if we so wish, with convenient deliveries or new smartphone apps. It appeared in all its hyperbolised glory only in science fiction series ("Black Mirror," "Philip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams*" and others). But now it appears to be right behind the door, its digital breathing real and perceptible. The inevitability of the transformation and transition to new forms of existence is not yet announced by the politicians but in the post-crisis period they will have to become "conjurers of the future" whose advent will not be put off until the next generations.

The need for fitting expert analysis, scientific support for decision-making and learned opinion is felt particularly keenly in the face of threats to health. Coming into contact with a real rather than imagined crisis facilitates new technological decision-making. *COVID-19* intensified the use of modern technological devices both to monitor compliance with lockdown requirements and maintain livelihood in self-isolation. Robots and beep shuttles are a means to minimise contacts in medical institutions[34]. Drones are used to alert people and monitor compliance with restrictions on movement[35].

The authorities the world over are now able to test facial recognition, geolocation and concomitant Big Data systems legitimately and on a large scale[36]. The technology itself has got an additional impetus for its further development. Identifying people with partially

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[34] *Gardner G. Self-Driving NAVYA, Beep Shuttles Used To Transport COVID-19 Tests To Mayo Clinic In Florida. Forbes, 2020. URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2020/03/16/coronavirus-spy-drones-hit-europe-police-surveillance-enforces-new-covid-19-lockdowns/*

[35] *Doffman Z. Coronavirus Spy Drones Hit Europe: This Is How They're Now Used. Forbes, 2020. URL: https://www.forbes.com/sites/greggardner/2020/04/07/navya-beep-use-avs-to-tranport-covid-19-tests-to-mayo-clinic-in-florida/*

[36] *A smart monitoring system is being introduced in Moscow: A. Balasheva et al, Moscow authorities to control lockdown via face recognition and geodata (Балашева А. и др. Власти Москвы проследят за изоляцией через распознавание лиц и геоданные). RBC, 2020. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/31/03/2020/5e820b139a7947ce8c3d5830*

covered faces and taking temperature measurements from a distance[37] are becoming a reality.

The pandemic is expanding the prospects for using remote diagnosing and health monitoring methods[38]. Number two technological company on the US market with a market cap exceeding $10 billion and the highest three-month quotations in the early *COVID-19* period is Teladoc Health Inc[39], a provider of telehealth services via means of communication of any type.

Topics under discussion include across-the-board use of smart watches and bracelets to identify seats of new infections in real time[40]. Specialists are focusing on existing, if not widely used, technologies, such as "smart tattoos" that help to monitor certain health indicators[41].

The need to keep social distance and maintain the lockdown against the background of widespread non-compliance may precipitate mass-scale introduction of sophisticated surveillance systems. If after 9/11 the United States used the external terrorist threat to justify new mechanisms, the new reality demonstrates the inability of large communities for self-organisation and self-monitoring in the face of a common challenge and thus the need to survey public activities.

Moreover, if China proves positive dynamics in its fight against *COVID-19* and the efficiency of its measures, this will increase the demand for the specific Chinese experience in promoting the social credit system

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[37] *Pollard M. Even mask-wearers can be ID'd, China facial recognition firm says. Reuters, 2020. URL: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-facial-recognition/even-mask-wearers-can-be-idd-china-facial-recognition-firm-says-idUSKBN20W0WL*

[38] *Park A. The Tech That Could Be Our Best Hope for Fighting COVID-19—and Future Outbreaks. Time, 2020. URL: https://time.com/5805622/coronavirus-pandemic-technology/*

[39] *According to Finviz.com on April 17, 2020. URL: https://finviz.com/screener.ashx?v=141&f=cap_largeover,sec_technology&ft=4&o=-perf13w*

[40] *Topol E. How digital data collection can help track COVID-19 cases in real time. The Washington Post, 2020. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/10/how-digital-data-collection-can-help-track-covid-19-cases-real-time/*

[41] *For more details: Hosu O. et al. Minireview: Smart tattoo, microneedle, point-of-care, and phone-based biosensors for medical screening, diagnosis, and monitoring. Analytical Letters, 2019.Vol. 52.№ 1.P. 78–92.; Yetisen A. K. et al. Dermal Tattoo Biosensors for Colorimetric Metabolite Detection. AngewandteChemie, 2019. Vol. 131.№ 31. P. 10616–10623.; Meetoo D., Wong L., Ochieng B. Smart tattoo: technology for monitoring blood glucose in the future. British Journal of Nursing, 2019.Vol. 28.№ 2. P. 110–115.*

and municipal organisation to ensure security and an effective recovery in the post-crisis period. The narrowing of the resource base promotes a revision of fair distribution criteria. One can expect a demand, not for an equalising distribution, but for a conservative interpretation of distributive justice as the correspondence of the received to the merits and an opportunity for everyone to do what he or she is fit for[42]. In this context, the social capital in the form of accumulated social credit looks like a method of organisation rather than a scare.

The same goes for organising the urban space. If China's claim that it has overcome the pandemic by maintaining strict control within isolated neighbourhoods organised as autonomous communities is confirmed, these practices may be borrowed by Western metropolises for their own development. The world knows examples of entire cities being rebuilt under the impact of epidemics. A case in point is Paris and its renovation by Georges-Eugène Haussmann in an attempt to prevent a new outbreak of cholera. In a similar effort to fight cholera, Naples was pulled down and built anew under the Risanamento programme[43].

The practices and technologies that are being employed to combat *COVID-19* are of extraordinary nature. But their large-scale testing and efficacy might make them routine and candidates for the list of acceptable tools to be used to legitimise political power.

Political Leadership and Institutions

Alongside demonstrating its achievements, the political authorities can gain legitimacy through the procedures of selecting leaders and decision-making. In the framework of normative legitimacy theories, this is a question of exclusively democratic procedures and institutions of representative government. The logic of this discourse is similar to Max

[42] *Pilon R. et al. American conservative thought in the twentieth century. Transaction Publishers, 2011. P. 355–381.*

[43] *For more details on the epidemics of cholera and the reconstruction of Naples, see: Snowden F. M. Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present. Yale University Press, 2019. P. 256–259.*

Weber's rational legal authority[44]. People voluntarily agree to be ruled because the political leaders came to power as a result of procedures that guarantee a fairer and more competent representation. However, the procedural aspect of legitimacy embraces a much broader range of institutions and practices beyond the limits of its normative dimension. In addition to legitimisation via the mechanisms of selecting the political leaders (which do not have to necessarily be part of the democratic process), it includes legitimisation through political decision-making. The legitimacy of the authorities and of their decisions depend on the people's trust in the existence of procedures that respect their interests. It is equally important to convince the people that their interests are really being met. In this respect, the procedural dimension of legitimacy is closely linked with the institutions of communication between society and the authorities.

The coronavirus crisis calls into question the efficiency of the existing mechanisms of communication between political leaders and the public. The content of communication as well as its form is subject to change. The internet has long become one of the elements of election campaigns and daily communication between the leader and the public. Political managers have fully mastered its advantages and are actively using them in practice. However, the internet has never been the main or the only channel of political communication. The US experience shows that the absence of an opportunity to hold a rally, gather 10,000 people at stadiums and make fiery speeches before a live audience deprives nominees of the usual technology and additional points. The disappearance of personal meetings with voters from a presidential campaign dealt a tangible blow at Bernie Sanders, a formerly energetic speaker. The election rallies that played an important role in Donald Trump's victory in 2016 are now on hold as well.

Adaptation to the new conditions cannot take place overnight but it is clear that the transition from the traditional forms of communication with voters to the online format is already being tested on a large scale. Both Trump, who has kept his official rostrum, and Biden, who initially limited himself to interviews from his library, are building up the use of the online format. The political season in the United States is taking place with virtual party conventions and meetings with voters, as well as

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[44] *Max Weber. Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie (1921 – 1922).*

virtual campaigning. The candidates, their families and political allies are involved in the daily process of producing content for numerous platforms. They are trying to demonstrate their involvement and engagement through the digital veil, be it Zoom meetings with Jill Biden, Facebook video comments or the Triggered podcast by Donald Trump Jr. However, effective work with the voters obviously requires new approaches. At a time when most Americans say they wish to receive information directly from the candidates or their campaigns, in June only 27 percent of respondents said that they receive information online from channels associated with Trump and a mere 24 percent from Biden[45].

The demand for new communication formats and competent decisions requires a revision of the existing representative democracy institutions. Experiments with electronic voting and a possibility of direct communication of the leader with the voters at e-plebiscites and other digital formats put into doubt the existence of parliaments in their current form. If decisions must be made by competent technocratic officials, and the opinion of the interested groups can be expressed without mediators, the need for parliaments ceases to be obvious and requires at least new arguments to support it.

Technological acceleration provoked by the pandemic-caused demand for more effective digitalisation of many practices[46] opens up new opportunities for maintaining high legitimacy levels by appealing to direct contacts with the voters. This is all the more so since new digital solutions make it possible to involve increasingly broader public circles into communication by reducing entry barriers and resorting to gamification of the process as such. As any crisis, the current situation increases the demand for charismatic leaders[47] who openly describe their view of what is happening and possess the resources (as well as the intellect) to achieve the declared results. Such leaders

[45] Oliphant J.B. A growing share of voters say it's important to them to hear from the Trump and Biden campaigns. Pew Research Center. August 2020. URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/03/a-growing-share-of-voters-say-its-important-to-them-to-hear-from-the-trump-and-biden-campaigns/

[46] Germany's digital transformation is an indicative process. Vladislav Belov. COVID-19 as a mirror of Germany's digital transformation. Analytical note No18 (No201). RAS Institute of Europe, 2020. URL: http://www.instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/analitika/2020/an201.pdf

[47] Bligh M. C., Kohles J. C., Meindl J. R. Charisma under crisis: Presidential leadership, rhetoric, and media responses before and after the September 11th terrorist attacks. The Leadership Quarterly, 2004. Vol. 15. № 2. P. 211–239.

do not need mediators. They need a skilful team with enough expert knowledge. Decisions are legitimate not because they are supported by most people's representatives but because they take into account the opinions that were directly expressed by the voters. In this context, it is interesting to observe the development of the parliamentary systems where legislature exercises not only representative and legislative functions but also serves as a mechanism for selecting top officials.

Political and psychological aspects of leadership in crises add to the appeal of more active direct communication. Apprehensions over life, health and financial welfare increase the importance of political psychotherapy. The leader is expected to produce reassuring signals, while the suggested political and ideological concepts must be instilled with the hope for stabilisation and development and serve as landmarks and motives for mobilising efforts. Demonstration of being in the same boat with the people during a crisis becomes one of the aspects of leadership in these conditions. This solidarity with the people may be expressed in different ways: via self-restriction, personal contribution to funding the fight against the pandemic, participation of family members in volunteer campaigns and involvement in resolving the problem on the ground. The social and image gains made during the crisis will help the leaders to preserve their positions when it is over.

The digital instruments of obtaining politically relevant information and indirect feedback continue developing alongside the appearance of new channels and forms of direct communication. In addition to opportunities to collect sociological information, political leaders have such instruments as artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data. The analysis of big data is already being introduced into the government management system. It makes it possible to receive not only technical information (for instance, on the traffic load) but also cross-section of public opinion on a broad range of issues. Importantly, it is not necessary to address people directly for this. It is enough to re-orient the automated analysis of people's digital footprint to the attainment of political goals[48]. The depth of this analysis may raise questions but the prospects of using it for legitimising the adopted decisions are obvious. A list of epistemological practices used by political

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[48] *Ulbricht L. Scraping the demos. Digitalization, web scraping and the democratic project. Democratization, 2020. Vol. 27. № 3. P. 426–442.*

elites to construe the vision of common benefit, ways of achieving it and current socio-political demands will be considerably expanded by new technology, including AI.

For the time being, people are cautious about the use of new technology in political decision-making but the pandemic has encouraged the adoption of these practices by the public. As a poll ordered by the Oxford Internet Institute shows, only 18 percent of British respondents believe that AI will be used to determine into which areas the state must channel resources, and a mere 10 percent think AI will take part in issuing court decisions[49]. At the same time, 46 percent of Brits believe that AI will be used in diagnosing diseases, and 34 percent think that it will help medical institutions to prioritise patients. Some 44 percent agree that AI will help develop autonomous transport, and 48 percent are convinced that AI will promote the automation and efficiency of production. When the crisis is over and the use of new technology becomes more effective in healthcare, the readiness to use AI will increase in other areas as well. Gradual realisation of the inevitable introduction of technology in the post-pandemic world coupled with the lack of understanding of progressive technology by a substantial part of the population[50], will increase the demand for political leaders that are capable of using new opportunities.

The institutionalisation of new communication channels and the use of AI in decision-making will be accompanied by a growing need to elaborate new elements of the system of checks and balances. Potential renunciation of the existing representative institutions prompts a search for mechanisms that can ensure sufficient control over the adopted decisions and instruments for disputing them. Much has been written about this in accordance with the republican tradition, but this task appears to be more difficult under the circumstances. It is necessary to fit in a new system of checks and balances into a new balance of freedom and security. People are noticeably changing their priorities as the crisis progresses and they realise the seriousness of the threat. According to Gallup polls, in March 75 percent

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[49] *YouGov Survey Results for Oxford Internet Institute. Yougov, 2020. URL: https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/ wq0vlam10h/Results%20for%20Oxford%20Internet%20Institute%20%28Artificial%20Intelligence%29%20V2. pdf*

[50] *The same study shows that almost half of Brits admit that they do not understand artificial intelligence.*

of respondents were ready to sacrifice part of their rights for the sake of protection against the pandemic. In Italy, this figure was 93 percent[51]. These figures remained high in April as well. Indicatively, it went down to 85 percent in Italy but in the United States and Russia the number of respondents who placed their security above freedom increased from 45 percent to 68 percent and from 60 percent to 69 percent, respectively.

Inspiration for specific decisions may be found both in ancient institutions and completely new sources. Big Data and AI have the potential for progress in this area. Both the public and the elite will be equal in the face of a digital arbiter. At the same time, these mechanisms require meticulous development. At present, there are no effective digital solutions for ensuring the accountability of the political leadership. The situation is complicated by the fact that the political importance of corporations will grow with the increasing involvement of technology in political processes. In this context, it will be easier to receive support for the leaders who will be able not only to use innovative approaches but also to suggest mechanisms of self-containment and control over technological solutions and those who provide them.

Leadership in a New Age

The post-crisis situation is opening the door to a new political reality, where legitimacy and stability of political leadership will largely depend on the ability to readapt to new requirements, values and conditions. The pandemic and the concomitant socioeconomic processes are eroding the existing institutional order. The new realities will transform the set of contracts accepted as the basis for collaboration. The *modus vivendi*[52] always reflects real relations as they take shape rather than their normative projections. To be accepted, political leaders should fit in with its current version. They will be expected to submit proposals that are in line with the moment of common good. In a current situation, the vision

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[51] *Snap poll on Cov19 in 28 Countries. Gallup International Association, 2020. URL: https://www.gallup-international.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GIA_SnapPoll_2020_COVID_Tables_final.pdf/h*

[52] *In this case, modus vivendi is understood in John Horton's interpretation as permanent commitments embodied in institutions, procedures and practices, rather than as a short-term or one-off contract to settle a specific dispute or conflict. For more detail on modus vivendi as related to political legitimacy, see: Horton J. Modus Vivendi and political legitimacy. The Political Theory of Modus Vivendi. Springer, Cham, 2019. P. 131–148.*

of the future and the trajectories of its attainment must reflect the new balance of freedom, security and economic prosperity.

In a world where new technologies, new institutions, new communications formats, and the expectation of new crises – repeated waves of the pandemic, an economic downturn or any other threat – will be found side by side, a demand will emerge for leaders possessing not only a vision of goals that unite but also the resources for their attainment. Political establishments are getting a chance to respond ideologically to a wave of populist politicians. Coming to the fore are experience, professionalism and access to financial, technological and intellectual resources. Populists are promising to spend what has been accumulated to quench the electorate's "anti-elite thirst." In a situation where there is nothing to spend, while the population's demands remain high, there is a need for those who know how to accumulate additional resources.

The need to accept unpopular and tough decisions and to focus on long-term strategic goals will force leaders to take additional efforts to rally the public behind common mass values. The importance of the ideological constructs supporting national identity, civic consciousness and order will be increased. Limited resources will dictate the need for political leadership to be resolute in redefining the criteria of fairness and redistributing benefits.

Political leaders will have new tools for both taking and legitimizing decisions based on new technologies, but they will have to learn how to use them properly. The authorities will need to neutralize fears that go along with new technologies. It is not enough to have a store of strategies and a team capable of implementing them. The public must be persuaded that the new formats will really benefit them. Given that it is too early to discount the populists and that they will not discontinue their attempts to re-orient their rhetoric to new challenges[53], it is still important for the current leaders to maintain direct communication with the public. Apart from that, a living connection, if in new digital formats, between the authorities and society will balance the AI- and Big Data-aided decision-making and give the hope that the political processes will still have a human face.

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[53] P.V. Oskolkov, "Populism i korona: kak pandemia vliyayet na pravopopulistskiye partiyi Evropy?" [Populism and the corona: How the pandemic influences the right-wing populist parties in Europe], Analytical Note #15 (#198). Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2020. URL: http://www.instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/analitika/2020/an198.pdf

A political leader's qualities for a new age

- Being able to generate a dominant common good narrative taking into account the new balance of freedom, security, and economic prosperity.

- Being skilled in creating new ideologemes meant to maintain national civic identity, commonalty, order and a social hierarchy.

- Demonstrating the strength and the political will to ensure merit-based distributive justice while distributing benefits in a resource-scarce environment.

- Understanding the ways of accumulating financial, technological and intellectual resources to implement growth-driving projects, maintain the global competitiveness of metropolises, and ensure a massive demand for a decent standard of living "here and now."

- Having a team able to adapt new technologies, including AI and Big Data, to addressing political and managerial missions and reforming political engagement.

- Being ready to step forward from behind the back of experts and ensure a direct and "live" communication with the public to balance the technological and technocratic aspect of politics.

- Possessing a vision of possible ways of protecting the public against a technocratic digital dictatorship.

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