

## THE SUBJECTS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC – INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND STATES' RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organisations and States' Response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 484.

Every person living on the planet Earth in the previous two years could have felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It only makes sense that the same can be said for the subjects in the international arena as well. Therefore, the collection of papers published by the Institute of International Politics and Economics in 2021 entitled “International Organisations and States' Response to COVID-19” is a book with many possible advantages. Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and studying international relations can be challenging *per se*, but adding to that the pandemic that the world has never seen before makes it even harder. The crisis caused by COVID-19 differs from the previous ones because it has influenced the health, political, security, and economic systems of almost every state in the world.<sup>1</sup> That is why such a collection of papers is important.

Sanja Jelisavac Trošić and Jelica Gordanić worked hard on the book's editing. It is certain to say they have done it successfully. The editors clearly intended for this book to be international in scope, not

<sup>1</sup> Ana Jović Lazić i Sanja Jelisavac Trošić, “Evropska unija i pandemija virusa Kovid 19 – neposredni odgovor i dugoročne mere za prilagođavanje budućim krizama”, u: Nevena Stanković, Dragana Dabić i Goran Bandov (ur.), *Razvojni pravci Evropske unije nakon pandemije Kovid 19*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2021, p. 94.

only in terms of its content but also in terms of authors. There are 28 papers written by 41 authors from Japan, Cuba, Turkey, Egypt, Slovakia, Spain, Serbia, China, Russia, Israel, Poland, Latvia, Hungary, Belarus, France, Italy, and Bulgaria. Based on the topics, the papers are divided into three thematic units.

The first thematic unit is called “International Organisations’ response to COVID-19”. There are eleven papers dedicated to the African Union, the Organisation of the American States, the European Union, human rights, the World Health Organisation, the World Trade Organisation, NATO, the United Nations, the Eurasian Economic Union, and cyber diplomacy. The overall impression of this part is that numerous organisations have shown their shortcomings when it comes to functioning. In that sense, the African Union has faced many challenges in response to COVID-19, as Ahmed Amal described. After discussing the substantial and contextual obstacles that the African Union was facing in responding to COVID-19, he concluded that while the African Union has shown a strong interest and responsibility in assisting in the early detection and treatment of the coronavirus, several constraints that were inherited from the previous years have limited its ability to provide a successful and effective response to the virus.<sup>2</sup> In this unit, the correlation between democracy and the coronavirus is emphasised. The Organisation of the American States is well aware of this connection and the importance of perseverance of the democratic stability in the Americas. Speaking of democracy, this unit contains a paper devoted to political groups in the European Parliament. The European Parliament is the largest transnational democratic voting system in the world, and this study was devoted to finding out how each of these political groups acted regarding the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The conclusion is that the European Union was insufficient in the process of fighting the coronavirus, but since there are problems arising inside the European Union, it is very difficult to form a common position

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Amal, “Confronting an unprecedented crisis with limited resources: the African Union’s response to COVID-19”, in: Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organizations and States’ response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ekrem Yaşar Akçay & Halil Emre Deniz, “The COVID-19 policies of political groups in the European Parliament”, in: Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organizations and States’ response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 54.

among the member states that would lead to solidarity and coordination. Additionally, the global role and leadership of the European Union have been challenged. This part of the book would be incomplete without the papers dedicated to the World Health Organisation, the World Trade Organisation, NATO, the United Nations, and the Eurasian Economic Union. The overall impression is that all of these organisations have already had their own problems and shortcomings that the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis only made worse.

The second thematic unit, “States’ Response to COVID-19: Cooperation and Comparison”, consists of nine papers. Narratives and dissent; the economic impact of the pandemic; socio-economic response; foreign aid and donor competition; Russian-Chinese cooperation during the pandemic; China-CEEC cooperation; Japan and South Korea’s policies in response to COVID-19; various countries’ approaches to compulsory licensing during the pandemic; and public procurement during the pandemic in relation to the Republic of Serbia are among the topics discussed. These papers lead the readers to conclude that cooperation among the states may be a good mechanism for reducing all the negative effects that the crisis has brought and also to stop negative economic consequences. Of course, states dealing with the crisis used many narratives in the context of COVID-19. One of the main ones is the anti-Chinese one, which was associated with the appearance of the disease in the Wuhan province. This led to polarisation, not only in the European Union but also in the US in light of the 2020 elections. But not only here. The negative implications have been noticed in the socio-economic implications of the crisis. The states decided to intervene by implementing measures that were supposed to protect the domestic economy. Even though there were some effective measures in Serbia, such as covering wage costs and moratoriums on debt repayment, the biggest obstacle to the effectiveness of all the measures was the invisible informal segment of the Serbian economy.<sup>4</sup> In this unit, there are also papers devoted to

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<sup>4</sup> Nataša Stanojević & Slobodan Kotlica, “Socio-economic response to coronavirus challenges: a comparative study of Serbia and the selected European countries”, in: Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organizations and States’ response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 257.

bilateral relations and cooperation that demonstrate the importance of mutual cooperation when dealing with the crisis.

Finally, the third part of the book is entitled “Individual States’ Response to COVID-19”. There are eight papers devoted to the measures that states such as Latvia, Turkey, Slovakia, China, France, Belarus, and Egypt imposed during the pandemic, but also other questions, such as human rights and violence. The overall conclusion that could be drawn from this unit is that the coronavirus has brought many negative consequences. For example, this can be seen in the area of human rights, specifically the rights of women and girls. In Turkey, the impact on the rights to equal access to education, on the right to life, well-being and gender equality, on the rights to equal access to essential services and justice, on the right to equal access to health services, on freedom and the right to paid work and gender equality in employment, and much more were noted. Therefore, the pandemic has only deepened the pre-existing inequalities in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Another aspect where this negative influence can be seen is international student mobility. The situations in France, Belarus, and Egypt show that the problems are more or less similar: the vaccine issue, lack of institutional behaviour, and the protection of basic rights.

It is without a doubt that international organisations and states are the main subjects in public international law and the main actors in the international community. This collection of papers managed to show how both of these subjects responded to COVID-19, and that is where the value of this book lies. Also, there has been a lot of commentary on whether 2020 will have transformative effects on world politics.<sup>6</sup> Reading the papers from this collection may lead to some conclusions. When it comes to international organisations and states and their management in the pandemic, interested researchers, students, teachers, or simply anyone with an interest in this area could find answers to many of their possible questions. Therefore, we could

<sup>5</sup> Kadriye Bakirci, “Impacts of COVID-19 measures on women’s and girls’ human rights in Turkey”, in: Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organizations and States’ response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> Jovana Blešić, “The United Nations combat against COVID-19 – the alarm for the Security Council reform?”, in: Sanja Jelisavac Trošić & Jelica Gordanić (eds), *International Organizations and States’ response to COVID-19*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, 2021, p. 172.

recommend this collection of papers with great certainty that it could be of great use.

### *Literature*

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