

Coronavirus: Europe Can Go “the Italian Way”?

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As coronavirus began spreading across China and devastating the once prosperous city of Wuhan, Western countries should have immediately begun preparing to deal with what would later be announced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The results of the carelessness of the political elite is evident. To date, the United States leads in the number of infected people of 400,000. This is largely because of the inconsistency in the measures taken by the White House, where U.S. President Donald Trump even had the arrogance to announce that lockdowns and normalcy will return to normal after Western Easter.

In Europe, the most dramatic situation is in Italy, where more than 135,000 cases of infection and 17,000 deaths from coronavirus are registered. For the EU, the situation in Italy should have been an occasion to join forces in the fight against the pandemic. However, each European country confronts the coronavirus separately, increasingly distancing itself from the problems of its neighbors, demonstrating that the [liberal globalized order](#) which the EU was a supposed champion of is collapsing under pressure. This has created a realpolitik situation where states are now contracting into self-serving agendas.

Probably, a significant share of responsibility for such a catastrophic situation should be placed on Germany, which for many years has sought recognition for its leading role in the EU, claiming the status of a “system-forming state.” But German authorities cannot effectively counter a pandemic even in their own country where over 2,000 people have already died. In terms of the number of infected, Germany is in fourth place in the world, behind the United States, Italy and Spain. In just one day on April 2 6,174 people were infected with the dangerous virus in Germany. The total number of cases is nearly at 110,000. This is the predicament that Germany finds itself in despite having what is considered one of the best healthcare systems in the world.

Ironically it is little Greece, once the “black sheep” of Europe and considered “lazy” that has been a shining light and embarrassing their European counterparts. Berlin and Brussels decimated the Greek healthcare system with its strict austerity measures imposed since 2010 when the financial crisis began, and saw funding in the sector reduce by upwards of 50%. This reduction saw 35,000 Greek doctors emigrate to Germany alone by 2015 – this does not include doctors who went elsewhere as well. While Germany struggles to contain the coronavirus, Greece has 1,832 cases and 81 deaths. Even when adjusted for per capita, Italy’s fatality rate is almost 40 times greater than Greece. But even when compared to countries with a similar population like Belgium that has 2,035 deaths and a far higher GDP without a devastated healthcare system, it gives an insight in how effective early lockdowns

and closure of the borders has been for Greece - something the overwhelming majority of the EU did not do.

But Greece is only one standout case on a continent that has seen the traditional powerhouses like Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the UK absolutely devastated. The EU in fact recognizes the inability to contain the pandemic on its own. As a result, Italy accepted the help of Russia, which sent several planes to the Mediterranean country with equipment for the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, with modern disinfection means, as well as teams of high-class medical specialists. At the same time, Moscow confirms its readiness for dialogue with European countries in expanding cooperation in the fight against coronavirus. Russia was able to develop more effective methods to counter the pandemic. While in Germany 288 people died in just one day from complications caused by coronavirus, in Russia, for the entire time of the terrible pandemic, the number of deaths from the dangerous infection is at 63 people.

Of course, when it comes to people's lives, such statistics is not a reason for pride or gloating. But the countries of the EU could somehow use the experience of Russia in confronting COVID-19 and learn from it despite the bruised egos it may create. After all, only by joint efforts, abandoning political differences and ideological prejudices, the world community will be able to defeat the deadly infection.

Unfortunately, the United States, together with Great Britain, the EU, Ukraine, and Georgia, blocked the Russian draft resolution at the UN General Assembly on countering the pandemic, claiming there were some deceptive purposes in the Russian call to establish closer cooperation between all countries of the world and temporarily abandon mutual trade restrictions, sanctions and profiteering of essential goods.

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