

Covid-19: Lithuania on the Brink of a Catastrophe

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COVID-19 expands in Lithuania. Having registered its first official case in February, the country currently has almost 300 infected people and four confirmed deaths. Taking into account that the official numbers tend to differ from the real ones due to the delay in investigating suspicions, it is likely that there are already many more infected, perhaps even thousands. In parallel, state measures to contain the announced catastrophe are few and weak and the government is more concerned in dealing with an alleged “Russian threat” than with the country’s imminent crisis.

Incompetent to deal with the virus’s arrival in Lithuania, the pro-Western government decided to choose simple targets to blame for the coming disaster: Russia and the Lithuanian diaspora. **Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis** in recent pronouncements went to the extreme of saying about diaspora Lithuanians returning to the country:

“You have probably seen scenes on social media, who and what types are returning to Lithuania (...) I’m sorry, but they cannot be called people. (...) These are the individuals that, after getting off planes and ferries, are posing danger to us.”

Supposedly, there was a collective breach of social isolation rules by Lithuanian emigrants, however, instead of making decisions that enforce quarantine rules, Skvernelis prefers to harass his own people.

Lithuania then began to spread the lie reported by the European Union that Russia would be spreading fake news about the development of the pandemic in western European countries. In a March 16 report, the European External Action Service published:

“The overarching aim of Kremlin disinformation is to aggravate the public health crisis in Western countries [...] in line with the Kremlin’s broader strategy of attempting to subvert European societies”.

According to the EU, Moscow would be interested in increasing panic in the bloc’s countries and would be spreading lies on social networks for this purpose.

In response, the incompetent Lithuanian government decided to hide the lack of policies against the virus by tightening up measures against Russia. The government announced that as a quarantine measure it would close the access route to Kaliningrad, which is a Russian territory in the Baltic. In addition to being a measure of extremely dubious effectiveness, it is above all disrespectful, anti-diplomatic and outrageous maneuver against

Russia, since Moscow has sovereignty over Kaliningrad. Although the traffic in the region has not been completely closed, the Lithuanian government has already restricted it significantly, reducing the number of trains and limiting the number of passengers to a maximum of 100 people.

However, with great attention being paid to Russia and the diaspora, a very important point in the Lithuanian viral crisis is being ignored. **So far, 20 NATO soldiers stationed in Lithuania have tested positive for the disease.** The number is truly alarming and can indicate the beginning of a major outbreak of infection. Official government data did not report the nationality of the infected, but it is already known that two of them come from the Netherlands. Apparently, in addition to bringing international instability and insecurity to Lithuanians, NATO is also carrying a deadly pandemic, but it is minimally curious how the government remains inert about such numbers and simultaneously prefers to implement policies against Russia and the diaspora.

Indeed, if the Lithuanian government maintains its current stance, it will have to deal alone with what could be the biggest crisis in its country's history. The rate of growth of the infection is still inaccurate, partly due to the lack of transparency in the Ministry of Health, which is clearly omitting data to "prevent collective panic". Due to the fact that a large part of the Lithuanian population is educated in the Russian language, it does not remain totally hostage to the lies spread by the media agencies in the country and in the European Union, and can consume content produced in Russian, which usually shows another view about the pandemic. It is for this reason that the Lithuanian government and the EU accuse Moscow of spreading "fake news".

What we know so far is that in less than a week the numbers jumped from 60 to 300 officially confirmed cases. In addition, two members of Seimas are infected and Parliament is unable to maintain activities, with meetings being conducted remotely. In the morning of last Wednesday, 46 new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed. Apparently, it is increasingly difficult to hide the truth about the catastrophic scenario that is approaching the country.

Above all, Lithuania is dealing with its own choices. The situation of the coronavirus in Russia, compared to the Western scenario, is very clear: it is Western Europe that is succumbing to the coronavirus. Therefore, it is much more logical to think that the infection vector for Lithuania is also the West, and not Russia, which shows the weakness of anti-Russian policies and restriction of access to Kaliningrad as ways to contain the pandemic. And the alarming number of infected NATO soldiers makes one to presume that the virus has entered the country through this way.

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