

# WHY CAN'T EUROPE CONTROL THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC?

The COVID-19 epidemic is the biggest crisis in the life of our generation. Therefore it is worth analyzing how Eastern countries, especially China, can successfully control and reduce the epidemic, and why Europe can not do so at all. In 2020-03-17 Mr. Peng Zhengming (Trigo) analyzed in detail the reasons of the China's success in the "El Popola Cxinio", and now I am trying to explain how Europe is failing in this area.

If we look at the epidemic situation in different countries of the world on the website <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> then it is clear that in East Asia (Japan, Korea and China) the epidemic is being successfully controlled. In China, there were only 46 new patients yesterday, and in the Chinese city of Wuhan (where the epidemic began) in the last few days there were almost no new patients. But in many European countries (especially in Italy and Spain) hundred times more people get sick in one day. Italy is a relatively small country compared to the huge China, yet in Italy more people have died from the epidemic for the recent weeks than in China during the whole epidemic. It would be important and interesting to understand why this is so.

In my opinion, the most important reason originates from the centuries-old cultural difference between Europe and East Asia. I mean that people are traditionally obedient and loyal to governments in East Asia, but in Europe individualism is important. This means that in Europe many political parties, social movements and so-called "civil organizations" are encouraging the population to protest against the decisions of the central and local governments. As a result, masses of the population are reluctant to obey government mandates to control and reduce the epidemic. To explain this phenomenon, I am going to mention some concrete facts.

- At the beginning of the epidemic the virus appeared in Lombardy (province of Northern Italy), and there the population became ill. It was therefore logical to understand that in order to reduce the epidemic the province should be blocked, however, many people believed that they had an individual right to decide whether to remain in quarantine or to leave the province. The result of this was, that many people left Lombardy, including Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, the former prime minister of Italy. I was informed in the international media that the Italian government had ordered all people in Lombardy to stay in their province, yet a few hours after that government decision the whole world could see that hundreds, or even thousands of people went to the railway station to travel to other parts of Italy. The result of this action was that within a few days the virus could spread widely throughout the country. The situation is now intolerable and uncontrollable. So many sick people appear every day, that there is no room for all the patients in the hospitals. For this reason, doctors must decide which patients to take to hospitals, and which others would not be given a chance for life. Over the last few days, so many people died, that it was not possible to carry them to normal cemeteries, but the military did so at night.

- The mass immigration has been a serious social problem in Europe for the last five years. I mean that millions of Africans and South Asians are trying to immigrate to the European Union, and they have no passports or other documents. As a result, no one can control who they are and which countries they came from. They usually cross the border secretly at night. In 2015 more than one million immigrants arrived in this way. Hungary's official state policy is that Hungary, as well as the European Union, must protect its borders and that is why Hungary has built a wire fence at its border. But many Western European and Scandinavian countries have strongly criticized Hungary for their state policy of not accepting refugees and immigrants massively. Also many so-called "civil organizations" which are financially supported by foreign governments and social foundations, have protested against Hungary's closure. They would rather build an open European Union without barriers. The majority of the European Union's parliamentarians also agree with this approach, and for that reason they made a European parliamentary decision against Hungary. Nowadays, when dealing with the epidemic every day, it should be a serious task for all countries to monitor international migration, because the hidden migration of unknown people without any control has a serious health risk, that those unknown and uncontrolled people can carry a virus from a country to another one.
- In Hungary the first patients were not Hungarians, but they were students from Iran. When it was revealed that some of them had the virus in their body, the authorities ordered them to remain in quarantine at a hospital for two weeks. But they protested in the hospital, without permission they left the room where they had to stay, did not obey the doctors' orders, even began to throw chairs out of their room through the windows. For this reason, police officers had to be called for help the staff of the hospital. But that was not enough, the police officers also had to ask for help from the Iranian Embassy, and interpreters were also invited. Because the problem was not resolved, a few days later, the relevant authorities ordered the students to be sent home to Iran. But the students opposed, and asked that civil organizations turn to court, because they had an individual right to stay in a country where they want.
- The problem in Europe is very serious not only because of the disobedience of ordinary people, but even leaders tend to disobey government decisions or proposals. In Hungary, there is a famous university whose former president was a Nobel laureate biochemist, who discovered vitamin "C". This is the University of Szeged, whose current president (in Hungarian: rector) had spent his time in Austria recently, where the epidemic had already spread. That is why the government proposed that people who had spent time in dangerous countries, (including Austria), should remain in private quarantine for two weeks. But that university president did not obey, he did not stay home, but he went to his university, held meetings with other professors and faculty members, even operated his patients at his university hospital. Two days later it became clear, that he had also received the virus in Austria. That is why all of his contacts must now remain in quarantine to observe whether they also received the disease or not.
- A few days ago the Hungarian government decided to block the country and prohibited foreigners to enter Hungary, aiming at protecting the health of the Hungarian people. But many foreigners were reluctant to accept that decision and they accumulated at the

Hungarian-Austrian border. They protested against this government order and asked the Hungarian border guards to allow them to enter the country. Because they believed that they had their individual right to move freely from one place to another one. The mass of these people and their cars was 24 kilometers long, so between Vienna, the Austrian capital city and the Austro-Hungarian border they filled the motorway. Because of this, one day later the government had to amend the order, and for humanitarian reasons these aliens were allowed to enter the country at night. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, also suggested that the Hungarian government solve this problem in a humane manner, so let those foreigners enter Hungary.

- Peng Zhengming wrote in his essay that Chinese telecom companies also contributed to the cessation of the epidemic. With a database of China's 1.6 billion smartphones, these companies were able to detect human trafficking in provinces and cities. These data helped local governments to predict the direction of epidemic spread and to take appropriate measures. This business-government cooperation has been useful in China to fight against the epidemic. But according to the traditional European way of thinking, such cooperation can not happen. In Hungary, for example, the government wanted to improve the public administration system many years ago, and therefore they gave a personal identification number to all citizens. It was thought that in this way all state offices could easily and simply identify citizens. But later the Constitutional Court (the highest court in Hungary) overruled that government decision, saying that in that case people could not have right to privacy. And the right to privacy is an important individual right of man according to this court decision. As a result, since then the various state offices (eg. tax offices, land registry offices, public safety offices, etc.) have had to create their own identifier numbers for all citizens.
- Today it is common to have video cameras in many public places almost everywhere in the world. But several years ago a high ranking parliamentary official (called: ombudsman) banned the use of these video cameras in public buses in Hungary. Because he thought that in those buses people could not keep privacy, so they could not hide if they wanted to do so. But I saw in China that these video cameras were also very useful in the fight against the epidemic. Because when a new patient appeared somewhere in a bus, then it was easier to find his contacts, with whom he was traveling together in the same bus. In this way, the epidemic could be effectively reduced and many people's lives could be saved in China.

In this situation, it is clear that the epidemic in Europe can not be stopped as effectively as it happened in China. Many European leaders now tend to accept this situation, saying that the epidemic can not be stopped in Europe. They claim the epidemic will not be stopped in Europe in the near future. Based on a forecast by the Robert Koch Public Health Institute in Berlin, Angela Merkel, the state leader of Germany has announced that 60-70 percent of Europe's population is expected to become ill due to the COVID-19 epidemic in the next two years. This means that about three hundred million people will become ill in the EU (with the United Kingdom) and many millions will die. My conclusion is that according to the traditional individualistic European approach we tend to protect many human rights (rights to privacy, human rights for free travel, etc.).

But at the same time we forget that the most important human right is the right to life. Accepting the facts, that many people have died, die and will die because of the epidemic, those European leaders do not mention, that those people did not have, do not have, and will not have their most important right, the right to life.

Dr. MARKUS Gábor

President of the Eurasian Cultural Center and

Honorary President of the Hungarian Esperanto Association