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**Expert seminar «Regional trade blocks: fight
against global pandemic»**

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This material contains the main mechanisms of four regional trade blocs - the EU, EAEU, ASEAN, and MERCOSUR - to combat the coronavirus pandemic. In more detail, the issues of countering the pandemic, assessing the effectiveness of the measures taken, the strategic consequences of the pandemic for integration associations will be covered during the expert online seminar on March 18 «Regional trade blocks: fight against global pandemic», organized by the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies, Higher School of Economics.

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EU

The European Union institutions have contributed to shaping the European response to COVID-19 using a bunch of institutional and economic measures:

1. The EU was able to mobilize 2.364 trillion euros to curb the coronavirus infection.
2. European institutions have not kept pace responding to the spread of COVID-19. The EU took the first significant steps to combat coronavirus infection only in May 2020.
3. Brussels actively collaborated with business to roll out vaccines against coronavirus infection and inoculate EU citizens with them.
4. The EU institutions managed to ensure the functioning of the external border (but not the internal ones) of the free movement space (Schengen area).

The EU has a complex institutional architecture. Therefore, to understand its response to COVID-19, it is advisable to consider European institutions' actions at two levels: supranational and intergovernmental. Simultaneously, throughout the pandemic, European institutions have been closely interacting with each other, so this division seems to be somewhat arbitrary in several cases.

The supranational level of COVID-19 crisis management in the EU was mainly represented by the European Commission, which sought to 1) prevent the destruction of the existing achievements of European integration, primarily the single internal market and the Schengen area, and 2) if possible, use the coronavirus crisis as a window of opportunity to gain new competencies and funding sources from the member states.

In healthcare, the main areas of activity of the EC were obtaining vaccines and vaccinating EU citizens. Vaccination against COVID-19 began on December 27, 2020 across the European Union. In total, the European Commission has approved 3 vaccines against COVID-19, while the number of vaccines approved by the EC will increase in the future. Currently, people from priority groups are being vaccinated: namely, the elderly or medical personnel¹. However, the EC cannot solve many

¹ The EU responses to the coronavirus crisis // The European Commission. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/20210125_eu_response_covid.pdf

problems. Firstly, AstraZeneca fails to comply with the agreed EU vaccine supply plan². Secondly, vaccination in the European Union continues at a sluggish pace³. Thirdly, in this regard, several member states purchase vaccines from manufacturers that have not received EU registration yet⁴. As a result, the EC even banned the export of COVID-19 vaccines outside the EU without special permission⁵.

So far, the European Commission has entered into agreements with 6 vaccine developers, and a total of 2.3 billion doses could be received.

The EU vaccine strategy is based on two pillars:

1. Ensuring vaccine production in the EU and sufficient supply for its member states through Advance Purchase Agreements with vaccine manufacturers.

2. Adapting the EU regulatory framework to the current emergency and leverage existing regulatory flexibility to accelerate the development, authorization, and availability of vaccines while maintaining quality, safety, and efficacy standards.

To date, the EC has signed six vaccine contracts: with BioNTech-Pfizer (600 million doses), CureVac (405 million), AstraZeneca (400 million), Johnson & Johnson (400 million), Sanofi-GSK (300 million), Moderna (160 million). However, vaccines developed by BioNTech-Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca are approved for use in the EU⁶.

Using the coronavirus crisis as a window of opportunity to strengthen the supranational component in the EU, the European Commission has put forward several initiatives: to declare emergencies at the EU level to ensure EU measures; make decisions on risk management at the EU level; harmonize preparedness plans at regional, member state and EU levels; regular audits and stress test readiness plans; track the supply of drugs and medical equipment and reduce their shortages⁷.

² Coronavirus vaccines: why the conflict between the EU and AstraZeneca emerged? // DW. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/vakciny-ot-koronavirusa-pochemu-voznik-konflikt-mezhdu-es-i-astrazenesa/a-56372648>

³ Vaccination against COVID-19: Why the EU lags behind other regions of the world // DW. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/vakcinacija-ot-covid-19-pochemu-es-otstaet-ot-drugih-regionov-mira/a-56351691>

⁴ EU countries are looking for new vaccine manufacturers after disruption of planned supplies // TASS. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/10548303>

⁵ EU bans export of COVID-19 vaccines without special permission // TASS. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/10581849>

⁶ The EU responses to the coronavirus crisis // European Commission. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/20210125_eu_response_covid.pdf

⁷ Ibidem

The EU also approved new rules allowing member states to request financial assistance from the EU Solidarity Fund to cover the costs of responding to health emergencies. Thanks to the fund's recently expanded budget, member states will be allocated up to 800 million euro this year to fight the COVID-19 pandemic⁸.

If in the field of healthcare the EC behaved "offensively", then in the field of movement of people it was purely "defensive": it tried to prevent the collapse of the single market and the Schengen area.

Immediately after the outbreak of the pandemic in Europe, almost all EU and Schengen member states unilaterally began to impose border controls and close their borders, which jeopardized the integrity of the single internal market and the Schengen area. The EC was only able to achieve that on March 17, 2020, when the EU leaders approved the closure of the EU external border for 30 days for non-essential travel⁹, which subsequently lasted until June 30, 2020¹⁰.

To avoid congestion at key internal border crossings, the European Union has created the so-called "green corridors" for trucks delivering in a simplified manner to its territory and transporting essential goods across its internal borders¹¹.

After June 30, 2020, most EU and Schengen member states quickly opened their borders to each other. Besides, the European Commission ensured that all EU and Schengen member states agree to follow the EU Council's recommendation list, which lists third countries with which they are encouraged to open external borders. However, this agreement was violated by Hungary, which unilaterally closed its borders on September 1, 2020¹². In February-March 2021, the situation seriously worsened: despite the protests of the EC, Germany, and France announced the introduction of border controls and partial closure of the borders¹³.

⁸ Ibidem

⁹ The European Union: restricting movement of citizens as a means of combating COVID-19 // Institute of Europe Russian Academy of Sciences. URL: <http://instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/analitika/2020/an197.pdf>

¹⁰ COVID-19: travel and transport // European Council. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/covid-19-travel-and-transport/>

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² The European Commission demanded that Hungary cancel the decision to close the borders // RBK. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/01/09/2020/5f4e3ce69a79476377fba962>

¹³ Schengen area cracked at the borders: what awaits the Schengen area after the pandemic? // Belta. URL: <https://www.belta.by/world/view/shengen-tresnul-po-granitsam-cto-zhdet-shengenskiju-zonu-posle-pandemii-431224-2021/>

In the economic domain, which is the “core” of European integration, the European Commission has been quite successful in seeking new competencies and rights to dispose of funds from the member states.

To mobilize the necessary investment, the European Commission has put forward a two-fold response, endorsed by the European Council and the European Parliament: a) NextGenerationEU, a new 750 billion euros recovery instrument that will boost the EU budget by attracting new funding in financial markets for 2021-2024; b) a strengthened long-term EU budget for 2021-2027.

To preserve jobs during the coronavirus crisis, the EC has proposed the SURE program, which provides the member states with funding of up to 100 billion euros, covering part of the costs associated with creating or expanding national short-term employment schemes. The EU Council has already approved financial support of 90.3 billion euros to 18 member states. 39.5 billion euros have already been distributed among Italy, Spain, Poland, Greece, Croatia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Slovenia, Malta, Latvia, Belgium, Romania, Hungary, Portugal, and Slovakia. Member States can still apply for financial support under the SURE, totaling up to 100 billion euros.

To provide member states with immediate liquidity, the European Commission has launched the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, consisting of unspent cohesion policy funds.

Overall, since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, the EU has mobilized significant funds to deal with the effects of the pandemic:

- About 18 billion euros were invested;
- 82% of the cohesion policy programs in 25 Member States and the United Kingdom have been changed, with additional funding to national budgets of 3.2 billion euros due to the possibility of using the 100% EU co-financing rate;
- Over 10 billion euros were allocated to small and medium-sized enterprises to help them stay active during the pandemic;
- 3 billion euros were allocated to workers and vulnerable groups;
- 6.6 billion euros were allocated to the health sector, in addition to the EU budget allocation of 10.2 billion euros for the 2014-2020 health budget.

EC economic measures will complement the European Central Bank's Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program of private and public securities worth 750 billion, in addition to the previously adopted 120 billion euros program.

NextGenerationEU of 750 billion euros (of which 390 billion euros will be distributed in grants and 360 billion euros in loans) and targeted EU long-term budget strengthening for 2021-2027 will increase the total EU budget to 1.824 trillion euros.

Along with the three crucial social safety nets for workers, business people, and sovereigns, approved by the European Council on 23 April 2020 and making up a 540 billion euros package, these exceptional measures, taken at the EU level, will reach over 2.364 trillion euro.

The EU has also approved new rules to allow member states to request financial assistance from the EU Solidarity Fund to deal with health emergencies. Thanks to the recent expansion of the fund, up to 800 million euros will be allocated to member states this year in the fight against COVID-19¹⁴.

The intergovernmental level of the European Union's response to COVID-19 was presented by the European Council and Council of the European Union. Since these bodies are composed of representatives of the EU member states, their activities resulted from lengthy discussions and difficult compromises, a kind of “common denominator” of all EU member states.

Medicine. On January 21, 2021, the Council adopted a recommendation establishing a common framework for the use of rapid antigen tests and the mutual recognition of COVID-19 test results in the EU. EU Member State representatives on the EU Health Security Committee have agreed on a common list of mutually recognized rapid antigen tests and a standardized dataset for test results certificates¹⁵.

The EU also mobilized 100 million euros for the rapid antigen tests' purchase and delivery to the member states through the Emergency Support Instrument, launching joint procurement in parallel.

To expand testing capabilities in seven member states (Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain), the EU has also signed an agreement with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Through this agreement, the EU is contributing 35.5 million euros, funded by the Emergency

¹⁴ The EU Responses to the coronavirus crisis // European Commission. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/20210125_eu_response_covid.pdf

¹⁵ Council recommendation on a common framework for the use and validation of rapid antigen tests and the mutual recognition of COVID-19 test results in the EU, 21 January 2021 // European Council. URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5451-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

Support Instrument, which will be used to support the training of personnel to collect and analyze samples and conduct tests, especially with mobile equipment¹⁶.

On 28 May 2020, the European Commission presented its proposal for a new enhanced EU health program for 2021-2027 — EU4Health. Currently, the program is the subject of negotiations between the European Parliament and the European Council.

As stated in the EU Council's negotiating mandate, the EU4Health program envisions a significant increase in the EU's capacity to complement and support member states in the area of public health. The budget for the new program is expected to be significantly higher than the budget for the current health program¹⁷.

Economy. On April 23, 2020, EU leaders decided to establish the EU recovery fund aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis. They instructed the European Commission to urgently develop a proposal that would also clarify the relationship between this fund and the EU's long-term budget. A proposal, a recovery plan for Europe, was presented by the European Commission on May 27 2020.

On July 21, EU leaders agreed on a 750 billion euros Next Generation EU reconstruction project to help the EU overcome the pandemic crisis. The recovery package is currently undergoing legislative steps that will be completed in 2021.

In addition to the recovery package, EU leaders have agreed on a long-term EU budget of 1,074.3 billion euros for 2021-2027. Along with 540 billion euros already allocated to three social safety nets (for workers, enterprises (businesses), and the member states), the EU's total recovery package accounts for 2,364.3 billion euros.

Moreover, the EU has established an instrument providing temporary support to reduce unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE). The scheme provides loans to member states on favorable terms to cover some of the costs associated with establishing or expanding national short-term employment schemes. As of February 2 2021, 15 Member States have received SURE support totaling 53.5 billion euros.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) Group has established the 25 billion euros pan-European guarantee fund. The fund provides loans (loans) up to 200 billion

¹⁶ Council encourages further cooperation in the use rapid antigen tests and the mutual recognition of COVID-19 test results (press release, 21 January 2021) // European Council. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/21/council-agrees-on-strengthening-the-use-of-rapid-antigen-tests-and-on-the-mutual-recognition-of-covid-19-test-results/>

¹⁷ An overview of the EU4Health programme (European Commission) // European Commission. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/funding/docs/eu4health_factsheet_en.pdf

euros to companies, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises throughout the EU. The first group of projects worth 1 billion euros has been already approved¹⁸.

The European Stability Mechanism has created Pandemic Crisis Support based on an existing precautionary credit line adjusted for the COVID-19 crisis. It can provide loans, available to all countries-members of the euro area, in the amount of up to 2% of their GDP for a total of up to 240 billion euros.

Amendments to the EU budget for 2020

In an immediate response to the impact of COVID-19, the EU amended its 2020 budget adding 3.1 billion euros to:

- procurement and distribution of medical equipment, including protective equipment and ventilators;
- increasing production of COVID-19 test kits;
- field hospitals construction;
- transfer of patients for treatment to the other member states;
- repatriation of EU citizens who are abroad.

On 11 September 2020, the EU Council agreed to add 6.2 billion euros to the 2020 EU budget. The revised budget increases payments for:

- development and implementation of a vaccine against COVID-19: the European Commission will use this money to pre-order vaccine doses (1.09 billion euros);
- Corona Response Investment Initiatives (CRII and CRII +): channeling funds from the EU budget to fight the COVID-19 crisis (5.1 billion euros).

In addition, the EU quickly redirected funds from its Cohesion Funds to help member states cope with the COVID-19 crisis.

In March 2020, the European Central Bank announced a pandemic emergency purchase program in amount of 750 billion euros¹⁹. On June 4, 2020, the program

¹⁸ EIB approves €25 billion Pan-European Guarantee Fund in response to COVID-19 crisis (European Investment Bank, 26 May 2020) // European Investment Bank. URL: <https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-126-eib-board-approves-eur-25-billion-pan-european-guarantee-fund-to-respond-to-covid-19-crisis.htm>

¹⁹ ECB announces €750 billion emergency purchase programme (European Central Bank, 17 March 2020) // European Central Bank. URL: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2020/html/ecb.pr200318_1~3949d6f266.en.html; ECB announces increase of €600 billion to coronavirus emergency purchase programme (European Central Bank, 4 June 2020) // European Central Bank. URL: <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2020/html/ecb.mp200604~a307d3429c.en.html>; COVID-19: economic measures overview (European commission) // European Commission. URL:

received an additional boost by adding 600 billion euros, bringing the total amount to 1.350 billion euros.

In the economic sphere, European intergovernmental institutions have become a platform for heated debates between the member states on empowering European institutions, which was vividly reflected in the controversies on the release of the so-called "Coronabond"²⁰.

Travels. On February 2, 2021, EU countries agreed on an updated recommendation on temporary restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU and the possible removal of such limitations. The new rules include additional criteria for determining the countries for which restrictions should be removed. Transport and border workers should be exempted from some travel measures²¹.

To hinder the transmission of the virus, on March 17, 2020, EU leaders agreed on a coordinated temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, which was in effect until June 30, 2020.

In June 2020, the Council adopted a recommendation on temporary restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU and the possible lifting of such restrictions. The recommendation was updated on February 2, 2021. The list of countries for which the member states should gradually remove travel restrictions is being revised and, if necessary, updated every two weeks²².

EAEU

The outbreak of a new coronavirus infection led to the almost synchronous closure of the EAEU member states' borders, which led not only to the freedom of movement restrictions but also significantly influenced the freedom of movement of

https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/jobs-and-economy-during-coronavirus-pandemic_en

²⁰ What are Coronabonds, and why they threaten to split the European Union // DW. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/что-такое-коронабонды-и-почему-они-грозят-расколом-евросоюза/a-52998803>

²¹ Council updates recommendation on travel restrictions from third countries into the EU (press release, 2 February 2021) // European Council. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/02/covid-19-council-updates-recommendation-on-travel-restrictions-from-third-countries-into-the-eu/>

²² Council updates the list of countries for which member states should gradually lift travel restrictions (press release, 28 January 2021) // European Council. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/28/travel-restrictions-council-reviews-the-list-of-third-countries-for-which-member-states-should-gradually-lift-restrictions-on-non-essential-travel/>

goods and services. It has become a challenge for the supranational institution of the Union - the Eurasian Economic Commission, which needed, on the one hand, to promptly respond to emerging problems within its powers, on the other hand, to provide all EAEU member states with an effective platform for communication and joint coordination of efforts.

Despite each of the Union states' isolation in determining approaches to combating the pandemic, issues common to the Union, including temporary emergency measures, were taken promptly. Due to the peculiarity of the institutional format of the EAEU, measures to combat the COVID-19 plague should be divided into two levels: supranational and intergovernmental.

Supranational level

At the supranational level, one should note the high degree of consolidation of national representatives' positions in the supranational institutions of the Union and the proactiveness of the Commission. Thus, the decisions necessary for a swift response to the increasingly complicated epidemiological situation were made very intensively. Simultaneously, the EEC maintained the effectiveness of communication channels with the national governments, developing the most comprehensive solutions that took into account the situation in each specific state of the Union.

A section "COVID-19" appeared on the EEC website²³, which not only provided information support to the EEC's decisions and responses to a rapidly changing situation but also accumulated the measures taken by each member state to combat the pandemic, providing up-to-date information on existing restrictions.

On March 19, 2020, on behalf of the Chairman of the EEC Board, an Interim Coordinating Council was established to monitor the situation related to coronavirus prevention and crafting rapid response measures²⁴.

The basic packages²⁵ of measures were adopted by the EEC in March-April and June-July 2020, while decisions on individual measures, as well as

²³ COVID-19 // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/covid-19/Pages/default.aspx>

²⁴ The EEC has created a coordination council to develop rapid response measures in connection with the spread of coronavirus infection // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/19-03-2020-4.aspx

extension or termination of their action, were taken throughout 2020. Counter-crisis trade measures at the Commission level can be divided into two blocks. The first ones aimed at the inflow of goods needed during a pandemic, the second - at preventing the outflow of preventive and personal protective equipment and food security.

The outbreak of a new coronavirus infection led to the almost synchronous closure of the borders of the EAEU member states, which led not only to the freedom of movement restrictions but also significantly influenced the freedom of movement of goods and services. It has become a challenge for the supranational institution of the Union - the Eurasian Economic Commission, which needed, on the one hand, to promptly respond to emerging problems within its powers, on the other hand, to provide all EAEU member states with an effective platform for communication and joint coordination of efforts.

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²⁵ Review of the EEC's key measures and decisions // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/covid-19/Pages/measures.aspx>

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The first block of measures. According to the decision of the EEC Council No. 21²⁹, adopted on March 16, 2020, duties on some medical products that are used to prevent the spread of coronavirus were canceled or reduced³⁰. The decision applied, first of all, to personal protective equipment, disinfectants, diagnostic reagents, certain types of medical equipment and materials. The exemption from payment of import customs duties lasted until September 30. Later, the list of goods imported into the EAEU to combat the pandemic was

²⁶ COVID-19 // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/covid-19/Pages/default.aspx>

²⁷ The EEC has created a coordination council to develop rapid response measures in connection with the spread of coronavirus infection // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/19-03-2020-4.aspx

²⁸ Review of the EEC's key measures and decisions // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/covid-19/Pages/measures.aspx>

²⁹ Decision No. 21 of the EEC Council dated March 16, 2020. EAEU Legal Portal // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01425251/err_24032020_21

³⁰ The EAEU to take joint measures to combat the spread of coronavirus // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/16-03-2020-5.aspx>

expanded by 19 positions by Decision No. 53³¹ of the EEC Council of May 27, 2020.

From April 1 to June 30, 2020, the Commission decided to exempt from payment of import customs duty concerning goods of critical import.

By the decision of the EEC Council dated October 1, 2020, No. 86³², for a period until March 31, 2021, the duty-free regime for the import into the Union's territory of specific components and materials for the production of medicines and disinfectants, medical supplies, respirators, goggles, rubber gloves, and some medical products and equipment, as well as boxes and stretchers for transporting patients, was extended.

The second block of measures. On April 2, 2020, the Decisions of the EEC Board of March 31, 2020, from the “second package” of measures was published: decision No. 42³³ “On amendments to the list of critical goods for the EAEU internal market and in respect of which, in exceptional cases, temporary bans or quantitative restrictions on exports may be introduced” and decision No. 43³⁴ “On amendments to the Decision of the EEC Board dated April 21, 2015, No. 30 “On measures of non-tariff regulation”.

In particular, this decision imposed a temporary ban on the export of personal protective equipment, protective disinfectants, medical products, and materials from the EAEU until September 30, 2020.

In addition, from April 12, 2020, a temporary ban on the export of certain types of food products from the EAEU countries was established. Among them are onions, garlic, turnips, rye, rice, buckwheat, millet, cereals, coarse flour and cereal granules, hulled buckwheat grain, ready-made buckwheat food products,

³¹ Decision No. 53 of the EEC Council dated May 27, 2020. EAEU Legal Portal // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01026277/err_23062020_53

³² Decision No. 86 of the EEC Council dated October 1, 2020. EAEU Legal Portal // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01427639/err_06112020_86

³³ Decision No. 42 of the EEC Council dated March 31, 2020. EAEU Legal Portal // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01425277/err_02042020_42

³⁴ Decision No. 43 of the EEC Council dated March 31, 2020. EAEU Legal Portal // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01425280/err_02042020_43

crushed and uncrushed soybeans, sunflower seeds. The decision of the EEC Board was in force until June 30, 2020.

Moreover, in April 2020, the EEC Council approved a list of critical import goods for which a tariff preference was provided in the form of exemption from import customs duties when imported into the EAEU member states for a period from April 1 to June 30, 2020. The list of goods consists of certain agricultural products and food and certain medicines and medical supplies.

Besides, the list of goods used for the production of medicines and medical goods, the import of which was duty-free from March 16 to September 30, 2020, being subject to confirmation of the intended purpose of such goods by authorized health authorities, was expanded.

Particular attention should be paid to the application "Traveling without COVID-19", developed by the EDB Digital Initiatives Fund, currently available in Armenia, Belarus, and Russia. This application aims to optimize the process of movement of citizens of the EAEU states within the Union³⁵.

Intergovernmental level

The order of Eurasian Intergovernmental Council of April 10, 2020, the No. 6³⁶ Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission "On measures taken within the Eurasian Economic Union aimed at ensuring economic stability amid developing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic" has become the basis for interstate interaction in the Union in responding to the pandemic and determined the EAEU's strategy to combat the virus and achieve economic recovery. Within the framework of this document, the following packages of measures were proposed:

- urgent temporary anti-crisis and stabilization measures (14 categories of measures);

³⁵ Traveling COVID-19 Free // Traveling COVID-19 Free Mobile App. URL: <https://nocovid.su/>

³⁶ Order of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council No. 6 dated April 10, 2020 // Eurasian Economic Commission. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01425377/ico_16042020_6

- measures to create conditions for recovery and ensure further development of the economy (6 categories of measures).

In particular, measures to ensure the effective functioning of the EAEU in the new conditions, maintain macroeconomic stability, and create conditions for further economic growth, were adopted. The states reached an agreement to create "green corridors" for the import of critical goods and the instructions of the EDB within its mandate to implement projects to combat the spread of coronavirus with the EAEU member states, as well as the provision of credit assistance to the EFSD member states in the prescribed manner for macroeconomic stabilization. For example, Kazakhstan opened a "green corridor" to import significant goods and adopted several facilitating measures (exemption from inspection, examination, control of customs value). Besides, Kazakhstan has reduced VAT rates on imports of socially significant food products. Russia has also launched a "green corridor" for essential goods and food (a priority order of customs operations).

The governments of the EAEU member states have maintained the dynamics of interaction in bilateral formats as well. So, Russia provided humanitarian assistance in the form of personal protective equipment, medicines, PCR systems³⁷, and medical equipment, as well as in the format of sending Russian medics³⁸ to all the member states, while Kazakhstan provided humanitarian assistance to the Central Asian states, particularly Kyrgyzstan³⁹. A similar dynamic was observed during the development of a vaccine against COVID-19.

Vaccine development has become another vital tool in the fight against the pandemic. For example, Russia was not only the first to present its product,

³⁷ Russia sent 50 thousand PCR test systems to Kyrgyzstan // 24.kg. URL: https://24.kg/obschestvo/173071_rossiya_otpravila_vkyrgyzstan_50tyisyach_ptsr_test-sistem/

³⁸ Russia will send medics to Armenia to help fight the pandemic // RT. URL: <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/news/757187-armeniya-rossiya-pomosch-vrachi>

³⁹ Kazakhstan sent ventilators and medical masks to Kyrgyzstan for a total of 389 million tenge // InformБюро. URL: <https://informburo.kz/novosti/kazahstan-otpravil-kyrgyzstanu-apparaty-ivl-i-medmaski-na-obshchuyu-summu-389-mln-tenge.html>

Sputnik V⁴⁰, in August 2020 but also successfully registered two more approved vaccines, EpiVacCorona and KoviVac⁴¹. Vaccine rollout in Russia began already on December 5, 2020, and, according to RBC's estimates, by February 19, 2021, the number of injected people in Russia reached 3.7 million people⁴². In December 2020, Kazakhstan became the first country to reach an agreement to launch the production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine on its territory within the Karaganda pharmaceutical cluster.

Kazakhstan became the second EAEU member state to start mass vaccination of the republic population from March 1, 2021, with the Russian Sputnik V and the second EAEU state to develop its vaccines against coronavirus successfully. According to the plans of the Government of the Republic, by the end of 2021, it is planned to vaccinate up to 6 million people, which is just over 30% of the country's population⁴³. As early as April 1, 2021, Kazakhstan will start using its vaccine – "QazCovid-In", the third phase of testing of which ends in March this year, created by the Research Institute of Biological Safety Problems, based on which four more candidate vaccines are currently being developed at different stages⁴⁴.

On March 30-31, 2021, Sputnik V's mass production will begin in Belarus⁴⁵ as well, while Armenia and Kyrgyzstan also received batches of Russian vaccine as official assistance⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Russia was the first in the world to register a vaccine against coronavirus // Interfax. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/721241>

⁴¹ Russian coronavirus vaccines. Research characteristics and features // TASS. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/10749489>

⁴² Vaccinating the whole country // RG. URL: <https://rg.ru/2020/12/27/reg-szfo/vakcinaciia-ot-covid-19-nachalas-vo-vseh-regionah.html>

⁴³ By the end of 2021, it is planned to vaccinate up to 6 million Kazakhstanis // Ministry of Health Ministry of Health. Official information resource of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan. URL: <https://primeminister.kz/ru/news/do-konca-2021-goda-planiruetsya-vakcinirovat-do-6-mln-kazakhstancev-minzdrav-190304>

⁴⁴ Vaccination for the President: what is known about the Kazakh vaccine QazCovid-In? // Sputnik. URL: <https://ru.sputnik.kz/exclusive/20210227/16406449/Privivka-dlya-prezidenta-cto-izvestno-o-kazakhstanskoy-vaktsine-QazCovid-In.html>

⁴⁵ Industrial production of the Sputnik V vaccine is planned to begin in Belarus at the end of March // Belta. URL: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/promyshlennoe-proizvodstvo-vaktsiny-sputnik-v-planirujut-nachat-v-belarusi-v-kontse-marta-431666-2021/>

⁴⁶ Russia will provide Kyrgyzstan with 500 thousand doses of Sputnik V vaccine free of charge // InformBuro. URL: <https://informburo.kz/novosti/rossiya-besplatno-predostavit-kyrgyzstanu-500-tysyach-doz-vakciny-sputnik-v>

ASEAN

By its nature, the pandemic is different from the Asian financial crisis, one of the major shocks for ASEAN throughout the association's history. However, the member states have chosen a similar toolkit to overcome the negative consequences - economic incentives, the growth of protectionism, a focus on ASEAN-centric institutions, and, above all, the ASEAN + 3 format with South Korea, China, and Japan.

Shortly after the publication of the first reports on SARS COVID-19 novel coronavirus infection in January 2020, the ASEAN Secretariat Health Division notified the Senior Officials' Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD) and activated the existing regional mechanisms⁴⁷. Such platforms include the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Center, the disease statistics collection and analysis system, the ASEAN Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Center (ARARC), and the ASEAN Health Sector Platforms on COVID-19 Prevention, Detection and Response: namely, Health Ministers Meetings and Senior Officials' Meetings on Health Development. SOMHD, along with ministerial meetings, has straddled a wide range of areas from forestry to the labor market⁴⁸.

Besides, the ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network for Public Health Emergencies (ASEAN EOC Network), launched in May 2020, has become one of the formats for synchronizing and operating information to combat the pandemic⁴⁹. The centers aggregate and provide data to various platforms, which enabled to establish the information and technical exchange among ASEAN member countries, particularly on the clinical management of

⁴⁷ The ASEAN // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2017/09/The-ASEAN-Magazine-Issue-1-May-2020.pdf> P. 32

⁴⁸ Statement by the President of the 36th ASEAN Summit // VNexplorer. URL: <https://ru.vnexplorer.net/заявление-председателя-36-го-саммита-ас-а20203066.html>

⁴⁹ ASEAN Health Experts share government policies in tackling COVID-19 pandemic // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-health-experts-share-government-policies-tackling-covid-19-pandemic/>

COVID-19 cases⁵⁰. Thus, from an institutional point of view, the initial response of the Association to the threat of the disease's spread was the development of online consultation formats, as well as the renewal of existing healthcare programs.

Against the backdrop of the outbreak, ASEAN's multilateral and bilateral cooperation with ASEAN Plus Three partners intensified, encompassing traditional consultation mechanisms and technical and expert exchanges. With the first cases reported in February, regular consultation mechanisms were set up, including meetings of experts and heads of ASEAN Plus Three health ministers and the ASEAN Plus Three Senior Officials Meeting for Health Development (APT SOMHD). Moreover, Field Epidemiology Training Network (ASEAN+3 FETN)⁵¹ and the Laboratory Network aimed at disease surveillance were organised⁵². On April 14, the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was held, at which the foreign ministers were assigned the task of coordinating cooperation to combat the pandemic⁵³. As a result of the Summit, a Plan of Action on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 was adopted⁵⁴. To ensure the free movement of goods, including medical, the Plan establishes measures aimed at achieving the market sustainability and openness to trade and investment to be taken at the national level; it stresses the necessity to discuss customs regulation amidst the pandemic. Besides prioritizing the task of gradual economic recovery, in August 2020, the Association agreed on implementing

⁵⁰ ASEAN health sector sustains cooperation in responding to COVID-19 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: [Singapore https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/ASEAN/Latest-News-in-ASEAN/2020/03/ASEAN-health-sector-sustains-cooperation-in-responding-to-COVID](https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/ASEAN/Latest-News-in-ASEAN/2020/03/ASEAN-health-sector-sustains-cooperation-in-responding-to-COVID)

⁵¹ ASEAN Plus Three senior health officials reaffirm cooperation to stop spread of 2019-nCoV // pandemic // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-plus-three-senior-health-officials-reaffirm-cooperation-stop-spread-2019-ncov/>

⁵² ASEAN Health Sector Efforts in the Prevention, Detection and Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/?static_post=updates-asean-health-sector-efforts-combat-novel-coronavirus-covid-19

⁵³ Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (14 April 2020) // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/Final-Joint-Statement-of-the-Special-APT-Summit-on-COVID-19.pdf>

⁵⁴ ASEAN Plus Three Plan of action on mitigating the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://www.meti.go.jp/press/2020/08/20200828013/20200828013-10.pdf>

the ASEAN Plus Three Plan of Action on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁵.

As part of bilateral cooperation to combat the disease, the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting took place in February, and, subsequently, China proposed the establishment of the ASEAN-China Emergency Operations Network and the relevant ministries' meetings⁵⁶. Besides, several joint programs were launched with the rest of ASEAN Plus Three states. On June 17, the Republic of Korea initiated a \$5 million project, "Enhancing the Detection Capacity for COVID-19 in ASEAN Countries," to diagnose and tracing contacts of the infected through the equipment and goods supply well as medical staff training⁵⁷. Cooperation with Japan, in addition to Tokyo's financial support for ASEAN initiatives, covered meetings of relevant ministries, such as the one held on the April 22 of the heads of economic departments to develop an ASEAN - Japan Economic Ministers' Joint Statement on Initiatives on Economic Resilience in Response to the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak⁵⁸.

A critical decision in the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation following the 36th ASEAN Virtual Summit, held on July 26, was creating the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund and the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies⁵⁹. The Fund is formed from an initial contribution of 10% of the ASEAN Development Fund and may also include

⁵⁵ ASEAN Plus Three Summit held online // ASEAN Vietnam 2020. URL: https://www.asean2020.vn/xem-chi-tiet1/-/asset_publisher/ynfWm23dDfpd/content/asean-plus-three-summit-held-online

⁵⁶ Statement of the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2020/02/ASEAN-China-SFMM-Statement-on-COVID-19-20-Feb-2020-Final.pdf>; ASEAN, China exchange practices to better manage coronavirus disease 2019 // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-china-exchange-practices-to-better-manage-coronavirus-disease-2019/>

⁵⁷ Launched: ROK project to support ASEAN COVID-19 detection capacity // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/launched-rok-project-support-asean-covid-19-detection-capacity/>

⁵⁸ ASEAN - Japan Economic Ministers' Joint Statement on Initiatives on Economic Resilience in Response to the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/AJ-EM-Joint-Statement-on-Economic-Resilience-in-Response-to-COVID-19-FI....pdf>

⁵⁹ Terms of reference the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/53-Finalised-and-APPROVED-TOR_COVID-19-ASEAN-Response-Fund.pdf

contributions from the allocation of funds from ASEAN+1 and ASEAN+3 frameworks and voluntary contributions from ASEAN member countries and their partners⁶⁰. In November, Singapore and Vietnam announced \$100,000 donations to the Fund, while the Philippines did the same in January 2021⁶¹. In turn, Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea pledged to contribute \$1 million to the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund and allocated \$300,000 from the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Fund. Finally, following the 37th ASEAN Summit held in Da Nang on November 12, the ASEAN Regional Reserve for Medical Supplies (RRMS) was established⁶². Subsequently, China took the initiative to launch the ASEAN Plus Three Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies⁶³.

Along with the ASEAN Plus Three countries, a dialogue on overcoming the pandemic has been established with the European Union, with which several ministerial discussions⁶⁴ have taken place since March, and Australia⁶⁵, which announced a \$23 million aid package on July 29. Also, contact was established with India, with which the foreign ministers met in September, and then, in December, the Indian side sent \$1 million to the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund⁶⁶; Canada⁶⁷, which provided \$4 million equipment and goods, as well as

⁶⁰ Ibidem; Southeast Asia Covid-19 Tracker // CSIS. URL:

<https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker-0>

⁶¹ Southeast Asia Covid-19 Tracker // CSIS. URL:

<https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker-0>

⁶² ASEAN Plus Three Summit held online // ASEAN Vietnam 2020. URL: https://www.asean2020.vn/xem-chi-tiet1/-/asset_publisher/ynfWm23dDfpd/content/asean-plus-three-summit-held-online

⁶³ Economic Watch: Vibrant East Asia cooperation set to accelerate regional economic recovery // Xinhua. URL: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-11/15/c_139517740.htm

⁶⁴ Co-Chairs' Press Statement ASEAN-EU Ministerial Video Conference on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/co-chairs-press-statement-asean-eu-ministerial-video-conference-coronavirus-disease-2019/>

⁶⁵ Ibidem; ASEAN-Australia Health Experts' Meeting on COVID-19 // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-australia-health-experts-meeting-covid-19/>

⁶⁶ ASEAN step up cooperation with EU, India // Nhan Dan. URL: <https://en.nhandan.org.vn/politics/item/9073802-asean-step-up-cooperation-with-eu-india.html>; PM Modi announces USD one million for COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund // Financial Express. URL: <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/pm-modi-announces-usd-one-million-for-covid-19-asean-response-fund/2127891/>

⁶⁷ Canada donates personal protective equipment to ASEAN for COVID-19 prevention // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/canada-donates-personal-protective-equipment-asean-covid-19-prevention/?highlight=COVID>

Italy⁶⁸, France⁶⁹, Russia⁷⁰. The United States, which hosted a High-Level Inter-Agency Video Conference on COVID on April 1, launched the US-ASEAN Health Futures Initiative⁷¹ on April 22, which is designed to promote research collaboration and enhancing health systems' capacities. At the same time, the United States provided ASEAN with a \$35.3 million aid package⁷².

To improve the inter-ASEAN communication mechanisms, the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Public Health Emergencies (ACCWG-PHE) was formed and hosted its first meeting on March 31⁷³, uniting all three ASEAN Community's pillars: the economic, socio-cultural, and political one⁷⁴. Chaired by Viet Nam, which even before the pandemic proclaimed "cohesion and responsiveness" as the theme of ASEAN for 2020, ASEAN's main anti-crisis program to overcome the pandemic and its consequences was the "ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework" (ACRF), aimed at (1) "strengthening health systems and (2) human security, (3) maximizing market potential and broadening economic integration, (4) accelerating digital transformation, and (5) moving towards a more sustainable future"⁷⁵. Similarly to its Plan of Action, it highlights the need for a

⁶⁸ ASEAN, Italian health experts exchange experiences in combating COVID-19 // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-italian-health-experts-exchange-experiences-combating-covid-19/?highlight=COVID>

⁶⁹ ASEAN EOC Network, France hold video conference on COVID-19 policies // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-eoc-network-france-hold-video-conference-covid-19-policies/?highlight=COVID>

⁷⁰ Statement of the Special ASEAN-Russia Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/statement-special-asean-russia-foreign-ministers-meeting-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/?highlight=COVID>

⁷¹ Co-Chairs Statement of the ASEAN-United States High-level Interagency Video conference on Cooperation to Counter COVID-19 // ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/co-chairs-statement-asean-united-states-high-level-interagency-video-conference-cooperation-counter-covid-19/>

⁷² U.S.-ASEAN Health Futures // US Mission to ASEAN. URL: <https://asean.usmission.gov/u-s-asean-health-futures/>

⁷³ THE ASEAN // ASEAN Secretariat. URL:

<https://asean.org/storage/2017/09/The-ASEAN-Magazine-Issue-1-May-2020.pdf> P. 32

⁷⁴ ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/FINAL-ACRF_adopted_37th-ASEAN-Summit_18122020.pdf P. 11

⁷⁵ Prime Minister of Thailand Attended the Official Release of the Mid-term Review of the ASEAN Community Vision Blueprints 2025, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, and the Launching of the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies // Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand. URL: <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/midtermreviewacrfrmsforpublichealthemergencies-2?page=5d5bd3cb15e39c306002a9ac&menu=5d5bd3cb15e39c306002a9ad>

comprehensive, cross-cutting ASEAN Community recovery, divided into three phases: “reopening, recovery and resilience”⁷⁶. Meanwhile, to revive economic activity against the backdrop of the pandemic, the ASEAN Declaration on an ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework was published on November 12 and confirmed the member countries’ intention to begin the process of restoring business travel in the region⁷⁷. Thus, targeting the gradual economic recovery, along with the launch of a tourist corridor, the Association began a dialogue with ASEAN Plus Three partners and in August 2020 agreed to draft the ASEAN Plus Three Plan of Action on Mitigating the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic⁷⁸.

Another initiative launched in November following the 37th Summit is the ASEAN Regional Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED), which, with \$500 million funding from the Japanese government, serves as a regional resource base for emergency preparedness⁷⁹. The Center is a vital part of the ASEAN coordination mechanism. It participates in analytical and research activities, responds to disease outbreaks, and directly contacts the ASEAN Secretariat⁸⁰. In sum, along with the establishment of the Response Fund and an Emergency Center, the construction of regional warehouses for medical supplies continued and the development of standard operating procedures for public health emergencies⁸¹. Concerning vaccination

⁷⁶ ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/FINAL-ACRF_adopted_37th-ASEAN-Summit_18122020.pdf P. 16

⁷⁷ ASEAN Declaration on an ASEAN travel corridor arrangement framework // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/2020/11/5-ASEAN-Declaration-on-an-ASEAN-Travel-Corridor-Arrangement_FINAL.pdf

⁷⁸ ASEAN Plus Three Summit held online // ASEAN Vietnam 2020. URL: https://www.asean2020.vn/xem-chi-tiet1/-/asset_publisher/ynfWm23dDfpd/content/asean-plus-three-summit-held-online

⁷⁹ ASEAN Strategic Framework for Public Health Emergencies // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-strategic-framework-public-health-emergencies/>; Virtual ASEAN summit puts pandemic high on agenda // Kyodo News. URL: <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/11/1b8cc622aaad-virtual-asean-summit-opens-with-pandemic-high-on-agenda.html>.

⁸⁰ ASEAN Strategic Framework for Public Health Emergencies // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/2020/11/4-ASEAN-Strategic-Framework-on-PHE_Final.pdf P. 6

⁸¹ ASEAN cooperation in COVID-19 fight reviewed // ASEAN Vietnam 2020. URL: https://www.asean2020.vn/xem-chi-tiet1/-/asset_publisher/ynfWm23dDfpd/content/asean-cooperation-in-covid-19-fight-reviewed

of the ASEAN population, the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Vaccine Safety and Self-Sufficiency (AVSSR) was adopted in November, underlining the Association's commitment to tackle vaccine shortfalls⁸².

In 2021, with the chairmanship's transition to Brunei Darussalam, the Association's priority is given to economic recovery, digitalization, and sustainability⁸³. This is evidenced not only by the meetings of the relevant ministers, but also by the meetings along the ASEAN Plus Three contour, where the February discussion was devoted to the restoration of the tourism industry⁸⁴; cooperation on the ASEAN Business Council (ABAC)⁸⁵ track has intensified. In 2021, under the slogan “We care, we prepare, we prosper”, chosen by Brunei as the theme of its chairmanship, the interaction formats activated last year continue to be developed to reach the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and its Plan implementation⁸⁶.

MERCOSUR

Even though the MERCOSUR member states have demonstrated a high state capacity during the "first wave" of the pandemic, they faced an increase in protectionism and national egoism at the level of the regional bloc (in the form of a political confrontation between Argentina and Brazil as the largest regional actors, as well as the priorities of internal development for Argentina) and the migration problem.

On the one hand, agreements on the joint provision of medical supplies, information exchange, agreement to allocate additional budget for measures to combat the pandemic, and joint research are among the success stories. On the other hand, as

⁸² ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance (AVSSR) // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-asean-vaccine-security-self-reliance-avssr/>

⁸³ ASEAN Economic Ministers endorse 13 priority deliverables // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-economic-ministers-endorse-13-priority-deliverables/>

⁸⁴ The 20th meeting of ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and Republic of Korea) tourism ministers // The ASEAN Secretariat. URL: https://asean.org/storage/JMS_M-ATM-3-20-Final.pdf

⁸⁵ 20 January 2021 Press Release: ASEAN BAC 2021 Chairmanship Brunei Launches its theme // Brunei Darussalam ASEAN 2021. URL: <http://asean2021.bn/Theme/news/news-20.01.21-press-release-asean-bac.aspx>

⁸⁶ 21 January 2021 Press Release by the Chairman of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) // Brunei Darussalam ASEAN 2021. URL: <http://asean2021.bn/Theme/news/news-21.01.21.aspx>

before, the constraints to deepening cooperation are the growth of protectionism in the form of new restrictive measures (for example, the rule to grant licenses for certain groups of goods associated with the pandemic), shortcomings in migration regulation, and the confrontation between Brazil and Argentina.

Successful experience in the consolidation of the MERCOSUR member states

MERCOSUR member states have shown a visible ability to cooperate in the "first wave" of the pandemic. Firstly, shortly after the COVID-19 outbreak, on March 17, 2020, the heads of the MERCOSUR countries agreed on measures to combat COVID-19, including joint purchases of medical supplies⁸⁷. The next day, March 18, 2020, the presidents signed a Declaration aimed at achieving the goals of cooperation between countries, as well as information exchange and the development of measures to overcome border restrictions to protect the economy from the crisis caused by the pandemic, assistance in the repatriation of citizens who remained abroad⁸⁸. Moreover, on the same day, the leaders of the MERCOSUR member states agreed to maintain the free movement of goods and services to maintain the regional economy, as well as exchange information (especially statistical), coordinate the repatriation of MERCOSUR citizens, approved the daily communication of the health ministers of the member countries, a meeting with the members Andean Development Corporation (CAF) and the Plata Basin Development Fund (FONPLATA) to discuss economic means to combat the pandemic⁸⁹. It was decided to hold videoconferences and provide open access to them so that the work of the association could be watched online⁹⁰.

Separate measures were immediately taken to address the return of migrants to their countries of origin under existing agreements (for example, the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement). On March 19, 2020, the MERCOSUR member states' leaders reached a consensus on the willingness to facilitate the return of migrants to their

⁸⁷ Los presidentes de la región acuerdan medidas para combatir el Covid-19. 17 March 2020 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/los-presidentes-de-la-region-acuerdan-medidas-para-combatir-el-covid-19/>

⁸⁸ Los presidentes del MERCOSUR acuerdan medidas contra el coronavirus. 19 March 2020 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/los-presidentes-del-mercotur-acuerdan-medidas-contra-el-coronavirus/>

⁸⁹ Mandatarios del MERCOSUR acuerdan libre tránsito de cargas y servicios en frontera para mantener economía regional. 18 March 2020 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/mercotur-mantiene-el-libre-transito-fronterizo-para-mantener-la-economia-regional/>

⁹⁰ Arredondo R. Mercosur: A New Victim of the Coronavirus? 2 May 2020 // OpinJuris. URL: <https://opiniojuris.org/2020/05/02/mercotur-a-new-victim-of-the-coronavirus/>

places of origin and/or residence. The means to achieve this goal should have been the regular exchange of lists of persons who expressed a desire to return, taking into account the peculiarities of settlements in the border areas in the process of developing and implementing measures to combat the pandemic⁹¹.

In April 2020, an initiative was agreed to provide an additional budget of \$16 million for the COVID-19 response⁹². The announced funds belonged to the Foundation for Structural Convergence of Mercosur (FOCEM) and were intended to provide medical equipment, personal protective equipment for personnel, tests for the detection of the virus, and so forth. Within the framework of the MERCOSUR Foundation's project on structural convergence, the interaction of scientific institutions conducting research in public health in the region is also being carried out.

Thus, on April 21, 2020, a meeting of the Common Market Group members, the executive body of MERCOSUR (Grupo Mercado Común, GMC), was held, at which experts assessed the course of action in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the discussions, it was decided to establish a mechanism for exchanging information on trade measures taken by the MERCOSUR member states⁹³.

By summer, in addition to trade and economic measures at the level of the regional bloc, issues related to the protection of human rights were discussed. For example, on June 5, 2020, at the XXXV plenary meeting of MERCOSUR on human rights, the leaders adopted a Declaration on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Declaración de Asunción sobre la Promoción y Protección de los Derechos Humanos en situación de pandemia COVID-19)⁹⁴, contributing to the growing importance of protecting human rights amid the pandemic in the Latin American region⁹⁵.

⁹¹ Los presidentes del MERCOSUR acuerdan medidas contra el coronavirus. 19 March 2020 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/los-presidentes-del-mercotur-acuerdan-medidas-contra-el-coronavirus/>

⁹² MERCOSUR has approved an emergency fund for the coordinated fight against COVID-19. 7 April 2020 // Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas. URL: <https://www.conicet.gov.ar/mercotur-has-approved-an-emergency-fund-for-the-coordinated-fight-against-covid-19/>

⁹³ Coordinadores del Grupo Mercado Común (GMC) evalúan cursos de acción a raíz de la situación creada por la COVID-19. 21 April 2020 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/coordinadores-del-grupo-mercado-comun-gmc-evaluan-cursos-de-accion-a-raiz-de-la-situacion-creada-por-la-covid-19/>

⁹⁴ La XXXV Reunión de Altas Autoridades sobre Derechos Humanos del MERCOSUR aprobó la Declaración de Asunción sobre la Promoción y Protección de los Derechos Humanos en Situación de Pandemia COVID-19. 5 June 2020 // MERCOSUR IPPDH. URL: <https://www.ippdh.mercosur.int/la->

Amidst the “second wave” of the pandemic, MERCOSUR member states also showed a high degree of effort consolidation. For example, on November 8, 2020, MERCOSUR took additional trade measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional measures include a temporary suspension of anti-dumping measures on imports of Chinese syringes and a 60-day deferral of export duties for small and medium-sized enterprises in Argentina, a review and consolidation of public health response emergencies related to maritime transport, and port facilities in Brazil and others⁹⁶.

Limitations in the efforts consolidation of MERCOSUR member states

Despite the high level of consolidation of efforts within the MERCOSUR, negotiations on importing medicines and adopting coordinated measures on trade relations at the regional level experienced several difficulties. Therefore, the member countries of MERCOSUR more often resorted to bilateral negotiations. Firstly, measures to liberalize trade in some member countries faced resistance in the form of protectionist measures in other states of the region. For instance, in the period from February 1 to May 31, 2020, all MERCOSUR countries agreed to reduce import duties on medical products, some (Argentina and Paraguay) lowered the VAT rate, suspended anti-dumping barriers (Argentina and Brazil), temporarily stopped requesting a license for import (Brazil). At the same time, new restrictive measures were introduced: Argentina began to oblige ventilators exporters to provide export licenses, Brazil imposed a ban on the export of several medical products and began to request export permits for other items, and Paraguay introduced compulsory licensing for the export of individual protection⁹⁷.

Secondly, a significant problem, especially aggravated by the lockdown during the pandemic, was the migration regulation's insufficiency. For example, the

xxxv-reunion-de-altas-autoridades-sobre-derechos-humanos-del-mercosur-aprobo-la-declaracion-de-asuncion-sobre-promocion-y-proteccion-de-los-derechos-humanos-en-situacion-de-pandemia-covid-19/
⁹⁵ Declaración de Asunción de la Reunión de Altas Autoridades sobre Derechos Humanos en el MERCOSUR sobre la Promoción y Protección de los Derechos Humanos en Situación de Pandemia Covid-19. 28 July 2020 // MERCOSUR IPPDH. URL: <https://www.ippdh.mercosur.int/declaracion-de-asuncion-de-la-reunion-de-altas-autoridades-sobre-derechos-humanos-en-el-mercosur-sobre-la-promocion-y-proteccion-de-los-derechos-humanos-en-situacion-de-pandemia-covid-19/#:~:text=En%20el%20marco%20de%20la,Situación%20de%20Pandemia%20COVID-19.>

⁹⁶ El MERCOSUR adopta medidas comerciales en el contexto del Covid-19 // MERCOSUR. URL: <https://www.mercosur.int/el-mercosur-adopta-medidas-comerciales-en-el-contexto-del-covid-19.1>

⁹⁷ Holden P. How did regional institutions like Mercosur, ASEAN and the EU respond to the pandemic? 15 December 2020 // LSE. URL: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108282/1/Covid_19_2020_12_15_how_did_regional_institutions.pdf

MERCOSUR Residence Agreement, adopted in 2009, which allows all citizens of the member countries and associate members to freely move, live and work in other states within the framework of integration and receive equal access to public goods, proved to be inadequate against the backdrop of the coronavirus crisis and the 2020 lockdown. One of the reasons for its ineffectiveness is that the Agreement covers only legal migrants and their ability to return home without hindrance, while illegal migrants were deprived of the opportunity to return home due to closed borders. The flow of migrants from Venezuela, which had not ratified the Agreement, was exceptionally high⁹⁸.

Thirdly, Brazil and Argentina's political rivalry remains an obstacle to the successful outcome of the negotiations at the MERCOSUR level. Within the coronavirus crisis framework, the countries managed to reach a compromise, but, according to the former Argentinean Ambassador to Brazil, Juan Pablo Lohlé, the ideological confrontation between the two countries hinders the effective coordination of the integration association's actions. Recall that in December 2019, Alberto Fernandez won the presidential elections in Argentina, a representative of the center-left Justicialist party, which gravitates towards Peronism's ideas, authoritarianism, and autarchy in economic terms⁹⁹. At the same time, Brazil, whose authorities adhere to international trade liberalization, announced its readiness to withdraw from MERCOSUR because of Argentina's policies¹⁰⁰.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Argentinian government announced in April 2020 a partial suspension of participation in the MERCOSUR, which was negatively perceived by Brazil¹⁰¹. The only exception was Argentina's participation in the work on agreements with the European Union and the European Free Trade

⁹⁸ Acosta D., Brumat L. Political and Legal Responses to Human Mobility in South America in the Context of the Covid-19 Crisis. More Fuel for the Fire? 20 November 2020 // *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*. URL: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2020.592196/full?&utm_source=Email_to_authors_&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=T1_11.5e1_author&utm_campaign=Email_publication&field=&journalName=Frontiers_in_Human_Dynamics&id=592196

⁹⁹ Argentina terminates negotiations on an agreement under Mercosur due to COVID. 25 April 2020 // Prime. URL: <https://lprime.ru/News/20200425/831335643.html>

¹⁰⁰ Akhunbaev A.M., Dauranov T. Sh., Kuznetsov A.S., Petrosyan A.R., Nikitushkina Y.V. Eurasian Economic Integration-2020. Moscow: EDB Publications, 2020.- 80 p. URL: https://eabr.org/upload/iblock/d21/EDB_Integration_2020_2020_08_25.pdf

¹⁰¹ Churikov A. Argentina announced a partial suspension of its participation in the work of MERCOSUR. April 26, 2020 // RG. URL: <https://rg.ru/2020/04/26/argentina-zaiavila-o-chastichnoj-priostanovke-svoego-uchastiia-v-rabote-merkosur.html>

Association. The MERCOSUR member states pay significant attention to the entry into force of the agreement between MERCOSUR and the EU, signed in July 2019 but has not been ratified by several European states yet¹⁰². The economic crisis caused by the pandemic is prompting Latin American countries to look for new markets for their products, especially agricultural products, and to reduce import barriers for their goods, which an agreement with the European Union can facilitate.

However, in this particular case, an obstacle to the successful completion of negotiations on an agreement is Brazil's environmental policy, to which France, Italy, Austria, Ireland, and some other EU states are sharply hostile. If Brazil does not begin to deal with environmental disasters caused by expanding its agro-industrial sector, the MERCOSUR agreement with the EU may never be ratified¹⁰³.

¹⁰² El Gobierno argentino y el Mercosur. 24 April 2020 // Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto Argentina. URL: <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/el-gobierno-argentino-y-el-mercosur>.

¹⁰³ Vieira F. The relationship between the MERCOSUR agreement with the European Union and South American regionalism. 21 January 2021 // Global Americans. URL: <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/01/the-relationship-between-the-mercosur-agreement-with-the-european-union-and-south-american-regionalism/>.

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