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NATIONAL POWER. OPTIONS FOR THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA IN CASE OF A PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

The present paper looks at a purely hypothetical situation where the government of the Republic of Estonia has received information that the World Health Organization has declared the start of an influenza pandemic. The government starts looking for ways to use all means of power it has to protect the population. The foreign policy goals in this situation can be summarized as supporting neighboring countries through sharing expertise when possible, monitoring the actions of Russia which there is general distrust towards, being an equal partner of shared values to the Nordic countries, and negotiating with vaccine producers while looking for any solutions that might make vaccines attainable for more countries. The strength of Estonia lies in using soft power instruments. The country can use its image as a link between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe to act as a bridge to the ideas and values of health protection. Estonia can also share expertise in fields like ICT. Complicated relations with Russia are not easy to overcome even for humanitarian causes which suggests the necessity of active involvement in international initiatives. To enlarge the vaccine supply, Estonia is again likely to

STRESZCZENIE

Poniższy esej analizuje hipotetyczną sytuację, w której rząd Republiki Estonii otrzymuje informację ze Światowej Organizacji Zdrowia o pandemii grypy. Rząd stara się użyć wszystkich możliwych instrumentów władzy, by ochronić swoją populację. Cele polityki zagranicznej mogą być podsumowane jako: wspieranie państw sąsiadujących poprzez dzielenie się fachowymi ekspertyzami, monitorowanie działań strony rosyjskiej, wobec której funkcjonuje powszechny brak zaufania, bycie równym partnerem dla krajów nordyckich, podjęcie negocjacji z producentami szczepionek, jednocześnie starając się znaleźć rozwiązania, które będą dostępne dla jak największej liczby państw. Siła Estonii leży w jej umiejętności posługiwania się instrumentami *soft power*. Państwo to może użyć swojego wizerunku, by być łącznikiem pomiędzy Skandynawią i Wschodnią Europą, działać jako most łączący idee i wartości związane z ochroną zdrowia. Skomplikowane relacje z Rosją nie są łatwe do pokonania nawet dla celów humanitarnych, które wymagają aktywnego zaangażowania w międzynarodowe inicjatywy. W celu zwiększenia podaży szczepionek, Estonia skorzysta z międzynarodowej współpracy. Bogatsze państwa

benefit from international cooperation. Richer states and international organizations can perceive Estonia as wishing to subdue to their own soft power by following their example of inoculating the populace.

Key words

government, WHO, hypothetical situation, soft power, strategic simulation, pandemic, crisis

i organizacje międzynarodowe mogą postrzegać Estonię jako ulegającą ich *soft power* poprzez pójście za ich przykładem szczepienia populacji.

Słowa kluczowe

rząd, WHO, hipotetyczna sytuacja, *soft power*, symulacji strategiczna, pandemia, kryzys

1. Introduction

The Republic of Estonia, a member of the European Union, is a small state of about 1.27 million people.¹ It is vastly influenced by its geopolitical position by the Baltic Sea between Russia and the West. Estonia's closest neighbors are Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Finland, and Sweden. Historically, relations with Russia have been complex. From an epidemiological viewpoint, the geographical location is a strength as tropical diseases rarely travels that far north. During the influenza pandemics of recent years, the so-called bird and swine influenzas, Estonia was left almost untouched. The Estonian population is apprehensive about inoculation, and the number of people vaccinated against the "swine flu" is among the lowest in Europe.²

The present paper looks at a purely hypothetical situation where the Estonian government has received information that the World Health Organization has now declared an influenza endemic that started in Africa three months ago and has been steadily spreading into a pandemic. Singular cases have been discovered in most parts of the world, including the Baltic States.

2. The Case: Pandemic Fear in Estonia

The influenza virus causing the pandemic is highly contagious, but it is only spread among people and does not affect any species of animals. The disease

¹ For further information on the Republic of Estonia, see: <http://estonia.eu/index.html>

² See: <http://www.eurosurveillance.org/ViewArticle.aspx?ArticleId=20064>.

has traveled from its first outbreak center in Africa to all other continents. Most European countries have had their first cases of the disease. In the Baltics, Estonia and Latvia have had a few singular instances where travelers arriving from other countries have come down with the virus; however, there is a small ongoing outbreak in Lithuania, where the virus has been spread by person-to-person contact inside the country. Finland and Sweden have had singular cases. Russia has reported two separate outbreaks with transmission inside the country.

The Republic of Estonia needs to prevent the pandemic fully reaching the country. The government is looking to adopt a strategy that keeps virus outbreaks as far from the Estonian border as possible. In general, there is a belief that the Nordic neighbors can be trusted to use all possible precautions to limit the disease. The other two Baltic States are motivated to stop the virus from spreading, but they may need international support. Due to their friendly relations with Estonia, they can be expected to begin collaboration. There is usual distrust in all three Baltic States towards Russia.

Previous influenzas have not affected Estonia much. The population is divided in their opinion; some suspect the pandemic is simply media hype and that the vaccine business lobby is promoting the pandemic to sell vaccines, but others are fearful of the disease and demand the government purchase enough vaccine to inoculate the whole population. So far, vaccine reserves are scarce and limited to risk groups. Further purchases are dependent on negotiations with Western vaccine producers who are keeping their prices very high.

In conclusion, the foreign policy goals of the Estonian government in working against the spread of the pandemic can be summarized as supporting neighbors when needed, monitoring the situation and actions of Russia, being an equal partner of shared values to the Nordic countries, and negotiating with vaccine producers while looking for any solutions that might make vaccines attainable for more countries.

3. Instruments of National Power

Looking at the situation from the viewpoint of hard power, it can be said that while no military action would eliminate a virus, the military as an organized workforce may be used to undertake something like an operation to isolate and quarantine a part of land limiting the movement of people and vehicles. It is possible to employ the military for a task that requires manpower that is under a clear central command. Economic sanctions could be used to influence

states that do not appear to be motivated to combat the virus on their territory, on the other hand, Estonia as a small economy couldn't make little impact by such means. Russia could be influenced through trade sanctions, namely on rail trade, yet this is an ambiguous method. The fragile relationship between the two neighbors could suffer greatly, and Estonian businesses could bear the brunt of the sanctions as opposed to the Russian side.

Economic aid to other countries could be provided to an extent, and especially as a part of a multilateral aid package, it could prove effective with partners who are clearly motivated to react to the pandemic but are struggling financially. Estonia could use its good relations with the Nordic countries to draw attention to the worsening situation in the Baltics, and to lobby for assistance to Latvia and Lithuania. Estonia can be seen as lying between Scandinavia and the rest of Eastern Europe, so where Estonia lacks in financial means to provide aid, it could raise support through its connections and help from collaboration networks. Estonian diplomats and politicians have been cooperating with Scandinavia and the West ever since Estonia gained independence from the USSR. For Latvia and Lithuania, contacts with Scandinavia have been less frequent.

Estonia could also contribute to the global combat effort by sharing its expertise. Even though the country has had no firsthand experience in fighting pandemics, medical sciences, and virology are well represented in the Estonian academia. Famous for its successful use of ICT, Estonia could also provide know-how for coordinating communications in areas that have been quarantined. As a member of the World Health Organization and the European Union, Estonia can partake in lobbying for vaccine attainability. Private vaccine producers are not likely to lower their prices, however, international cooperation in the form of subsidies or loans could help inoculate a bigger part of the world's population.

4. The Best Course of Action

The strength of Estonia appears to lie mainly in soft power instruments. Above all, to fight the spread of the pandemic in the region and to keep it away from Estonian borders, the country can use its image as a link between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, and Russia and the West to promote a general drive to stop the virus. This image gives Estonia a good standing to act as a bridge to the ideas and values of health protection. The wish to participate in eradicating the disease on a global level is proof of sharing the highest health protection values. Complicated relations with Russia are not easy to overcome even for

humanitarian causes though, and monitoring the situation in Russia might be easier through international organizations. To enlarge the vaccine supply, Estonia is again likely to benefit from international cooperation. Richer states and international organizations can perceive Estonia as wishing to subdue to their own soft power by following their example of inoculating the populace, and Estonia could thus receive help for doing so.