

# IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN THE REALIZATION OF BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DIPLOMATIC MEETINGS

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 disease is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus, which on 11 March was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, thus becoming a global issue with serious consequences in many aspects. Coronavirus is indiscriminate in who it infects regardless of being rich or poor, and it is equitable between disadvantaged or privileged members of societies. Although a lot of meetings, conferences, and other major events were cancelled because of coronavirus, diplomacy cannot be cancelled because international cooperation in various fields during this pandemic is more than necessary. Therefore, many states and international organizations are hosting their meetings online and are moving from conference rooms to online spaces offered by various digital platforms. The main purpose of this paper is to explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the realization of various diplomatic meetings, whether bilateral or multilateral, as well as its consequences on their effectiveness. For the realization of the research qualitative methods were used, based on bibliography and on the credible Internet sources which contain valuable information about the virtual realization of the most important diplomatic meetings. Results of the research show that coronavirus has been a key catalyst for the digitalization of diplomacy because the traditional work of world leaders and diplomats has stopped abruptly as a result of travel restrictions, border closures and shelter-in-place orders. The conclusions of this paper aim to contribute to increasing knowledge about the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in traditional diplomacy.

**Key words:** coronavirus, pandemic, impact, diplomatic meetings

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted to be quite difficult and is accompanied with long-term consequences in every aspect of life. Even the most developed countries in the world were unable to cope with these consequences, in which case their leaders were forced to hold bilateral and multilateral meetings. However, these meetings that make a very important part of traditional diplomacy were so much challenged by the extraordinary spread of the COVID-19, thus imposing to world leaders the usage of various digital platforms and holding of these meetings virtually. The usage of digital platforms to achieve foreign policy goals of states is defined as digital diplomacy, and it was never been thought before that will come the moment when traditional diplomacy would be challenged so much by digital diplomacy, until 2020.

The main purpose of this research is to explain the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the realization of various bilateral and multilateral meetings. The research question of the paper is: *Has the importance of digital diplomacy increased compared to the traditional one as a result of the coronavirus?* While the hypothesis of the paper is: *In the literature of diplomacy, 2020 will be known as the year of digital diplomacy, in which traditional diplomacy is seriously disfavored as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.*

Therefore, to give the research question the right answer and to identify the raised hypothesis, the paper in addition to the abstract, introduction, conclusion, bibliography and resources from the Internet, also contains two specific chapters. The first chapter offers information about the coronavirus disease. This chapter is divided into three subchapters, which explain the spread of COVID-19, its symptoms and prevention, and the situation of the coronavirus in different regions of the world. Whereas, the second chapter is very important because it gives data about the challenging of traditional diplomacy by digital diplomacy as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. This chapter is divided into six subchapters, which elaborate digitalization of diplomacy during the pandemic. In order to understand much better the impact of the coronavirus on the realization of diplomatic meetings, this chapter presents some examples of the most important bilateral and multilateral meetings in the international arena in 2020, such as the Brexit negotiations, and the summits of the UN General Assembly, G7, G20 and ASEAN.

This paper has an explanatory, descriptive, analytical and comparative nature, and for its realization are used qualitative methods, relying in the bibliography and the latest credible Internet sources that are related to the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences, and also to the field of diplomacy, with special emphasis to the most important bilateral and multilateral meetings realized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE?**

### **2.1 The spread of coronavirus**

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The first cases of this disease were reported in China at the end of 2019. On December 31, 2019, cases of pneumonia detected in Wuhan, China, are first reported to the World Health Organization. During this reported period, the virus was still unknown. The cases occurred between December 12 and December 29, according to the Wuhan Municipal

Health. On January 5, 2020, China announced that the unknown pneumonia cases in Wuhan are not SARS<sup>2</sup> or MERS<sup>3</sup>, while on January 7, Chinese authorities confirmed that they have identified the virus as a novel coronavirus, initially named 2019-nCoV by the WHO. On January 11, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission announced the first death caused by the coronavirus, a 61-year-old man, exposed to the virus at the seafood market, who died on January 9 after respiratory failure caused by severe pneumonia. On January 17, was confirmed the second death in China caused by the coronavirus, and after three days China reported 139 new cases of the sickness, including a third death. On January 20, were confirmed cases in Japan, South Korea and Thailand, whereas officials in Washington state confirmed the first case on the United States of America soil. On January 28, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom in Beijing. At the meeting, Xi and WHO agreed to send a team of international experts, including US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention staff, to China to investigate the coronavirus outbreak (CNN Health, 2020). On February 16-24, the WHO-China Joint mission, which included experts from Canada, Germany, Japan, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore and the US spent time in Beijing and also travelled to Wuhan and two other cities. They spoke with health officials, scientists and health workers in health facilities (maintaining physical distancing). Deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, on March 11, 2020, the WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020).

## 2.2 The coronavirus symptoms and its prevention

Most people infected with the coronavirus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and how it spreads. The coronavirus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it's important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (World Health Organization, n.d.).

The coronavirus symptoms are divided into three groups:

- 1) **Most common symptoms:** *fever, dry cough and tiredness;*
- 2) **Less common symptoms:** *aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell and a rash on skin, or discolouration of fingers or toes;*
- 3) **Serious symptoms:** *difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure and loss of speech or movement.*

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<sup>2</sup> SARS (*Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome*) coronavirus or SARS-CoV is a virus identified in 2003. SARS is thought to be an animal virus from an as-yet-uncertain animal reservoir, perhaps bats, that spread to other animals (civet cats) and first infected humans in the Guangdong province of southern China in 2002. Symptoms are influenza-like and include fever, malaise, myalgia, headache, diarrhoea, and shivering. No individual symptom or cluster of symptoms has proved to be specific for a diagnosis of SARS. An epidemic of SARS affected 26 countries and resulted in more than 8000 cases in 2003.

<sup>3</sup> MERS (*Middle East Respiratory Syndrome*) or MERS-CoV is a viral respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus, that was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Since September 2012, 27 countries have reported cases, while WHO has been notified of 2494 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV and 858 deaths.

People with mild symptoms who are otherwise healthy should manage their symptoms at home. On average it takes 5-6 days from when someone is infected with the virus for symptoms to show, however it can take up to 14 days. According to the WHO, to prevent infection and to slow transmission of COVID-19, must do the following:

- *Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, or clean them with alcohol-based hand rub;*
- *Maintain at least 1 metre distance between you and people coughing or sneezing.*
- *Avoid touching your face;*
- *Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing;*
- *Stay home if you feel unwell;*
- *Refrain from smoking and other activities that weaken the lungs;*
- *Practice physical distancing by avoiding unnecessary travel and staying away from large groups of people* (World Health Organization, n.d.).

As the WHO and partners work together on the response tracking the pandemic, advising on critical interventions, distributing vital medical supplies to those in need they are racing to develop and deploy safe and effective vaccines. Vaccines save millions of lives each year. Acting now to accelerate development, manufacture, and equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines will save millions of lives and protect the livelihoods of billions more. On December 18, 2020, CEPI<sup>4</sup>, alongside Gavi<sup>5</sup> and the WHO, launched COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the ACT Accelerator<sup>6</sup>, with the aim of ending the acute phase of the pandemic by the end of 2021. COVAX aims to produce 2 billion doses of vaccine and distribute them globally and fairly in 2021 (The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, n.d.).

### **2.3 The situation of the coronavirus disease in different regions of the world**

Until January 31, 2020, the WHO reported that there have been 101,917,147 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, including 2,205,515 deaths. Ten states with the largest numbers of confirmed cases with the COVID-19 were: *US (25,676,612); India (10,746,183); Brazil (9,118,513); Russian Federation (3,832,080); the United Kingdom (3,743,738); France (3,102,215); Spain (2,705,001); Italy (2,529,070); Turkey (2,464,030); and Germany (2,205,171)*. Whereas, ten states with the largest numbers of deaths were: *US (433,173); Brazil (222,666); Mexico (156,579); India (154,274); the UK (103,126); Italy (87,858); France (75,224); Russian Federation (72,697); Iran (57,889); and Spain (57,806)* (World Health Organization, 2020). Obviously, larger countries tend to have higher numbers of both infected cases and deaths. Mainly countries with ageing populations were hit harder because the disease is more dangerous to older people.

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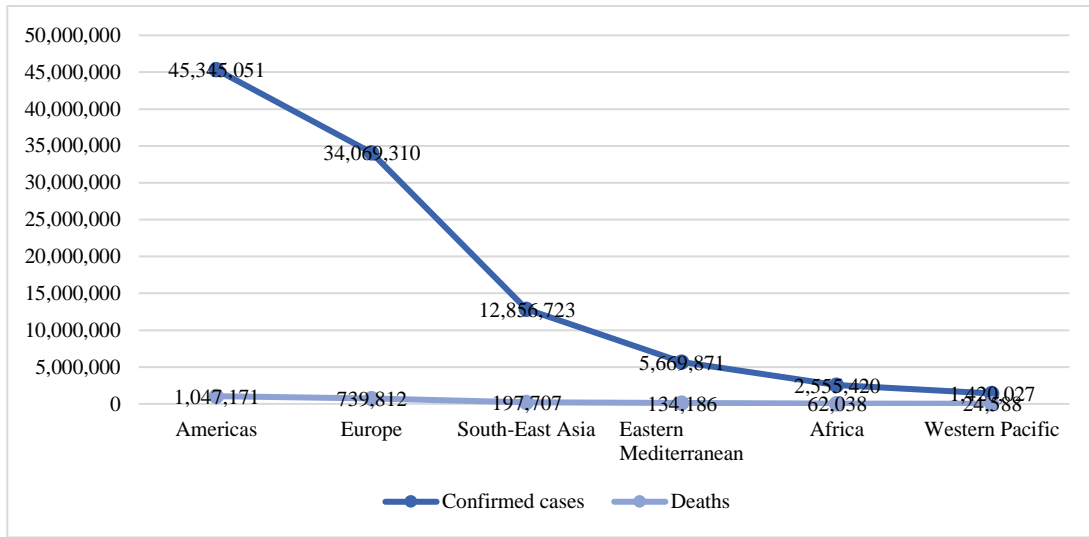
<sup>4</sup> *The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations* is a foundation that takes donations from public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organisations, to finance independent research projects to develop vaccines against emerging infectious diseases.

<sup>5</sup> *GAVI*, officially Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance is a public-private global health partnership with the goal of increasing access to immunisation in poor countries.

<sup>6</sup> *The Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator*, or the Global Collaboration to Accelerate the Development, Production and Equitable Access to New COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines, is a G20 initiative announced by pro-tem Chair Mohammed al-Jadaan on 24 April 2020.

**Table 1.**

*The coronavirus situation in different regions of the world by the WHO*



(World Health Organization, 2020).

### **3. CHALLENGING OF TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY BY DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A RESULT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

#### **3.1 Digitalization of diplomacy during the coronavirus pandemic**

Over the past months the world as we know has changed beyond recognition. Overnight the coronavirus has completely transformed our lives, from the way of education to the way we work and conduct business. The coronavirus pandemic is crippling the economies of rich and poor countries alike. Many people have lost their jobs or seen their incomes cut due to the coronavirus crisis. Unemployment rates have increased across major economies as a result. The International Monetary Fund said that the global economy was shrink by 3% in 2020, and it described the decline as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s<sup>7</sup> (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Health systems around the world are being challenged by increasing demand for care of people with COVID-19 while trying to maintain the delivery of routine health services. Prevention and treatment services for noncommunicable diseases have been severely disrupted since the coronavirus pandemic began. Many people who need treatment for diseases like cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes have not been receiving the health services and medicines they need (World Health Organization, 2020). Then, most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. These nationwide closures are impacting over 60% of the world's student population. States around the world have more than clear that the consequences caused by the coronavirus pandemic belong to a very serious degree, for the resolving of which international

<sup>7</sup> *The Great Depression* was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place during the 1930s, beginning in the US after a major fall in stock prices that began around September 4, 1929, and became worldwide news with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929, known as Black Tuesday. It was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century. Between 1929 and 1932, worldwide GDP fell by an estimated 15%. In many countries, the negative effects of the Great Depression lasted until the beginning of World War II.

cooperation is more than necessary because unilateral actions have failed to halt the spread of the coronavirus (UNESCO, 2020).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has thoroughly upended diplomacy, a profession which involves a fair amount of travel, physical meetings and in-person interactions. The traditional work of world leaders and diplomats has come to a sudden stop as travel restrictions, border closures and shelter-in-place orders have scuppered in-person diplomatic activity. No more physical meetings, bilateral summits or multilateral gatherings. World leaders and diplomats had to adapt to working from home and have been thrust into virtual meetings and diplomacy became truly digital<sup>8</sup>. Bilateral and multilateral meetings are now held via telephone or videoconferencing apps. The traditional pictures of multilateral meetings, such as the G7, G20 and the ASEAN summits, have been replaced by a mosaic of screens with leaders sitting in front of their respective flags. The coronavirus has been a key catalyst for the digitalization of diplomacy. Despite the timid resumption of in-person meetings between masked foreign ministers, there is little chance that bilateral and multi-lateral meetings will ever come back to normal. Many large-scale diplomatic events have already been downscaled with large portions of the debate happening online rather than in-person. Speaking online without a live audience is a challenge for many world leaders but the chance to pre-record statements offers new opportunities for the leaders' messages to be heard and seen beyond the meeting room by a global online audience (Twiplomacy, 2020).

Social media represents the basis of digital diplomacy, that provides a platform for unconditional communication, and has become a communicator's most powerful tool. World leaders can communicate with massive audiences around the world in unimaginable ways and the list of social media is growing at incredible speed. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly transformative impact on how world leaders use social media. As the virus spread around the world, leaders wasted no time to engage on these platforms. While governments are trying to reach their constituents on the main social channels, to warn about the deadly virus and how to mitigate its spread, social media users are looking for guidance and leadership from their leaders online. Millions are flocking to social media for answers, advice and support. The pages of governments and world leaders have literally exploded (Twiplomacy, 2020).

Until the coronavirus appeared, it was thought that digital diplomacy is an essential element for realizing foreign policy of state and doesn't have the power to replace traditional diplomacy. However, it seems that 2020 will be known as the year of the brilliance of digital diplomacy because many bilateral and multilateral meetings were held through digital platforms. The year 2020 has disfavoured traditional diplomacy but, if digital diplomacy will be favoured or not after the coronavirus pandemic is over, remains to be seen in the future.

### **3.2 The Brexit negotiations through video conferencing**

A typical example of bilateral meetings held via video conferencing during the coronavirus pandemic is the one on the Brexit negotiations. The latter ones are characterized by a phase-based approach which aimed to avoid

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<sup>8</sup> *Digital diplomacy* is a form of new public diplomacy, which uses new information and communication technologies (ICT), the Internet and social media as means for strengthening diplomatic relations between international actors (states, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, because should be clarified that digital diplomacy is not used solely by states).

operational and legal gaps during the transition from the current relationship to new arrangements in all areas of cooperation between the UK and the EU. The first phase during June - December 2017 was dedicated to settling key priority issues like EU and UK citizens' rights, the financial settlement, and the dilemma caused by the Northern Irish border, in order to prevent the risk of legal uncertainty following Brexit. The second phase during February 2018 - January 2020 was focused on the negotiation and ratification of a Withdrawal Agreement and on a preliminary discussion on the framework for the future EU-UK long-term relationship (Carrapico, Niehuss and Berthélémy, 2019, pp. 41-42). The entry into force of the Withdrawal Agreement marked the end of the period under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and the start of a transition period until December 31, 2020. Negotiations on the future partnership between the EU and the UK as a third country started on March 2, 2020, while the first round of these negotiations took place in Brussels. However, due to the ongoing the COVID-19 crisis, the EU and UK negotiators had agreed to continue negotiations in April, May and June via video conference (European Council, n.d.).

An early victim of the coronavirus pandemic has been trade talks between the UK and the EU. With the COVID-19 consuming the British government's attention, it was hardly an ideal time to thrash out compromises during third phase of Brexit negotiations. Also EU minds were elsewhere, as they confronted the serious risks to the bloc's economy and the potential destabilization. The chances of getting a deal fixed in time were diminishing. The pandemic was reordering the global economy in ways that led to question whether an agreement with the EU even makes sense for the British government anymore (The Economist, 2020). Although the third phase of the Brexit talks was considered as the most complicated phase of the negotiations, the coronavirus pandemic further increased the difficulties and disagreements between the negotiating parties in this phase, endangering its termination without an agreement between the parties.

### **3.3 The first virtual session of the United Nations General Assembly**

The year 2020 should have been remembered as a very important year for global diplomacy, based on the fact that in this year some of the most important international organizations have celebrated special anniversaries, as was the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The General Assembly is the chief deliberative organ of the UN. It consists of all UN members and each of them having one vote. The assembly's resolutions are passed by either a two-thirds or a simple majority of those present and voting. On external matters, its resolutions are only recommendatory, but on matters internal to the UN, such as budgetary questions and the election of non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, the assembly's resolutions are binding on the members and the organization (Berridge & Lloyd, 2012, p. 163). The UNGA meets each year in regular session between mid-September and late December. The meeting of world leaders usually brings thousands of government officials, diplomats and civil society representatives to New York for more than a week of speeches, dinners, receptions, one-on-one meetings and hundreds of side events.

The 75th session of the UN General Assembly in 2020 was expected to bring an especially large number of leaders to UN headquarters to celebrate the founding of the UN in 1945. However, the President of the UNGA Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, said that world leaders will not come to New York for their annual gathering in September (The New York Times, 2020). The high-level session went virtual for the first time in the UN's 75-year history because of

the coronavirus pandemic. This session of the UNGA was opened in New York on September 15, 2020 and the theme for this event was: “The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism” (The Economic Times, 2020). The high-level meeting to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the UN took place on September 21, 2020. Whereas, the UNGA General Debate Week took place from September 22 through September 26, and September 29, 2020. Biodiversity was in the spotlight with a virtual Global Summit on September 30 and the high-level meeting on the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women took place on October 1 (United Nations, n.d.).

### **3.4 Cancellation of the 46th summit of G7**

G7 has been operating over more than a quarter of a century, as a forum for consultation and policy coordination, at the highest level, on major political, security and economic issues among the largest industrial economies. The Group has become closely involved with international financial issues and the work of the relevant multilateral institutions, notably the IMF, multilateral trading relations and policies towards the developing world. G7, although lacking a formal structure, represents a significant opportunity for the Heads of State and Government of the participating countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US) and for the representatives of the EU to discuss major international economic and political issues. Senior officials and experts from economic and foreign affairs ministries prepare the agenda for the Group’s meetings with the aim of working out more detailed commitments (Schiavone, 2005, pp. 149-150).

The 46th summit of the leaders of the Group of Seven was originally scheduled to be held on June 10-12, 2020, at Camp David, US. However, the former American President Donald Trump has been forced to cancel a planned face-to-face summit of the group leaders in June after the German chancellor Angela Merkel told him in a phone call that she saw the summit as a health risk because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds of security staff, journalists and officials also attend the two-day summits. Trump said that he planned to postpone the annual G7 summit of world leaders and that he wanted to invite Russia<sup>9</sup> to rejoin as part of an alliance to discuss the future of China. He also mentioned his plans to invite South Korea, Australia and India to the meeting on purpose to build an alliance against China. Justifying the cancellation of the June meeting and his proposed new format, Trump said the group’s current makeup was “very outdated” and does not properly represent “what’s going on in the world”. He said he had not set a precise date for the new meeting, but suggested it might be around the time of the annual session of the UNGA in New York, which is normally held in September, although there was no guarantee that this summit would be held in 2020. The proposed “G11” meeting could have been held after the US presidential election, according to Trump (Wintour, 2020). However, this summit was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### **3.5 The first virtual G20 summit**

The coronavirus pandemic resulted in urgent meetings between states to help each other overcome the pandemic situation more easily, and such a case was the virtual meeting of G20 members before the traditional summit

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<sup>9</sup> On March 24, 2014, the G7 members cancelled the planned G8 summit that was to be held in June of that year in the Russian city of Sochi, and suspended Russia’s membership of the group, due to Russia’s annexation of Crimea.



in November. The Group of Twenty is the premier forum for international economic cooperation that gathers the leaders of the largest economies of the world (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the UK, the US and the EU) to discuss financial and socioeconomic issues. The emergence of the G20 was fostered by the growing perception that the G7 was losing legitimacy, as it was less and less representative of global balances after the end of the Cold War. The conditions that actually launched the G20 were related to the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998 (Vinay-Postel, 2014, pp. 3-4). Originated in 1999 at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, the G20 gathered for high-level discussions on macro-financial issues. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 was elevated to include the leaders of member countries. The first G20 Leaders' Summit took place in Washington in November 2008<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, the G20 agenda expanded beyond macro-financial issues, to include socio-economic and development issues (Group of Twenty, n.d.).

Ahead of the 15th G20 summit held virtually on November 21-22, 2020, the G20 Heads of States and Governments held an extraordinary virtual summit on Covid-19 on March 26. The G20 leaders agreed that tackling the pandemic and its health, social and economic impacts is an absolute priority for the group. The conclusions of this meeting emphasized that tackling the pandemic requires sharing timely and transparent information, expanding manufacturing capacity in terms of medical supplies and further strengthening WHO's mandate in coordinating the international action against the pandemic. The G20 mentioned that safeguarding the global economy requires: using all of the instruments available to minimize the economic and social shocks, protecting workers and businesses, shielding the vulnerable through adequate social protection, injecting over \$4.8 trillion into the global economy, supporting the exceptional measures taken by central banks, the IMF and the World Bank. Meanwhile, enhancing global cooperation requires strengthening the global financial safety nets, paying special attention to developing countries, notably in Africa (Government of France, 2020).

### **3.6 The 36th ASEAN Summit via teleconference**

Established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) now has 10 member states since Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos PDR, and Cambodia have joined. ASEAN in the first instance, was a political and security organization and offered a different model for regional integration. The acceleration of economic development within the region is now ASEAN's primary aim. In 2015, the ASEAN Community was launched under three pillars, including an economic pillar, and a free trade area within the ASEAN region has been established. The other two pillars of the ASEAN Community are the Political-Security Community and the Socio-Cultural Community (Lamb & Snape-Robertson, 2017, pp. 40-41).

The ASEAN leaders convened at the 36th ASEAN Summit on June 26, 2020, via teleconference to discuss how to further strengthen cooperation on public health emergencies and put in place a robust post-pandemic recovery

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<sup>10</sup> The 2008 G20 Washington Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy took place in November 2008, in Washington. It achieved general agreement amongst the G20 on how to cooperate in key areas so as to strengthen economic growth, deal with the 2008 financial crisis, and lay the foundation for reform to avoid similar crises in the future. The 2008 financial crisis also known as the global financial crisis, was a severe worldwide financial crisis, which was the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression.

plan. Under the theme of Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN in 2020, they underscored the need to enhance ASEAN's unity, cooperation and solidarity, economic integration, ASEAN awareness and identity, and emphasized the importance of promoting ASEAN proactiveness and capacity in seizing opportunities as well as in addressing the challenges brought about by rapid changes in the regional and global landscape. The ASEAN Leaders recognized the unprecedented challenges posed by the Coronavirus Disease pandemic in the region and the world. They noted with grave concerns the human cost and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and reaffirmed their commitment to implementing targeted policies to assure their peoples that ASEAN is at the forefront of this critical battle and future crises. They announced the establishment of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and the commencement of the process of moving forward ASEAN's efforts to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and develop a comprehensive recovery framework that is robust, holistic, inclusive, gender-responsive and science-based as well as effective in taking the region through the reopening and recovery stages, towards longer-term resilience, preparedness, and competitiveness (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2020).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The coronavirus had the power to spread across the planet, sparing no country in the world, whether large or small, rich or poor, even powerful or powerless. Over 100 million people were infected worldwide and over 2 million deaths were caused by this virus. Vaccination started in 2021, but its results are expected to be seen during this year. However, the consequences that resulted by the COVID-19 pandemic have affected all aspects of life and are very serious and long-term, for the resolving of which unilateral actions of the states did not yield results. This is the main reason why international cooperation is more than necessary to overcome difficulties and problems of the coronavirus disease.

In order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19, states around the world implemented some restrictions and closures, including here also the closure of their land, sea and air borders. This hindered the traditional realization of diplomatic meetings of world leaders, and as a result of the need for bilateral and multilateral meetings they adopted digital platforms and held these meetings through videoconferencing. Some rounds of the third and most important phase of the Brexit negotiations, and the 75th session of the UNGA were held virtually, while G7, G20 and ASEAN summits or were held virtually, or were postponed and cancelled.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a very large impact in the field of diplomacy, bringing about some long-term changes in it. As the usage of digital platforms is increasing at an extraordinary speed, the importance of digital diplomacy will be also increased because these platforms present its basis. The year 2020 should have been remembered as a very important year for diplomacy, based on the fact that in this year some of the most important international organizations and agreements would have celebrated very special anniversaries. However, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the year 2020 will be known as the year of digital diplomacy. Before the pandemic it was very hard to believe that digital diplomacy could replace traditional diplomacy, but 2020 proved the opposite, thus disfavoring traditional diplomacy. But, whether or not digital diplomacy will be favoured after the coronavirus pandemic is over, remains to be seen in the future.

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