

GLOBAL ACADEMY TALKS

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No. 3, NOVEMBER 2020

Global Academy



Global Governance and the COVID-19 Pandemic



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GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and international cooperation have been in the agenda of International Relations for a long time. Global governance on the other hand is an approach that has been developed in a relatively new period, specifically just after the ending of the Cold War and began to be utilized in order to take on the ever complicated and multi-dimensional global issues. In order to develop long-lasting and sustainable solutions to deal with the cross-border problems that has the potential to affect all humanity in the international arena necessitates international actors to adapt multidimensional cooperation rather than to act alone.

International organizations emerge as the most efficient and purpose-built global governance institutions to ensure collaboration and coordination in the international arena. These encompassing and comprehensive institutions, particularly the intergovernmental international organizations work on finding solutions to global problems to within boundaries and scope defined by member states. In this context, the United Nations currently appears as the main cooperation platform where the existing global problems are addressed and solutions to these problems are developed.

Pandemics constitutes the global dimension of the public health problems that have been faced by the humanity. Preventing pandemics to emerge and spread and developing protective measures and treatments became an important part of the contemporary global governance agenda. Within this framework, dealing with pandemics that begin to have more effect and spread rate to the relevant effects of globalization, became a priority in global governance agenda. The short time span of the spread and immediate effects of the Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in the beginning of 2020 and the human losses have shocked the whole World. The process of coping with the pandemic has shown the significance and necessity of global governance and the need for cooperate in order to tackle global issues, as well as the problems encountered in acting in coordination in these processes. This report aims to take on and analyze the developments in the COVID-19 pandemic health emergency from the perspectives of international actors and international organizations within the context of global governance perspective.

REFERENCE: Açar, Dilaver Arkan, "Global Governance and the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Global Academy Talks Series* (İstanbul: Global Academy and International Relations Council), No.3, November 2020, https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AACAR_GlobalGovernance_v.2.pdf

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.35706.31687

Introduction¹

After experiencing two global wars in the twentieth century that caused millions of people to lose their lives, states established an international order to ensure their survival and prevent further such catastrophes by seeking ways and means of institutionalizing international cooperation. Although the foundations of institutional cooperation in the international arena date to the nineteenth century, it seems that these two global-scale wars had to be experienced for the idea of intergovernmental institutional cooperation to come to the agenda. Following World War II, states thus established comprehensive multilateral institutional structures to ensure international security, peace, and stability. Today, however, global problems are more complex, multidimensional, and wide-ranging, and international actors need global institutional cooperation more than ever. For a host of reasons, it has become increasingly difficult for international actors to cope with the crises, emergencies, conflicts, and challenges of the twenty-first century. In many cases, states have discovered that they simply cannot deal with the global-scale problems by themselves. From this point of view, it is evident that the global emergency that we are experiencing today due to the COVID-19 pandemic is one such case, and one that

can only be managed by international actors acting together in a coordinated manner. Despite this need, international actors have struggled to handle the pandemic through existing international cooperation mechanisms and institutional structures.

International Relations, International Actors and Global Governance

After the end of the Cold War, in order to address global problems and produce long-term, permanent and sustainable solutions to these problems, some scholars from the International Relations discipline² later to be joined by an international endeavor of the Global Governance Commission began to lay down general lines of an approach related to international cooperation to be called “global governance”.³ In this context, global governance lay at the center of a global approach to fostering a fair, long-term, and sustainable world order.⁴ Within the framework of this understanding, it was assumed that global governance would create opportunities to develop solutions to global problems and crises in different issue areas by harnessing international institutions and multilateral cooperation. The scope of global governance included the provision of global public good, a mixture of informal bilateral relations and multilateral or treaty-based relations among the states,

¹ This text is originally written in Turkish and later translated to English.

² Rosenau, J. N. (1992). “Governance, Order, and Change in World Politics”. In J. N. Rosenau and E.-O. Czempiel (ed.), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-29

³ Commission on Global Governance (1995). *Our Global Neighbourhood. The Report of the Commission on Global Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ Açar, D. A. (2020). “Küresel Yönetişim Çerçevesinde Küresel Sağlık Riskleri ve 2020 Pandemi Krizi”. Elif Uzgören and Dilaver Arıkan Açar (eds.) *Küreselleşmenin Krizi Pandemi ve Uluslararası Siyaset*, Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, pp.19-20.

and network governance that incorporate the interests and activities of non-state actors.⁵

Although a general framework exists for global governance, there is no single, agreed-upon definition and the concept contains ambiguity for both academic researchers and practitioners alike. James N. Rosenau, one of the leading scholars of the International Relations discipline, launched an academic debate about the issue in the early 1990s, arguing that the concept of governance in international relations is not synonymous with the government (state administration) and has a more inclusive and broader meaning. He underlined that “although it has characteristics in common with the ‘government’ such as purposeful behaviors, targeted actions, and systems to govern, it does not have the coercive power to oversee implementation,” and defined the situation as “governance without government”.⁶

There is no structure or world government, however, with global authority and legitimacy over states and non-state actors. International actors, especially states, therefore aim to protect their sovereignty and autonomy to the extent they can. Thus, they recognize the merits of “governance without government.” In this regard, Thomas G. Weiss, an expert on international institutions and cooperation, defined its scope as “the inclusion of ‘governance’ both formal and informal values, norms, practices, and institutions.” He also argued that it should be considered a capacity to provide services “in an environment where ‘world government’ does not exist”.⁷

To raise these conceptual discussions in a public international forum, the Global Governance Commission was established in 1995, which elevated the concept of global governance to the public agenda. The commission, which was co-chaired by Ingvar Carlsson, one of the Swedish Prime Ministers, and Shridath Ramphal, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations, published a report that same year entitled *Our Global Neighborhood*.⁸

In the report, the Commission defined the concept of governance to include “all the ways and means in which individuals, as well as public and private institutions, govern their relations.” The report underlined that “while conflicting and differentiating interests are part of the relations, global governance mechanisms could help to transform these conflicting interests into harmony and cooperation.” This definition included officially authorized institutions and regimes to ensure appropriate action, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions acknowledged for their common interests. In this relatively more favorable environment for global governance in the 1990s, it was easier to promote international institutional cooperation and solidarity. The removal of the international system's constraints that had existed during the Cold War period then further promoted global governance among international actors, and global governance practices have since grown more prevalent. It has also been argued that states should cooperate without giving up their

⁵ Report of the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance (2015). *Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance*. The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the Stimson Center, the Hague and Washington D.C. pp. 8-9.

⁶ Rosenau, p. 4.

⁷ Weiss, T. G. (2011). Introduction. In T. G. Weiss (ed.), *Thinking about Global Governance: Why People and Ideas Matter*, Routledge, p. 9.

⁸ Commission on Global Governance (1995).

sovereignty is ultimately more beneficial in solving global problems. By facilitating trust building and stability, in which the norms and rules are agreed upon, new governance regimes could likewise be established. With these increased multilateral tendencies, the range of international organizations' activities widened, deepening the dimensions of cooperation.

Globalization, which gained momentum after the end of the Cold War, provided opportunities for actors in the international arena but also complicated the set of problems already facing the world. For instance, the involvement of non-state actors in the international arena has grown more prominent. International intergovernmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational companies, and individuals with transnational aims have more forcefully influenced international processes under globalization. Non-governmental actors, in particular, have become a part of global governance by creating agendas and shaping public opinion. Alongside states, non-state actors have become the main stakeholders in platforms in which global problems are discussed and have accordingly made significant contributions. As a result, the global governance processes of consultation and negotiation have become more participatory, inclusive, and democratic. The involvement of more non-state actors in global governance processes “has been a development that challenges the primacy of sovereign states in terms of taking the initiative in addressing international problems, setting the agenda and negotiation framework”.⁹

Regarding global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, sustainable development, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international NGOs, civil society networks, pressure groups, and even individuals may significantly affect decision-makers by taking the initiative on the issues being negotiated. Although these actors' ability to set the main agenda is limited, their presence in the processes and in global governance practices have shaped the direction of multilateral negotiations, the establishment of consensus, and the legitimacy of outcomes.

The United Nations as the Framework Organization for Global Governance

The United Nations (UN), which is the most important intergovernmental organization in the international order, was established after World War II. Historically, the UN played a significant role in the spread of global governance and helped identify, address, and prevent global problems. As an international organization that owes its institutional existence to governments, its legal framework was defined by the UN Charter, which was signed by the founding states. In this context, the UN can function as long as state sovereignty is respected, and their internal affairs and territorial integrity are protected. The UN was, however, undermined by the Cold War's bipolarity and, after the end of the Cold War, became the target of critics who highlighted its failures in handling acute global problems and promoting global governance. These critics described the organization as cumbersome, wasteful, reactive, and ineffective in

⁹ Açar, p. 26.

addressing global problems of inclusiveness and equality. The UN's reputation, credibility, and function were also denigrated by rumors of corruption and abuse. Despite and in response to these critics, the UN has undergone various reforms regarding its structure, functioning, priorities, and operations. Today, it remains the organization with the largest capacity, infrastructure, network, and global governance resources to deal with existing global problems.

The UN is also regarded as the leading institutional structure with which to embody multilateralism. The UN's work depends on active multilateral political mechanisms to prevent, control, and end armed conflicts on a global scale. The UN also organizes the deployment of armed forces, who are provided by member states, for peace operations. It strives to guide its members to develop solutions to global economic, social, and human rights-related problems within the framework of global governance and develops short-, medium-, and long-term solutions through its specialized institutions. For this purpose, the UN designed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 within the framework of global governance and presented eight goals to member states that aimed to ensure the development of countries with the lowest levels of development.

During the fifteen years that were allotted to achieve these goals, the UN carried out institutional studies to provide support to member countries in terms of

technical capacity, expertise, infrastructure, and financial resources and to raise awareness for these purposes. Within the framework of the MDGs, some progress was achieved towards each goal. While working towards them, studies were initiated that set new goals for all countries, from the least developed to the most developed. The development of common goals and cooperation under the UN's leadership was the most comprehensive process regarding the content, inclusiveness, and expected results in addressing global problems. It was an exemplary attempt to launch a global governance framework based on the lessons learned from the past and from developments in global governance practices.

In 2015, after an intense and detailed negotiation process involving the UN's member states, its specialized organizations and programs, international NGOs, and individuals produced seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets for their implementation, and evaluation indicators. The inclusivity of this process led to the effective inclusion of different actors in global governance processes. At the end of the negotiations, the SDGs were identified as a reference point for UN member states and all international and local stakeholders and were introduced at the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 with Resolution 70/1 entitled Transforming Our World: 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.¹⁰ The last of the

¹⁰ Under the heading of Sustainable Development Goals set out in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolution A / RES / 70/1 dated 25 September 2015 and titled "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 17 Goals are defined, 169 Targets developed to direct signatories to achieve these goals, and 231 Indicators provided to measure and verify progress. The 17

SDGs are: (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reducing Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14)

seventeen goals, Partnerships for the Goals, encouraged member states to establish global partnerships as a complementary element for realizing other objectives and the Sustainable Development Agenda, which opened up areas in which all countries could improve themselves. At the same time, it reminds governments that they should cooperate to solve global problems and to create a better world where basic needs and rights are met. It is a reminder, moreover, that all international actors need to cooperate to maintain a livable planet. The agenda is considered the most comprehensive global governance process ever; international actors, including non-state actors, were encouraged to participate in both the preparation and negotiation phases of it. Although we cannot predict whether the goals will be achieved by 2030, by establishing concrete goals and objectives and identifying concrete indicators to measure the results, the SDGs raised awareness about global problems and highlighted the value of the global governance approach to combat these problems.

Once again, the importance of the MDGs and the SDGs has come to the fore due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While one of the MDGs was “combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,” the third goal of the SDGs, Health and Quality Life, which included raising attention about global health and epidemic diseases, was identified as a priority. In this sense, an important step was taken to ensure that UN members and stakeholders prioritize the issue of public health and combating epidemics in their agenda. Moreover, this recognition of public health

and combating epidemics occurred within the framework of global governance. The UN, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the UN Development Program (UNDP) have been contributing to the implementation of these goals through international and local NGOs.¹¹ Besides carrying out essential work towards developing long-term aspects of public health, issues such as making preparations against the spread of disease, preventing emerging epidemics, treating diseases, and developing preventive practices have long been identified as priorities by international actors. Thus, global health is identified as a priority of the global governance agenda.

International Cooperation in Combating Global Pandemics and Health Emergencies

At the start of the new millennium, the scale and effects of globalization gradually increased, as cross-border travel, trade, transportation, and other contacts and interactions significantly expanded, making it more challenging to isolate problems with transnational effects. In this context, states began to face transnational problems that they could not control, including poverty, famine, hunger, water scarcity, environmental problems, climate change, irregular migration, terrorism, armed conflicts, economic crises, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human rights violations, discrimination, natural disasters, and

Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

¹¹ In this regard, in line with the SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being, under the leadership of the WHO the UN had laid down an action plan

in order to guide the INGOs and other international organizations. *Towards a Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All*, World Health Organization, (2008).

ultimately local epidemics and now global pandemics. Greater interconnectedness thus created broader and more profound risks to global stability, demanding that international actors utilize existing international cooperation mechanisms, especially international organizations, more effectively. To contain potential transnational threats and limit their effects, international actors would benefit from establishing partnerships, cooperation areas, and networks for global governance.

The spread of COVID-19 in early 2020 from a local epidemic to a global pandemic was a shocking and unexpected development. The rapid spread of the virus resulted in a crisis that profoundly affected the whole world. In response to this “expected but abrupt” crisis, almost all actors were unable to react to the steps taken on the local and global levels. A health problem of such global scale was far beyond the abilities of individuals and international relations networks to cope with. Even though previous outbreaks should have served as warnings to international and local actors alike, it was too late to think about public health as one of the main themes of global goals. Experts had, of course, warned leaders and decision-makers about the possibility of a global pandemic. Thus, the question we need to ask is: “why COVID-19 has cost more than a million of lives and led to economic, social, and political crises?” The answers can be found in the existing problems of global governance and the lack of leadership in local decision-making processes.

It is crucial to recognize and understand that governance in the field of public health is still identified as an

autonomous area of state decision-making. Often, states act to prioritize their sovereignty while conducting decision-making processes on global issues. In this context, states often tend to deal with the health-related problems that emerge within their borders by mobilizing national resources and capacities, preferring to intervene in emerging health crises by employing their own means. This is a reflection of the self-help logic behind the urge to protect sovereignty within their borders. It also reflects leaders’ fears of losing prestige in the international arena. However, the self-help approach to transnational health risks has clearly harmed citizens. As experienced with COVID-19, the situation quickly spiraled out of control. In health emergencies where situational awareness, coordination, and transparency are essential, it is crucial to isolate diseases, take preventive measures, and prevent them from spreading. In regions where countries are in close geographical proximity, different countries implementing their own measures in a non-coordinated manner limits the ability to control epidemics.¹²

While dealing with global health problems, emergencies, and epidemics, different non-state actors can also be essential global governance players. In cases where the capacity of states is insufficient or absent, NGOs, the private sector, scientific research centers, and influential individuals can effectively help corral global health problems. Particularly in times of health emergencies, the contributions of non-state actors become essential in responding quickly, determining the causes, intervening in the problem, preventing its spread, and developing treatment methods, appropriate medicines, and

¹² Açar, p. 32.

preventive vaccines in the long term. In developing countries with limited healthcare capacities and resources, the lack of expertise and equipment is often met by non-state international organizations. In this regard, health can be considered an area that would benefit from globalization's positive effects.

It is observed that non-state actors in the field of health, mostly in cooperation with host country governments, assume essential responsibilities in delivering services to those who live in places where health services are lacking, incomplete, or inadequate. International non-profit organizations, NGOs, local communities, and associations providing medical and humanitarian aid, such as the Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières, MSF), which specializes in the global expansion of public health services particularly in conflict and disaster areas, have increased their effectiveness in the global governance of public health.¹³

MSF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its work in providing humanitarian aid and augmenting medical activities in the international arena. As the work of MSF shows, non-state actors in the field of healthcare have increased their effectiveness, grown their capacities to influence processes, and elevated their international profiles. For instance, non-state actors have made key contributions to the global fight against malaria, which is still a significant public health problem in some regions. To eliminate this age-old threat to public health, many scientific studies were carried out, and treatment and vaccine development studies were conducted with the support of many international

organizations, particularly the WHO. International non-state actors have been working in cooperation to implement protective measures to prevent the spread of malaria and to treat patients.

Although global health problems are diverse and vary in prevalence and potency, the global community prioritizes the fight against global pandemics due to their multidimensional effects outside the sphere of healthcare. The spread of pathogens first turns into an epidemic at the local level, spreads beyond borders, and transforms into a global-scale pandemic. As COVID-19 demonstrates, it is imperative to prevent the spread of diseases globally. Historically, humanity has experienced many epidemics. Today, the global effects of the plague during the Middle Ages and the Spanish flu at the beginning of the twentieth century remain popular subjects of inquiry. In fact, epidemics have hardly dropped from the global agenda since HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, cholera, and other diseases still affect human health.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, significant outbreaks, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome SARS (2002), H1N1 Avian Influenza (2009), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome MERS-CoV coronavirus (2012), H7N9 Avian Influenza (2013) and Ebola (2014, 2018), continue to harm different parts of the world at varying intervals. Besides the economic and social losses in the countries and regions that they affect, these epidemics have significantly diminished welfare and stability and are considered significant security threats, especially if they

¹³ Açar, p. 33.

grow into pandemics. Pandemics may pose threats to human security, societal security, and national security as a result of their global impacts on healthcare systems, economic systems, and social and political stability. They may also disrupt national and international economic development through the contraction of trade and the slowdown of global financial movements, undermining national incomes and welfare and causing unemployment and poverty, which are major destabilizing factors for national economies. In this respect, all international and local actors perceive epidemics as a common threat, as they can affect all countries regardless of their levels of development. Pandemics, in other words, do not discriminate. Although the prevention of the spread of epidemics and the fight against them are among the common goals of international actors, differences in the development levels of countries prevent international actors from taking the necessary steps. Limited financial resources, fragile health systems, inadequate health infrastructure, and few trained health workers have all constrained developing countries from combating epidemics. In most cases, these countries need international support. Cooperation, coordination, and solidarity among international actors becomes vital. In this context, state actors should follow three basic strategies:

- surveillance (defined as detection, monitoring, and follow-up),
- the provision of financial and material assistance,

- rule-making in order to manage and control outbreaks in the context of global health governance.¹⁴

To implement these strategies, significant developments exist, including global efforts for capacity building in combatting epidemics and creating solidarity mechanisms, norms, and rules. These developments are significant contributions to global health governance. Since the importance of global public health is a priority for international actors, they need to act multilaterally, actively use international institutional structures, and implement common approaches as part of global governance.¹⁵

Regarding the global health risks of epidemics, the experiences of the 2000s shows us that global platforms of participation and cooperation within the institutional structures of existing international organizations are needed. To prepare for future epidemics, arrangements such as the Global Health Security Agenda were initiated.¹⁶ This agenda aimed to increase the global capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to pandemics; to prepare governments, international organizations, and other actors to combat future epidemics and pandemics; and to prioritize global health security through local leadership. Furthermore, through global platforms, the following priorities were underlined: enabling local and international actors to take action and developing structures to implement multilateral and multi-sectoral approaches. Similarly, in the 13th General Work Program (GPW13), the WHO revised its strategic priorities and global health goals.¹⁷ GPW13, which was accepted at the

¹⁴ Zacher, M. W. and Keefe, T. J. (2008). *The Politics of Global Health Governance: United by Contagion*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 130-134.

¹⁵ Açar, p. 36.

¹⁶ Global Health Security Agenda, <https://ghsagenda.org>.

¹⁷ *Delivering on the 13th General Programme of Work and Health SDGs: WHO Transformation Plan & Architecture*, World Health

71st World Health Assembly on 25 May 2018, covers the plans and programs for the years 2019-2023 under three headings:

- more people to benefit from universal health coverage;
- more people better protected from health emergencies;
- more people enjoying better health and well-being.

The report also underlined the interrelatedness of these three elements and linked them with the SDGs (SDG3¹⁸ and others).¹⁹

While the WHO has made health emergencies a strategic priority, the organization aims to strengthen national, regional, and global competencies to protect people from epidemics and other health emergencies by ensuring faster access to healthcare services for communities affected by emergencies. In this context, the WHO has reinforced the vitality of its international role as the steering and coordination authority in health emergencies, including epidemics. The WHO Health Emergencies Program was established to deal with such health emergencies.²⁰ In this context, the Emergency Response Framework was prepared.²¹ This program

provides services to support countries' responses to emergencies; to prepare them for health emergencies; to develop strategies and competencies in preventing and controlling high-risk epidemic situations; and to evaluate risks to public health. As witnessed in the example of influenza, the WHO also makes recommendations for using pharmaceuticals and other measures to combat epidemics that have the potential to spread globally. The organization develops strategies based on the lessons learned from previous experiences with pandemics and then shares scientific information about prevention and evaluates pandemic preparedness.²²

Given the risks of epidemics and pandemics, the WHO has been publishing since 2015 a "priority diseases R&D (Research and Development) Blueprint" to disseminate information on diseases that cause epidemics and pandemics. The R&D Blueprint aims to direct international actors to research and development activities to prevent the spread of Disease X.²³ As a result of this guidance, an international organization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), was established in 2017 to carry out these studies, along with government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, foundations, and pharmaceutical companies. This

Organization, 16 February 2018. The WHO prioritized the improvement of the situation of one billion people each within the scope of all three strategic priorities.

¹⁸ 3.d.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators directly refers to the capacity and health emergency preparedness of the International Health Regulations.

¹⁹ *The Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023*, World Health Organization, 2019.

²⁰ *WHO's Work in Emergencies: Prepare, Prevent, Detect and Respond*, World Health Organization Health Emergencies Programme Annual Report 2018, World Health Organization, Geneva (2018).

²¹ *Emergency Response Framework* (Second Edition), World Health Organization, Geneva (2017).

²² *Non-Pharmaceutical Public Health Measures for Mitigating the Risk and Impact of Epidemic and Pandemic Influenza*, World Health Organization, 2019. *Pandemic influenza preparedness in WHO Member States: Report of a Member States Survey*, World Health Organization, 2019.

²³ WHO R&D Blueprint, <https://www.who.int/teams/blueprint/>.

coalition's primary purpose is to conduct regular R&D activities, establish necessary infrastructure, develop preventive vaccines, and deliver them to people during epidemics.²⁴

As a matter of fact, the framework of the WHO's "Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT)"²⁵ initiative aims to provide technical coordination and facilitate the fight against COVID-19. The initiative has brought together different international actors such as CEPI, other UN institutions, international research centers, NGOs, and pharmaceutical companies. These actors took part in joint work to facilitate the development of the COVID-19 treatment and vaccine, COVAX.²⁶

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Governance in the Global Health Sector

Following the WHO's identification of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the organization mobilized its existing infrastructure and resources with a global governance approach to control the pandemic. It launched studies to provide information and ensure coordination. Unfortunately, this process did not start easily and did not proceed as quickly and effectively as it should have. The problem lay at the heart of the health dimension of global governance. The two leading actors of the international system, the United States and China, began competing and obstructed the WHO's work, which is

responsible for controlling epidemics and effectively implementing preventive health measures. At the beginning of the pandemic, multilateral relations became an area of competition instead of a platform for cooperation.

As of 2020, the WHO has 194 members. The organization's members recognized their international responsibility and committed to comply with the expanded international sanitation regulations and by-laws that were "designed to prevent the global spread of diseases." In this context, the International Health Regulations (IHR) were adopted in 2005 and entered into force in 2007, "to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade".²⁷ According to Article 6 of the Regulation entitled "Notification", all state parties are entitled to "notify WHO, by the most efficient means of communication available, by way of the National IHR Focal Point, and within 24 hours of assessment of public health information, of all events which may constitute a public health emergency of international concern within its territory in accordance with the decision instrument, as well as any health measure implemented in response to those events".²⁸ Through the IHR, the WHO imposes responsibility on parties to identify epidemics that may

²⁴ Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). <https://cepi.net/about/whyweexist/>.

²⁵ WHO, What is the ACT Accelerator, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/about>.

²⁶ COVAX Explained, <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/covax-explained>.

²⁷ World Health Organization (2008). *International Health Regulations* (3rd Edition). WHO Press, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations>

²⁸ *ibid*.

have international effects and report them immediately. The fulfillment of this responsibility is left to individual countries. After evaluating this information, the WHO declares the case as “a public health emergency causing international concern” and then undertakes the task of defining international epidemics as pandemics and initiates studies to take measures by warning all countries. After this, the Director-General of the WHO has the authority to declare a pandemic. In the case of COVID-19, after all the evaluations had been made, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the WHO, declared the coronavirus epidemic a pandemic on 11 March 2020.²⁹

As outlined in the IHR, it is indeed very important for the states to notify the WHO promptly as required in the case of an emerging epidemic disease. The disease, later identified as the New Coronavirus (COVID-19) is believed as had emerged in China’s Hubei Province sometime in December 2019, and the following developments especially concerns about the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government delay in following the established procedure and being late to notify the WHO and thus leading to a delay in corresponding measures to be taken, have been discussed. In this context, the PRC government was criticized for making the notification after the WHO had requested information. China made the official notification on 3 January 2020, two days after the WHO’s request. In this regard, the failure to obtain timely and accurate information about the nature and parameters of the epidemic, due to PRC’s closed and

non-transparent structure and its domestic political considerations, thought to have paved the way for the epidemic to turn into a global pandemic. Regarding the spread of the virus and the attendant human losses, globally the states were held responsible for prioritizing political considerations over international public health issues as well as not having the necessary capabilities and capacities to deal with pandemics.³⁰ The WHO, being at the center of global health governance, was also held partially responsible for the spread of the epidemic due to its negligence and problems caused during the process.³¹ Dr. Ghebreyesus, the WHO’s Director-General, declared the pandemic more than two months after the PRC government’s notification. It is argued that the uncertainties in this process, the hesitant approach of the WHO, and the failure to operate the appropriate international information channels caused significant delays in preventing the spread of COVID-19, which required the implementation of a transparent risk management approach, effective early warning mechanisms, and coordination for effective global governance.

Once more, the success of intergovernmental organizations such as the UN depended on the actions of member countries. The approach of powerful states to international cooperation is vital, and the competition between the United States and PRC ultimately obstructed the UN’s efforts to deal with the pandemic. Powerful countries, after all, are expected to lead efforts in finding solutions to global problems, but these two

²⁹ World Health Organization. *Timeline: WHO’s COVID-19 Response* (No date), <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline>.

³⁰ Açar, pp. 37-38.

³¹ Babones, S. (27 May 2020). “Yes, Blame WHO for Its Disastrous Coronavirus Response”. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/27/who-health-china-coronavirus-tedros/>.

states did not act per the logic of multilateralism due to domestic political considerations, damaging global governance efforts. . In this process, US President Donald J. Trump targeted the WHO claiming that the organization was far from fulfilling its function and helping for a cover up for what he considered as the Chinese responsibility for the spreading of the pandemic, and ordered the US withdrawal from the WHO and ending of US financial contributions to the organization in the middle of a global pandemic.³² In this period, the US government had also turned United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) passing of a draft resolution that would recognize COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis and a threat to international security, and call for a pause to ongoing armed conflicts in the World, into another area of contention with China thus leading to an unexpected prolongation of this process.³³ UNSC Resolution 2532 UNSC S/RES/2532 [2020])³⁴ did not entered into force until 1 July 2020, six months after the pandemic's outbreak. In this sense, it has been observed that foreign policy approaches centered on sovereignty and national interest and domestic policy calculations constituted obstacles for global governance processes.

Instead of ensuring international cooperation and effective coordination, states and other important international actors implemented selfish *ad hoc*

practices to protect themselves from the effects of the pandemic.³⁵ Notably, during the first months of the pandemic, even international organizations with supranational characteristics such as the European Union (EU) had problems assisting member countries as the virus was spreading across continents and were unable to devise a common approach to deal with the effects of the pandemic.³⁶ Clearly, neither the EU nor its member states were ready and the EU could not fulfill its coordination role. The EU member states and the EU citizens accordingly lost their faith in the EU's solidarity and joint action mechanisms. The EU's reputation was damaged primarily due to the institutional weakness it revealed in the early stages of the pandemic. Member states competed with each other to obtain necessary materials and could not support fellow countries in need. Furthermore, member states closed their borders, which was a negative experience for the Union. After the initial shock, the EU has gradually started to work in coordination and cooperation to combat the pandemic. Then, the EU provided financial aid and health equipment to support member states. In this context, it agreed to provide a recovery and support package, the European Union Coronavirus Recovery Plan,³⁷ and began preparing a new budget for this purpose. The pandemic has ultimately provided opportunities for deeper integration,

³² Coronavirus: Trump moves to pull US out of World Health Organization, BBC News, 7 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53327906>.

³³ Lynch, C. (27 March 2020). "U.N. Security Council Paralyzed as Contagion Rages". *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/27/un-security-council-unsc-coronavirus-pandemic>.

³⁴ UNSC Resolution 2532 (2020). 1 July 2020 (UNSC) [S/RES/2532(2020)], [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2532\(2020\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2532(2020)).

³⁵ Açar, p. 38.

³⁶ Chadwick, L. (27 March 2020). "The future of the European project is at stake: EU in crosshairs of coronavirus pandemic". *Euronews*. www.euronews.com/2020/03/27/the-future-of-the-european-project-is-at-stake-eu-in-crosshairs-of-coronavirus-pandemic.

³⁷ European Union, *The European Union Coronavirus Recovery Plan*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en.

but has also revealed the inadequacy of institutions designed to handle emergencies, even in structures like the EU where nations show flexibility to compromise their sovereignty to address common challenges.

Conclusion

The crisis that emerged at the beginning of 2020 is one of the most far-reaching global emergencies that humanity has ever faced. This process has been a critical test for international cooperation, coordination, and global governance practices. At the beginning of the pandemic, the shock waves experienced in institutions and leadership caused confusion and hindered institutions and leaders from taking immediate measures to control it. Although the loss of human life and the economic, social, psychological, and political damage caused by the crisis have been colossal, international cooperation and coordination efforts can still create a positive atmosphere in the international arena. Many governments, international institutions, organizations, and individuals have cooperated and shared knowledge, expertise, technology, and resources to overcome the global health crisis and acted in concert to work towards a common goal. In this respect, making existing international cooperation mechanisms functional, adapting them to meet crisis conditions, and constructing new mechanisms have been among the positive developments from the pandemic. International solidarity mechanisms and networks have been established to provide support globally, i.e. financial support, equipment to health institutions, infrastructure, and training to countries in need. Intensive studies have

been carried out on a global scale regarding treatment methods for COVID-19, which focus on developing and supplying medicines and medical equipment, sharing information, and developing preventive vaccines. In the final analysis, the global dissemination of prevention methods and tools that are being developed within global health governance has to ensure indiscriminate access to developing treatments and preventive vaccines.³⁸

Stable international relations and multilateral cooperation processes maintained by international norms and rules were unfortunately sacrificed to short-term populist domestic politics. This has created pessimism about the future of global governance. Leaders with a tendency for unilateralism undermined international cooperation mechanisms and global governance processes, not only in regard to the pandemic but also in regard to other global problems such as climate change. On the other hand, it is evident that the extent of global problems exceeds the capacities of individual nations and requires international cooperation. It is rational for decision-makers and leaders to use these opportunities to find solutions that harness cooperation, everyday use of resources, and good governance approaches in dealing with intricate global problems. While maintaining the voluntary-based character of international governance norms, rules, and structures is attractive for states to participate in the solution of global problems, international actors should better manage these processes. For stakeholders, it would be meaningful to transform them into more transparent structures with concrete binding provisions. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that hardly any

³⁸ Açar, p. 40.

international actor can isolate themselves from the consequences of global problems. Once again, international stakeholders have come to understand during this crisis the importance of acting together for the common future of humanity.

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Temsilciliği tarafından desteklenmektedir.

Global Academy Talks Series are supported by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey.

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