

COVID-19 Pandemic in Russia: The New Stage of Federalism?

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1 Introduction

The pandemic of COVID-19 that has hit many countries at the beginning of 2020 has influenced a lot of different spheres of our life: from the protection of human rights and provision of medical assistance to the relations in the sphere of state governance and federalism. Pandemic had posed many problems not only of a medical but also of a social, political, economic and legal nature to the world community and the Russian Federation in particular. Federative relations are not the exception.

On January 30, 2020, by the decision of the World Health Organization, the epidemiological situation caused by the outbreak of coronavirus infection was assigned a level of international danger, an emergency of international importance was declared and on March 11, 2020, the situation was recognized as a pandemic by a statement by the WHO Director-General.¹

Federal states along with other countries collided with difficulties, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative consequences for the economy and social sphere. At the same time, the results of the functioning of federal states in the new conditions turned out to be contradictory. How the Pandemic has influenced the federal system, has the balance of power changed and what are the lessons learned? These questions are addressed in regards to the Russian Federation, a country, which has faced serious threats due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Short Overview of the Russian Federalism before the Pandemic

Russia is one of the largest multinational federations in the world. The Russian Constitution, which was adopted in 1993, proclaims it as a federation with 85 subnational units, constituting the territory of the Russian Federation.²

Since then, Russia has passed two major stages of federal development: one, from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the century – the period of federal decentralization with vivid tracks of decentralized asymmetrical federalism – and the second from the beginning of 21st century and up to nowadays – the period of the federation's unitarization.³ The Russian Federation has faced the pandemic being a centralized asymmetrical federation with quite limited powers of subnational units, dependent on the decisions made

1 WHO announced the coronavirus pandemic, see *RosBusinessConsulting (RBC Group)*. <https://www.rbc.ru/society/11/03/2020> (14.05.2021).

2 *Kremyanskaya, Elena/Kuznetsova, Tamara/Rakitskaya Inna* 2014: *Russian Constitutional Law*, Cambridge, p. 75.

3 *Popelier, Patricia/Sahadzic, Maja (eds.)* 2019: *Constitutional Asymmetry in Multinational Federalism. Managing Multinationalism in Multi-tiered Systems*, London, pp. 403–406.

by the federal government. Whether the situation has changed under the pandemic influence, we are contemplating in this article.

3 Federal Regulations at the Beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Russia has met the pandemic several weeks after European countries. In March 2020, the Russian President Vladimir Putin, responding to the COVID-19 threat, has declared the policy of self-isolation. People were prescribed to comply with self-isolation mode. This regime had no legal background; thus, initially, it should be done voluntarily, however, the legislation was in a quite fast manner amended, and serious administrative penalties were introduced.

General legal regulation of such crisis cases is done per Article 56 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation⁴, where the President in certain cases may introduce a state of emergency on the whole territory of Russia and in its subnational units. State of Emergency permits for partial limitation of rights, for example the right to free movement. At the same time, these limitations of the constitutional rights are possible but in a strictly limited number of cases and only ordered per federal laws.

In this case, subnational units were empowered by the President to introduce such limitation by themselves, which led to a quite nonstandard case when subnational units introduced legislation advancing the federal one. Later on, this regime was analyzed by the Constitutional Court of Russia in its Ruling of December 25, 2020, where the Constitutional Court provided an opinion about the constitutionality of the newly made regulations even despite the fact that subnational legislation was ahead of the federal one.

Following the actions of the Russian government that did not announce the State of Emergency but introduced a new form as “High alert mode” and regime of “self-isolation” President Putin has signed the Decree “On determining the procedure for extending the measures to ensure the sanitary-epidemiological well-being of the population”. By this Presidential decree, the governors of the subnational units were empowered by additional powers and among them are the following ones: to determine whether it is necessary to introduce additional measures to prevent the dissemination of coronavirus; if these measures are necessary – then introduce them; to suspend the activity of entities, including the commercial ones (for example suspending work of cafes and restaurants, fitness clubs and kindergartens).

What is even more dramatic is that sub-national governments were empowered to establish limitations on the people’s right of free movement and prevent vehicles from moving from one region to another. In some subnational units as in Moscow city, for example, the subnational government had introduced total control over the movement of all citizens and vehicles, which meant mandatory application for the pass to visit your relative or move to your place of work.

4 *The Constitution of the Russian Federation* 1993. <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm> (31.05.2021).

Restrictive measures were taken within the framework of the regime provided for by the Federal Law of December 21, 1994 “On the Protection of Population and Territories from Natural and Technogenic Emergencies”⁵. Back in March 2020, this law could be relatively controversially applied to anti-epidemiological measures, since the nature of emergencies in it was defined only as natural or man-made. In addition, the high alert regime did not assume the possibility of significant restrictions on the rights and freedoms of citizens. Nevertheless, restrictive measures concerning this law were introduced in many regions and gradually expanded. For example, it was within the framework of this law that a general regime of self-isolation was introduced in Moscow on March 30, 2020. The legalization of this practice took place only on April 1, 2020, when amendments to Federal Law No. 68-FZ came into force.

Why was this particular legal regime chosen for the introduction of restrictive measures, and not more stringent? Alternatively, the legislation provides for the following legal regimes: state of emergency; emergency; quarantine Emergency status, via the Constitution of the Russian Federation, is introduced by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, which must be approved by the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. The spread of a viral infection across the territory of the Russian Federation had, firstly, significant differences in its intensity, and secondly, it was carried out asynchronously. To combat the pandemic and its consequences, a mode of functioning of the control bodies of the unified state system for the prevention and elimination of emergencies was used, built and tested over the years.

In the vast majority of cases, the authorized bodies limited themselves to the introduction of a high alert regime, and not an emergency. Contrary to popular belief, the state thus did not try to surrender its obligations to society and entrepreneurs.

The opinion that the emergency regime suspends the obligation to pay taxes, repay loans, pay utility bills, makes it possible not to fulfil the concluded contracts, and the state must cover all the costs of business and citizens, is erroneous and not based on legislation. On the contrary, in some cases, the emergency regime implies additional responsibilities of business and citizens.

The chosen high alert regime seemed to be more flexible. By the position of the Council under the President of the Russian Federation for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights, the chosen model of regulation is adequate to the threats that have arisen, since it has a less negative impact on the economy than the emergency regime. The above measures were sufficient to counter the threat. Within the framework of the chosen regime, the authorities had all the necessary powers to adequately respond adequately to the situation. The use of stricter legal regimes that further restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens would be redundant.

5 The Federal Law “On the Protection of the Population and Territories from Emergencies of Natural and Technogenic Character”, in: Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation 1994, No. 35, Article 3648.

4 Did the Pandemic Influence the Federal Division of Competencies: how was the Federal Division of Competencies Organized during the Pandemic Management?

According to Art.1 and Art.5 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation⁶, one of the foundations of the federal structure of the Russian Federation is the delineation of the powers between governmental bodies of the Russian Federation and subnational bodies. Determining the spheres of the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and the spheres of joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and its subnational entities, the Constitution of the Russian Federation establishes that federal laws and laws adopted for them and other normative legal acts of the sub-national units of the Russian Federation cannot contradict federal laws adopted on the subjects of the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and subjects of joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and its subnational units.

The Art.72 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation refers to the joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and its subnational entities. It is necessary to mention that the protection of human rights and the implementation of measures to combat catastrophes, natural disasters, epidemics, the elimination of their consequences falls into joint jurisdiction of the federation and its subnational entities.,

When introducing a high alert or emergency the Federal Government can determine the head of emergency response. This person is responsible for carrying out these works following the legislation of the Russian Federation and the legislation of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and who takes additional measures to protect the population and territories from emergencies. That includes to restrict access people and vehicles to the territory where there is a threat of an emergency, as well as to the emergency zone. Such an official at the regional level is the highest official of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation.

To ensure the necessary degree of efficiency in taking measures, the powers of the federal executive branch were expanded during the period of the pandemic. As a result of the adoption of several federal laws, the Government of the Russian Federation was endowed with the following extraordinary powers:

- the right to make decisions on the introduction of a high alert regime or an emergency on the entire territory of the Russian Federation or in its part in the event of a threat and/or the emergence of a federal emergency, as well as the right to establish rules of conduct that are binding on citizens and organizations when a high alert or emergency regime is introduced;
- the right to impose a moratorium on the initiation of bankruptcy proceedings on applications filed by creditors;
- the right to provide for simplified rules of state registration of medical products and medical devices in certain urgent cases;

6 *The Constitution of the Russian Federation* 1993 (fn. 4).

- the right to provide for a special procedure for regulation in 2020 of control, supervisory and licensing activities, including the right to extend overdue permits and authorize activities without permits, the receipt of which is provided for by legislative acts;
- the right to establish the specifics of calculating and collecting penalties for delayed payment of utility bills in 2020;
- the right to establish the specifics of taxation rules in 2020, the possibility of prompt redistribution of budget allocations in 2020 and the establishment of separate sources of financing the budget deficit was envisaged.⁷

When a high alert or emergency is introduced on the territory of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, regional government bodies shall adopt laws and other regulatory legal acts in the field of protection of the population and territories from emergencies, introduce an emergency regime for the relevant management bodies and forces for the prevention and elimination of emergencies.

These bodies independently at the expense of the budget of the subnational unit, attributed the solution to the issue of preventing emergencies of an inter-municipal and regional nature, natural disasters, epidemics and eliminating their consequences, the implementation of measures aimed at saving lives and preserving people's health in emergencies.

At the same time with giving additional powers to the governors, the federal government had introduced new criteria for the assessment of their activity, for example, level of effectivity on COVID-19 prevention, level of medical support to the population, etc. Thus, the provision of additional powers was balanced by the new forms of control and assessment of regional leaders by the federal government.

5 The Pandemic of COVID-19 in Russia from a Subnational Perspective

Since COVID-19 has become very widespread, as a result, a high alert regime was introduced in all 85 subnational units of the Russian Federation, so that this regime covered the entire territory of the state. By decisions of senior officials or supreme executive bodies of state power of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, along with the introduction of the high alert regime, restrictions are established on individual rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen, including the right to move freely; the right to assemble peacefully, hold meetings, rallies and demonstrations; the right to apply personally to state bodies and local self-government bodies; the right to work; the right to education. It should be noted that the right to work and the right to education were limited in a certain part.

At the same time differences in population density, traffic intensity, business activity, the specificity of the spread of infection throughout the country, led to the need to adopt decentralized measures, because initially the main number of infections was recorded in the Moscow region. The most stringent restrictions were envisaged in the Krasnodar

⁷ Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 2, 2020 No. 417 "On the approval of the Rules of Conduct binding on citizens and organizations when introducing a high alert or emergency", in: Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 08.04.2020.

Territory, in the Vladimir Region, the Republic of Sakha, and the Udmurt Republic. In these subjects of the Russian Federation, on some of their territories, “social Monitoring” was introduced, which provides, inter alia, with strict conditions for entry and exit from the relevant settlements and the possibility of the onset of “increased” administrative liability for violations of the terms of the quarantine. The least severe measures were applied in the Tver and Yaroslavl Regions.

This caused the expansion of both the formal powers of regional authorities and the political mandate to take independent measures to combat the pandemic. As a result, although the legislatively enshrined redistribution of powers between the Russian Federation and its constituent entities was not carried out, in fact, during the fight against the pandemic, the volume of regional autonomy increased significantly. On March 15, 2020, President of the Russian Federation Putin signed an Order on the State Council working group on countering the spread of the new coronavirus infection. The working group was headed by Moscow Mayor Sobyenin, who, in turn, was the first deputy chairman of the Coordination Council, which ensured the necessary coordination of the actions of the two governing bodies.⁸

Regional operational headquarters for combating coronavirus were created in the regions, consolidating on the ground activity of the bodies of all levels. From April 1, 2020, public authorities of the subnational units of the Russian Federation have received the right to establish rules of conduct that are binding on citizens and organizations when they introduce a high alert or emergency regime. These include additional rules of conduct that are binding on citizens and organizations

The Government of the Russian Federation expanded the possibilities of the regions to use the funds allocated for the fight against coronavirus. The regional authorities independently made decisions on the introduction or cancellation of specific restrictive measures. The experience of Moscow as a region that was the first to face an active increase in the incidence rate was used in decision-making as an example.

Regional bodies have got a significant amount of powers which they can use in the framework outlined by the federal center. The government of the Russian Federation adjusted the schedule of their payments on budget loans within anti-crisis measures to support the regions. Until the end of 2020, all subnational units were completely exempted from repayment debt reduction. It was envisaged that in 2021–2024 subnational units are obliged to pay 5 percent arrears annually, in 2025–2029 the balance in equal shares. In addition, they are allowed to compensate for the decrease in tax and non-tax revenues, which will allow ensuring the sustainability of their budgets in a crisis.

For interaction between both federal authorities and subnational units, a system of operational headquarters was created to combat the coronavirus. At the regional level, they are headed by the heads of the regions, who are at the same time members of regional governments. It is worth mentioning that representatives of the legislative branch of

8 Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated March 5, 2020 No. 12-UM “On the introduction of high alert”, in: www.consultant.ru (31.05.2021).

power on the subnational level were also included in many of such operational headquarters. Such a scheme showed itself as very productive since the parliamentary members provided control over the executive while settling risks of COVID-19.

One of the consequences of the pandemic was the accelerated introduction of digital output and telecommunication technologies in the activities of regional governments. New forms of work were used, such as remote voting in state legislatures, for example, or remote meetings and the decision-making process. It allows to make management decisions on an effective basis and maintain permanent communication with citizens and respond promptly to their problems.

To coordinate actions to combat COVID-19 situational information centers were organized. They permitted to collect information and make timely decisions, for example, open more hospitals or provide additional budget support. Within the framework of their powers, the regions independently implement a set of measures of legal, organizational and financial support. For example, the Government of the Komi Republic has issued an Order at the beginning of 2020, by which the new regional headquarter was created to maintain economic stability, where representatives both of legislative and executive regional branches of power were represented. In the Rostov Region, such regional headquarter was opened in March 2020. There were similar examples in many other regions.

Provided that in many regions the movement of citizens and officials was limited, regional bodies has started to adopt regulations, which permitted to organize online meetings and adopt subsequent official decisions. For example, such acts were adopted in Moscow⁹, St. Petersburg¹⁰, Tula and other regions. As the result, quick and effective coordination mechanisms of interaction of government bodies on the subnational level were introduced, that were based on modern communications and high-level technology. Another sphere, influenced by the pandemic, is the realization of electoral rights. The epidemic situation has made certain adjustments to the exercise of electoral rights. Several regional elections were postponed indefinitely. This postponement should be regarded not as a violation of citizens' electoral rights, but as a suspension of their implementation. A prerequisite for ensuring electoral rights during the period of continuing restrictive measures is the use of new forms and methods of participation in electoral procedures: remote voting via the Internet, by mail, increasing voting time, expanding seats onsite voting, simplifying electoral procedures to minimize contacts.

The lack of practice of applying such a wide range of measures to ensure the safety of the health of citizens cannot but raise questions related to the possibility of maintaining the quality of implementation of all democratic principles during the conduct of new electoral procedures. Implementation of the new amendments to the regional electoral legislation at the same time was followed by necessity to ensure all relevant democratic principles of implementation of electoral rights. The measures introduced in response to the pandemic have included the following:

9 Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated March 5, 2020 No. 12-UM, "On the introduction of high alert", in: www.consultant.ru (31.05.2021).

10 Decree of the Government of St. Petersburg, 13.03.2020, No. 121, "On measures to counteract the spread in St. Petersburg of a new coronavirus infection (COVID-19)", in: www.consultant.ru. (31.05.2021).

- ensuring the possibility of remote interaction during the execution of public functions and the provision of services;
- postponement of the performance of public duties by citizens and entrepreneurs (extension of expiring rights);
- suspension of the performance of public functions;
- postponement of the entry into force of previously adopted regulatory novelties that impose additional restrictions on doing business;
- weakening of liability;
- tightening of regulation.

In sum, it is necessary to stress that subnational units have got a lot of very important powers, permitting them to counteract the pandemic. However, at the same time the performance of functions was strictly controlled and checked by the federal government.

6 Friends or Competitors: Interaction between Subnational Units in the Pandemic Time

After the Constitution of 1993 was adopted, we should mention two major sites of interaction between the subnational units in the Russian Federation. The first one is the Council of Federation – the Chamber of the Russian Parliament representing the interests of subnational entities. Each subnational unit is represented by two representatives, one from the legislative branch and the second one is from the executive branch of regional power. Traditionally, participation in the Council of Federation permits representatives of subnational units to exchange experience and opinions and to find common interests.

The second one is the State Council, which is a constitutional state body formed by the President of Russia to coordinate the functions of and facilitate cooperation between the bodies that are part of the single system of public authority. Within the scope of its competence the State Council takes part in drafting strategic goals and tasks of domestic and foreign policy and shaping state policy on the socio-economic development of the Russian Federation, its subnational entities and municipalities. Subnational entities are represented by the Governors, who at the same time act as heads of the executive branch of power. In the frameworks of the State Council the Governors had a good platform to share options and to interact with the Head of State as well.

Both forms of interaction have been preserved during the pandemic, however, they had moved mostly into the online mode. At the same time, online communication substantially eases the interaction and gave more possibilities for this discussion and share of experience. In this article, we have already touched upon the process of transfer to online communication and showed its effectiveness.

At the same time considering the difference in the spread of infection due to objective reasons: high density of population, development as important trade and business centers made Moscow and St. Petersburg a trendsetter in the sphere of application of anti-COVID-19 measures. Moscow became the unofficial leader making the decisions, which later on were followed by most of the subnational units when the incidences level was raising.

The practice had shown that the subnational units were using all possible forms of interaction between each other and in extreme cases have provided assistance to each other by medical equipment, groups of experienced doctors and even by places in hospitals. Therefore, we can state that subnational units are interacting as partners but not as competitors in the pandemic.

7 The Role of Foreign Experience

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization recognized the spread of the coronavirus infection as an extremely international situation. An emergency required special response measures, in which a temporary restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens is inevitable. Many states have declared states of emergency, with Italy being the first state to declare a state of emergency on January 31, 2020, even though there were only two cases in that country at the time. Also, the state of emergency was introduced at different times in Australia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Moldova, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, USA. The list is wide enough, but it does not cover all states in which the virus was spread.

In international practice, there were also cases of the introduction of special rights a new regime that allows the use of restrictive measures without introducing a state of emergency. For example, in France, according to the law, it is possible to introduce a state of emergency by a decree of the Council of Ministers in part or throughout France for a duration of 12 days, which can subsequently be extended by an act of parliament. However, during the pandemic, a new law was passed by the French parliament, according to which the country declared a health emergency. Unlike the classic state of emergency, this regime requires scientific justification and can be declared for a month and then extended by an act of parliament. This mode also allows to restrict the freedom of movement and introduce quarantine. Special laws were adopted in Hungary, Poland and some other countries as well.

The coronavirus pandemic aggravated yet another global cyclical crisis. It demonstrated that federalism, given the adequacy of managerial decisions and the refusal to inter-party struggle, can provide the necessary state legal security. In the United States, the first person to fall ill appeared on January 20, and at the end of January, the federal center announced restrictive measures in the external contour. From February 2, a ban on the entry of foreigners was introduced if they have left China for two previous weeks.

In Russia, the development of the coronavirus epidemic was somewhat delayed in comparison with the countries of Western Europe and the United States. Affected by sufficiently effective protection against the penetration of those infected from People's Republic of China. At the first stage Russia, which has entered the pandemic a little bit later, was following the practice introduced by Western countries. As we have stated serious limitation to a normal life were introduced and at the same time, the federal government together with regional governments concentrated on expanding places of medical

assistance provision, building new hospitals and involving more and more doctors of different specializations into medical assistance for people suffering from COVID. This practice was more intensive in the subnational units with high population density and less intensive in far regions. The advantages turned out to be centralized medicine, financial and material assistance to subjects for the purchase of medical equipment, and the construction of medical facilities.

Highly centralized federative relations have played also quite an important role, since the subnational units did not spend a lot of time in establishing relations with the federal government, but were ready to follow instructions, coming from the federal government. These were supported by the experience of those subnational units, who did suffer from the pandemic most seriously due to their central position and high density of population as Moscow or St. Petersburg.

At the same time, comparing foreign experience and the Russian one we can state that the success in combating the pandemic could be achieved both by countries where mainly centralized measures were implemented as, for example, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and countries where a decentralized model was implemented, for example, Canada, Germany and Switzerland. That is, centralization or decentralization in itself is not a guarantee of success or an unequivocal reason for the failure of the measures taken.

8 Weaknesses Identified and Lessons Learned

Experts in Russia and abroad note not only the positive experience of different countries in countering the coronavirus and its negative consequences, but also problems in the functioning of the public power system at different levels caused by the coronavirus. Social, economic and political instability have become aggravated in connection with the COVID-19 epidemic. They indicate the need to reconfigure the work of the state apparatus to better adapt it to new conditions. First, the coronavirus pandemic requires the state to take some measures aimed at strengthening the state itself, increasing its effectiveness and resistance to threats from outside.

Among such measures, in particular, this regards the following:

- mobilization of the state apparatus;
- the creation of emergency bodies, whose work is aimed both at countering the spread of coronavirus and at overcoming its negative consequences in various areas;
- strengthening the role of the state in the economy and social sphere;
- expanding the scope of state planning, reflecting the issues of countering the pandemic and its negative consequences in the current strategic planning documents, etc.

Another type of threat during a pandemic inevitably arises in the state-territorial structure of a federal state. Among them, on the one hand, are problems in the sphere of budgetary relations between the center, regions and municipalities; on the other hand, the appropriation by subnational units of powers, violating the unity of the state and other foundations of the constitutional order, as well as the rights of its citizens. For Russia, such scenarios

for the development of the situation in the sphere of the federal structure were realized in the 1990s, when the so-called “parade of sovereignties”¹¹ was developing and the pandemic had reminded of such danger. Despite the measures taken by the federal center, the financial situation of some Russian regions with the advent of coronavirus is still difficult.

One more problem is the effectiveness of certain bodies and officials in the new conditions. The implementation of measures to counter COVID-19 required coordinated actions by all public authorities. Despite the large-scale work done, the implementation of regional normative legal acts on the introduction of enhanced regimes, as well as the increasing frequency of lawsuits on the illegality of establishing restrictive measures showed that to date it has not been possible to reach an optimal system of relations between the center and the regions. Unfortunately, the measures introduced in the regions by the requirements to combat the coronavirus often lead to negative socio-political and economic results.

The pandemic has also actualized the issues of relations between regional and municipal authorities. First of all, this concerns the reduction in municipal revenues, which is observed in some regions. Decisions made by regional authorities are not always effectively implemented. In addition, there are cases of abuse of authority by officials of local self-government bodies in establishing additional restrictions for citizens.

Despite the list of the negative sides, last year had shown quite a good level of effectiveness of the adopted measures. In May 2021, governmental offices and private companies are operating in the usual mode teaching is done in a usual mode as well with some precautions, including usage of masks and gloves, social distance. The numbers of COVID-19 patients are still quite high. However, it is clear that the measures adopted are mostly efficient and federal relations play an important role.

9 Conclusion

The of COVID-19 pandemic, which was announced at the beginning of 2020, is still in its development, even though the states are investing tremendous efforts to stop it. A lot of important things were done. Both unitary and federal governments are spending a lot of time, efforts and money to save people, prevent economics from falling and return to normal life as soon as possible. In this respect, the implementation of such measures in federations has its characteristics. First of all, the system of vertical separation of power matters. Centralized federations have shown quite good results in the organization of the system of counteraction to COVID-19, because it was easier to organize a system of support in subnational entities. Moreover, the federal government was giving quite clear directions to the subnational entities and has introduced an extensive system of control over the decisions, taken by the subnational bodies.

11 This is a period in the Russian history, when subnational units started to claim them being sovereign states within Russia, that was based on some political statements of the President Yeltsin, who proposed subnational units to take “as much sovereignty as they can swallow”. It was unconstitutional process, which later on was stopped with participation of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.

Thus, the federal state, on the one hand, has many advantages in countering threats such as the coronavirus pandemic, including the possibility of a differentiated approach to territories, the presence of well-established mechanisms of interaction between levels of public authority, etc. On the other, the strong role of the federal state is characterized by many risks, such as an imbalance of power, powers and resources in the federal system, a lag in making the necessary decisions, which is fraught with a sharp decrease in the rate of socio-economic development and the situation in the regions getting out of the control of the federal authorities. In a pandemic, certain problems are inevitably associated with insufficient coordination between levels of government. In Russia, these are federal and regional as well as local levels, which may well be overcome using various administrative mechanisms initiated by the federal center. It is also necessary to concentrate efforts on solving such problems as the financial provision of regions and municipalities, a clear delineation of powers and responsibilities between levels of public bodies.

When this article was almost ready for publishing, in June 2021 Russia had faced the 3rd wave of COVID-19, which almost double raise cases within several days. In response subnational units have started to introduce mandatory vaccination per certain categories of people and subsequent limitation of movement for those who are not vaccinated. The trend was set by Moscow, where the Mayor has announced mandatory vaccination per those, who are working in services industry: restaurants, beauty salons and even for teachers and university professors. At the same it was announced by many Universities that students will be able to join studies only after they are vaccinated. Planned medical assistance can be provided only to those who are vaccinated, the recommendations were issued to theatres and cinemas to accept vaccinated. In St. Petersburg it is required to vaccinate 65 percent of state employees, many other subnational units prohibit to accept hotel visitors without vaccination or PCR Certificate. While not denying the importance of vaccination we may suppose that mandatory vaccination was introduced as a reaction of COVID-19 cases raise simultaneously with quite a low level of vaccinations before the 3rd wave.

Russia was one of the first countries, that produced its own vaccine, and currently there are three different vaccines on the market which can be used by Russian citizens free of charge. The most wide spread is Sputnik V and people can be vaccinated without any administrative difficulties. The vaccine is accessible not only in Moscow but in all 85 subnational units. General leadership for the vaccine spread is with the Federal Government, however each subnational unit governor is responsible for the installation of vaccination mechanism inside their controlled regions.

At the same time quite low level of vaccination is probably based on traditional human being skepticism, when everything new is accepted with some resistance. Introduction of mandatory vaccination for a certain category of citizens has raised level of those who is vaccinated dramatically. Later academicians and practices will write articles and analyze the correspondence between mandatory vaccination and basic human rights, however what is really important is the life of each person, that we believe all taken measures will help to stop pandemic and to return back to a normal life.