

**Democracy in Pandemic Times:
A Decline or a NEW Form of Representative Democracy?**
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With the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, all national governments of the EU member states have found themselves in unusual circumstances. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the coronavirus as a pandemic on March 11th 2020. As there is no vaccine against the highly contagious virus, decision-makers across the EU member states have opted for various preventive measures. For that reason it has become a common practice to limit – or freeze – the economic, social and political activity. The success of these extraordinary measures in preventing the spread of the virus depended on rapid implementation.

Representative democracy is unthinkable without a parliament in which citizens' interests are represented in the decision-making process. For a representative democracy to thrive, national parliaments need their capacity to control and to hold governments accountable and to debate and vote on legislative projects while also representing the variety of interests in the deliberative and law-making process. Parliaments are namely the institutional foundation of representative democracy. Despite that, the importance of national parliaments seems to have radically declined during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020 most governments introduced preventive measures, sending all “non-essential” workers home. And so almost all national parliaments across the EU, and beyond, were... sent home. While most parliaments continued to work in a very limited extent, in Canada, for instance, the parliament closed for five weeks allowing only a short session to pass extraordinary legislation regarding the COVID-19. This trend raised serious concerns as it demonstrated to the public that national parliaments are non-essential in a crisis situation. Are we therefore witnessing a demise of representative democracy due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Or have national parliaments managed to defend their powers by adopting to new circumstances?

The overall goal of the project is therefore to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the legislative (law-making) powers and practices of national parliaments across the EU member states. The questions this project poses are:

- Have we observed a change of formal powers or practices regarding the law-making function of national parliaments during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What is the effect of the pandemic on parliamentary law-making powers and practices across the EU member states? In which states have we observed (a) disempowerment, (b) no change or perhaps (c) empowerment of national parliaments?
- Which formal or informal measures have been employed by the governments of the EU member states under study? What was the legal basis of these measures? How can we evaluate their legality and legitimacy?
- Are we witnessing a demise of representative democracy or a NEW form of representative democracy emerging?