



“The culture of fear” of inhabitants of EU countries in their reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic – A study based on the reports of the Eurobarometer

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper was a study of public opinion of the inhabitants of the European Union as regards the reaction and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic on the basis of weekly reports of the Eurobarometer: *Public opinion monitoring in the time of COVID-19*, containing data from member EU countries (March-July 2020: first wave of pandemic). It was assumed that during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of a sense of security (health, economic and social) was the result not by personal experience (a real threat), but was cultivated and communicated by the media, creating a culture of fear. The opinions were analyzed in three problem domains: health, economy and society, taking into account fears and their functions, experiences and declarations for solving the problems generated by the pandemic. A quantitative analysis of the content of the reports was applied as well as a qualitative analysis of the content and an analytical-descriptive one. Seven research hypotheses were accepted, of which 3 were affirmed: fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects is presently a more widespread problem than the pandemic itself. The level of fear as regards the effects of the pandemic exceeds the level of negative experiences. In the domain of the health effects, the greatest fear is engendered by contact with COVID-19 which may cause infection: 14 fears. The remaining hypotheses were refuted: the level of fear of inhabitants of EU countries regarding health consequences/dangers (46) does not exceed the level of fear regarding economical (75) and social (19) consequences/dangers. In the domain of economical consequences/dangers, the most fears: 37, are caused by fear of an economical crisis and not one of unemployment (17) - as was assumed. Social isolation is more often experienced (13) and present in declarations (16) of inhabitants of the EU than in their fears (4). Fears of the consequences/dangers of COVID-19 plays, most of all, a negative function (137/74) and not a positive one - as assumed.

1. Introduction

Classical societies associated fear with a clearly formulated danger: fear of illness, fear of death, fear of pandemic. Danger which was defined as the object of fear; the problem was not a feeling of fear, but of things feared (illness, death, pandemic). At present, many perceive fear as a danger in itself (Furedi, 2002, 2018). According to Stefanie Grupp (2002), particular fears are cultivated by the media and are less and less a result of direct experience. He ascertains that fear is experienced more and more from first hand and more and more experienced on the discursive and abstract level. Whereas Christopher Guzelian (2004) arrives at the conclusion that it is the communication of risk and not personal experience that presently causes the greatest fear. According to George Gerbner, television and other forms of mass media create a

worldview reflecting “repeated medial premises”, and not based on reality (Callanan, 2012, p. 95). In engendering fear, the media inundate inhabitants of the European Union with constant actualizations of information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

In previous weeks fear of COVID-19 generates problems of a health, economical and social nature whose scope and span differ from the level of numbers of noted cases of illness and deaths which could intensify the occurrence of fear. The *culture of fear* favours this. At present, fear of the pandemic and its effects is often acknowledged as a more common problem than the pandemic itself. It is noted that action undertaken both on the level of the Community, as well as of member countries, aim most of all at a lowering of the number of cases of illness and deaths and not of the level of fear. In as much as the indicators of cases of illness and deaths were clearly formulated, it is not clear what was intended when

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statistics indicated a growth or reduction of fear of the pandemic. It seems that quite often not so much fear of COVID-19 is measured, but rather another coefficient which may be characterized as a certain “lack” of a feeling of security (regarding health, economy and society) in contemporary life. An analysis of reports *Public opinion monitoring in the time of COVID-19*, carried out according to a categorizing key for the purpose of the present paper, will help us to discover these “lacks”.

Anxiety is a primordial emotion, that is, a universal one for every human being and a negative emotion whose source are definite threats. As opposed to fear, which is of an objectless nature, anxiety is a reaction to concrete threats (Szatan, 2012). It is connected both with unpleasant psychological occurrences (e.g. a feeling of paralysis), as well as with unpleasant somatic reactions (e.g. shivers, a quicker heart beat) (Strong, 1990). It fulfils both negative and positive functions. The positive ones resolve themselves into treating anxiety as a warning against threats, a sign of alarm which permits the undertaking of definite action aiming at guaranteeing security, it may also motivate one to act, mobilize for an suitable preparation for duties whose eventual failure we fear. The negative function is linked to unpleasant reactions of the organism, and also may relate to the fact that in the event of an inadequate level of anxiety to the threat, it may incline one to undertake irrational action or paralyze all action (Kozielecki, 2006).

The culture of fear is linked with the emotion of fear. It is a sociological concept which aims at an intended propagating of fear and unrest in public discourse and relations, in order to achieve definite profits. This concept also has the purpose of making “fear” influence human relations and the functioning of society (Furedi, 2002; Glassner, 2005). The culture of fear is enhanced by the concept of cultural scripts which advise people how to react in the face of threats to their safety. The influence of fear depends on the situation in which an individual finds itself, but it is also conditioned socially. Instead of treating fear as an obvious emotion, the significance of being attached to fear should be studied as well as the principles and customs ruling the way in which fear is experienced and expressed (Furedi, 2018). The intensity of fear is not directly proportionate to the objective character of a definite threat. In accordance with the concept of “cultural scripts”, human reactions to concrete threats are based on cultural norms which inform people about what is expected of them when they are confronted with a threat; what is to be feared, how they should react Arlie Hochschild (1979) described these informal expectations concerning how one should react to threats as “rules of feeling”. And so the significance and experience of fear connected with the pandemic are incessantly formed by social and cultural factors and most of all by the media.

2. Materials and methods

The aim of the paper is a study of public opinion of the inhabitants of the European Union as regards the reaction and perception of the COVID-19 pandemic on the basis of studies of the Eurobarometer carried out in all member countries of the EU in the period from the 20th of March until the 27th of July 2020 (the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic). In order to solve the research problem, we shall analyze the weekly reports *Public opinion monitoring in the time of COVID-19* prepared for DG Communication’ Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, which are to be found in the internet archives of the European Parliament (EP, 2020a). In the analysis, we shall limit ourselves to the first part of the report: *Europeans’ reactions and perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic*. The reaction of the respondents containing the opinions as regards the effects of the pandemic will be analyzed in three problem domains: health, economy and society. Each of these will contain the fears, appreciations based on personal experiences, declarations and functions of fear (positive, negative). We have accepted the assumption that during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of a sense of security (health, economic and social) was the result not by personal experience (a real threat), but was cultivated and communicated by the media, creating a culture of fear. To begin the research process, we have

formulate the following questions:

- May fear of the COVID-19 pandemic be regarded as problem in itself, not corresponding with the actual number of cases of illness and deaths?
- Which factors create the occurrence of fear: anxiety or the real experience of EU inhabitants?
- Which consequences/dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic create a “culture of fear”: those regarding health, economy or society?
- Which anxieties in health, economical and social consequences/dangers entail fear?
- What functions does anxiety play in respect of the pandemic?

We accepted the following research hypotheses:

- Fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects is at present a more widespread problem than the pandemic itself.
- The level of anxiety regarding the effects of the pandemic exceeds the level of negative experiences.
- The level of anxiety of inhabitants of countries of the European Union regarding the health consequences/dangers surpasses the level of anxiety regarding the economical and social consequences/dangers.
- Anxiety regarding health consequences/dangers is caused above all by a fear of infection.
- As regards economical consequences/dangers, a culture of fear is created by the fear of unemployment.
- Regarding social consequences/dangers, the fear of social isolation creates the phenomenon of anxiety.
- Anxiety regarding the pandemic plays a positive function.

We shall apply the following research methods: a quantitative analysis of the content of the reports, a qualitative analysis of the content, a comparative method and an analytical-descriptive one.

3. Results and discussion: The public opinion of inhabitants of the EU countries and Great Britain in the domain of the reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic

3.1. A quantitative analysis of the content of the content of the reports

The purpose of the quantitative analysis of the contents of the report is the gathering and ordering of research matter containing the opinions of inhabitants of a given EU country on the pandemic in the weekly reports and in the whole of the analyzed period (Table 1). The research matter creates 15 reports containing - with a different frequency of occurrence - data from 26 EU countries (except Luxembourg) and Great Britain (10 places) (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o). Altogether, it comprises 150 opinions concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, including the anxiety, experiences and declarations of their inhabitants (The opinion of a given country contains many fears, experiences and declarations, thus these number do not sum up together). The greatest number of opinions comes from Italy: 13 (the 14th place in Worldometer’s COVID-19 data) and eleven each from Spain (9), Germany (18) and France (19), the least, one each, from Denmark (70) and Malta (153) (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o; COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, 2020). The number of opinions of particular countries regarding the pandemic, given in consecutive reports, does not always correspond with their position in Worldometer’s COVID-19 data, conditioned number of noted cases of illness and deaths. Among EU countries, the highest position is held by Spain (9), whereas the most opinions (13) were given by the Italians (including: 21 anxieties, 5 experiences, 2 declarations). The question arises whether and in what scope the opinions of EU inhabitants in the three research areas: health,

Table 1

The number of opinions on the pandemic of a given EU country and the position in Worldometer's COVID-19 data.

| Country EU | Weekly reports | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Number of opinions | Position in Worldometer's COVID-19 data | |
|------------|----------------|----|-------|----|-----|---|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|----|--------------------|---|-----|
| | March | | April | | May | | | June | | | | July | | | | | |
| | 20 | 27 | 3 | 20 | 27 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 27 | 3 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 1 | | | 7 |
| IT | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | 13 | 14 |
| DE | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | 11 | 18 |
| ES | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | | | 9 |
| FR | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | 19 |
| BE | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | x | x | | 10 | 33 |
| CZ | | | | x | x | | x | x | x | | | x | x | | | 9 | 68 |
| PT | | | | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | 42 |
| RO | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | 46 |
| EE | | | | x | | | x | x | x | | | x | | | | 6 | 121 |
| HU | | | | | | | x | | | x | x | x | x | | | | 97 |
| BG | | | | x | | | x | | | | | x | x | | | 5 | 77 |
| GR | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | | | | | | 99 |
| SLO | | | | | | | | | x | | | | x | x | x | | 122 |
| LV | | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | | x | | | 135 |
| AT | | | | | | | x | | x | x | | | | | x | 4 | 61 |
| CY | | | | x | | | x | | | x | | | | | x | | 144 |
| FI | | | | | | | | | x | x | x | x | | | | | 86 |
| NL | | | | | x | x | | x | x | | | | | | | | 41 |
| HR | | | | | | | | | x | | x | | | | | 3 | 96 |
| LT | | | | | | | x | | | | | | | x | x | | 124 |
| PL | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | x | | | 44 |
| UK | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 10 |
| IE | | | | | | | | | | x | | x | | | | 2 | 57 |
| SE | | | | | | | | | x | | | | x | | | | 27 |
| SK | | | | | | | | | | | x | | x | | | | 119 |
| DK | | | | | | | | | | | | x | | | | 1 | 70 |
| MT | | | | | | | | x | | | | | | | | | 153 |
| Total | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 17 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 150 | |

Own study based on reports: [EP \(2020a-2020o\)](#); [COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic \(2020\)](#).

economy and society, are determined by the actual number of infections and deaths in their countries (Table 1).

From the data collected, it is evident that in countries of the European Union most often expressing their opinion regarding the pandemic, the number of cases of anxiety clearly grows on the 27th of March 2020, when a rapid increase of infections and deaths of COVID-19 occurs. At a later time, it falls and is stabilized on a more or less equal level. Anxiety of an economical nature expressed in March, is accompanied by experiences after the renewed increase of the sick rate on the 27th of April 2020, which again changes into anxiety at the end of June. Experiences of a social nature which accompanied the inhabitants of Italy, Germany, Spain and France, changed into anxiety and declarations after the period of the first increase of the sick rate, returning again at the end of June. Countries with a small number of infections and deaths express opinions of a social nature, in addition these are declarations and not anxieties or their own experiences or that of members of families. Fear of the COVID-19 pandemic may be acknowledged as a problem in itself, not corresponding with the actual numbers of sick rates and deaths. The highest position in the Worldometer's COVID-19 data (9) among EU countries is held by Spain whose inhabitants expressed only 6 fears, including 1 in the domain of health. In the next ranked countries, a decrease in fears is not noticed - which could be indicated by the position, but the number of fears increases, although not systematically: Italy (14): 21 fears, including 4 in the domain of health, Germany (18): 11 fears, including 5 in the domain of health, France (19): 13 fears, including 6 related to health (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o). Fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects is at present a more common problem than the pandemic itself, something which is indicated by the number of fears and personal experiences expressed not only in countries with a highest indicator of cases of illness and deaths, which allows us to confirm the first hypothesis. In Italy, fears (21) fourfold exceed experiences of its inhabitants, in France twice exceed (13 to 6), in Germany, the fears are slightly greater than the experiences (11 to 9). In contrast, the

inhabitants of Spain, where the highest incidence of sick rates and deaths was noticed, expressed an equal number of fears and experiences (6) (Table 2).

In the period analyzed, inhabitants of countries of the European Union jointly expressed 276 opinions in the domain of health (69), economy (132) and society (75) of consequences/dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic. In sum, they revealed 140 fears, 102 own experiences and 34 declarations/propositions for solving the problems connected with the pandemic. Most of the fears (75/140) and experiences (51/102) generate economical effects which make up nearly a half of them, whereas the least generate social ones (fears: 19/140, experiences: 38/102). From general data obtained, it follows that the level of fear, regarding the effects of the pandemic, exceeds the level of declared negative experiences, which allows us to confirm the second research hypothesis. It should, however, be emphasized that the level of anxiety and experiences of inhabitants of EU countries in their reaction to COVID-19 differentiate the studied areas of consequences/dangers. In the health domain, the level of anxiety exceeds by more than three times the level of experiences able to excite fear and dread. The greatest anxiety was noted successively in June: 17, in March: 15, in May: 10 and in July: 4. Whereas experiences, which are perceptible effects of the pandemic, were first noted in the report of the 27th of May and consequently appear in all subsequent reports. They oscillate around 2%. The greatest difference between the level of anxiety and experiences was noted in the report of the 3rd of June: a sixfold one. Declarations appear with a different frequency, not in all reports, and constitute every seventh opinion of EU inhabitants. In the economical domain, these proportions diminish considerably (60 to 45). The level of anxiety slightly exceeds the level of personal experiences. The most anxiety was noted in succession in June: 23, May: 20, March: 7, April: 6 and in July: 4. Whereas experiences, which are the effects of the pandemic, were first noted in a report of the 20th of April 2020, and were four times lower than the level of anxiety. The proportions change in the following months. In May, the level of experiences were comparable to the level of

Table 2
Number of infections and deaths in countries with the greatest and lowest indicator of opinions regarding the pandemic

| Country W/N | Weekly reports Cases/Deaths | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Total | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------|-----|-----|
| | March | | April | | May | | | | June | | | | July | | | | |
| | 20 | 27 | 3 | 27 | 5 | 12 | 19 | 27 | 3 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 1 | 7 | HA | HE | |
| ES 9/11 | | 21,571/ 1,093 | 119,199/ 11,198 | 229,422/ 23,521 | 250,561/ 25,613 | 269,520/ 26,856 | 278,803/ 27,384 | | 287,406/ 28,108 | 289,046/ 28,226 | | 293,832/ 28,325 | 296,739/ 28,363 | 299,210/ 28,392 | 2EA | 4EE | |
| | | SE | SA | SA | EA | EE | EE SD | | EE | EE SD | | SD | SA | HE | 3SA | SE | 3SD |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 6A | 6E | 3D |
| IT 14/13 | 47,041/ 4,026 | 86,478/ 9,120 | 119,796/ 14,659 | 199,378/ 26,921 | 212,980/ 29,255 | 221,188/ 30,850 | 226,672/ 32,108 | 231,117/ 33,011 | 233,820/ 33,540 | | 237,486/ 34,344 | 239,220/ 34,614 | 240,760/ 34,788 | 241,956/ 34,899 | 4HA | | |
| | 2EA | HA SA | SA | EA, EE | EA, EE | EA | EA | 3EA | EA SE | | EA,EE,E D SD | SE | 2EA | HA | 14EA | 3EE | ED |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3SA | 2SE | SD |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 21A | 5E | 2D |
| DE 18/11 | 19,848/ 68 | 50,871/ 51 | | | | 173,171/ 5,993 | 177,827/ 7,738 | 181,895/ 8,533 | 194,425/ 8,699 | 186,516/ 8,831 | 188,382/ 8,910 | 192,778/ 8,986 | 196,324/ 9,061 | 198,355/ 9,103 | 5HA | 3HE | ED |
| | HA | HA EA SE | | | EA | | | HE EA,EE | HA,HE EA,EE | HE | SD | SD | EA SA,2SE | HA, HD | 5EA | 2EE | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 11A | 9E | 3D |
| FR 19/11 | 12,612/ 450 | 32,964/ 1,995 | 64,338/ 5,503 | 128,339/ 32,270 | | 143,427/ 27,997 | 145,746/ 28,571 | 151,677/ 28,996 | 154,591/ 29,271 | 157,716/ 29,522 | 161,267/ 29,695 | 165,719/ 29,836 | 165,719/ 29,836 | 165,719/ 29,836 | 6HA | 1HE | |
| | 2HA 3EA | 3HA 3EA 4SE | EE 3SA | EA,EE 2SA | HA 2EA,EE | 2EA,EE SD | EA,2EE SD | 4EA,EE | 2HA,HE 2EA,2EE | HE EA,EE SD | EA,EE,E D 3SD | EA 3SE,SD | 2HA,HE BEA 2SA, 2SE | 2HA,HE, HD SA | 4EA | 2EE | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2SA | 2SE | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 12A | 5E | |
| DK 70/1 | | | | | | | | | | | 12,250/5 98 | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | SD |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | D |
| MT 153/1 | | | | | | 506/5 SD | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | SD |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | D |

W/N-Worldometer's COVID-19 data/Number of opinions.

H/E/S-health/economical/social consequences/dangers.

A/E/D-anxiety/experience/declarations.

Own study based on reports: [EP \(2020a-2020o\)](#); [COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic \(2020\)](#).

Table 3
Anxiety, experiences and declarations of EU inhabitants in their reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic

| Date of report | Consequences/dangers | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|----|----|------------|----|---|--------|----|---|----|
| | Health | | | Economical | | | Social | | | |
| | A | E | D | A | E | D | A | E | D | |
| March | 20 | 4 | | 3 | | | | | | |
| | 27 | 11 | | 4 | | | 3 | 5 | | |
| April | 3 | | | | | | 4 | | | |
| | 20 | | | 3 | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| | 27 | | | 5 | 1 | | | 2 | | |
| May | 5 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | | | | | |
| | 12 | | | 6 | 4 | | | | 1 | |
| | 19 | 1 | | 6 | 7 | 1 | | 1 | 3 | |
| | 27 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 11 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| June | 3 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 8 | | |
| | 9 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| | 16 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 14 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| | 23 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2 | |
| July | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | |
| | 7 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 1 | |
| A: 140 | | 46 | | 75 | | | 19 | | | |
| E: 102 | | | 13 | | 51 | | | 38 | | |
| D: 34 | | | | 10 | | 6 | | | | 18 |
| Total: 276 | | 69 | | 132 | | | 75 | | | |

A/E/D – anxiety/experience/declarations.

Opinions of EU countries were divided into fears, experiences and declarations, thus their number differs from the total number of opinions of member countries (150).

Own study.

anxiety, whereas in July it exceeded it twofold (Table 3). Propositions of single solutions of the economical crisis appear 6 times, whereas in social consequences/dangers a reverse tendency is noticed. As opposed to health and economical consequences/dangers, experiences in the domain of social consequences/dangers twice exceed the level of anxiety. A conclusion presents itself that the assumptions of the second hypothesis refer only to the health and economical effects of the pandemic (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o).

The third hypothesis assumed that the level of anxiety of inhabitants of countries of the European Union regarding health consequences/dangers, exceeds the level of anxiety regarding economical and social consequences/dangers. The analysis of research matter does not permit the confirmation of this hypothesis. The inhabitants of the EU jointly expressed 140 anxieties, among these 46 health anxieties, 75: economical ones and 19: social ones. The level of anxiety regarding health consequences/dangers thus constitutes one third of the noted anxieties in general.

3.2. A qualitative analysis of the content of the reports

The main purpose of applying a qualitative analysis of the content of the reports was an attempt to reply to the following research questions:

- What type of anxieties and experiences regarding health, economical and social consequences/dangers bring about fear?
- What functions does fear fulfil in respect of the pandemic?

3.2.1. Public opinion in the domain of health consequences/dangers

In the domain of health consequences/dangers, most opinions were expressed in the month of June: 27, in turn: in March: 15, May: 18, July: 9. In April, opinions were not expressed regarding health consequences/dangers. In March, an uneasiness is noted regarding the consequences/dangers of the crisis, linked with a prognosis saying the pandemic will last at least 6 months. In June, an uneasiness is still apparent concerning the consequences/dangers of the crisis, but with a diminishing tendency. From July disquiet grows caused by the possibility of a second surge of the pandemic (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o).

Anxiety. In the period analyzed, anxiety in the domain of health consequences/dangers of COVID-19 was expressed by inhabitants of Great Britain and twenty EU countries (DE, FR, IT, AT, LV, PT, SLO, GR, HU, LV, HU, PT, RO, SK, BG, BE, CZ, EE, IE, ES). The most anxiety is brought about by:

- contact with COVID-19 and infection: 14 (3xIT, 2xDE, AT, FR, LV, SLO, PT, GR, HU, RO, BG). Inhabitants of eleven EU countries fear - after a significant growth of sick cases - contact with the virus which may cause infection. In Germany, in April, serious anxiety as regards infection was declared by 51%, in May: 31%, whereas in June: 24%. At the beginning of June, the decrease of anxiety in respect of infection by the virus was noted in Germany as 17 pp (from 51% to 24%), in Greece as 19 pp (from 63% to 44%), in Hungary as 8 pp (from 33% to 25%). At the same time, 30% of inhabitants of Rumania fear infection by a new coronavirus, or infection of someone of the members of the family. At the beginning of July, anxiety regarding a violent increase of sick cases was expressed by 35% of inhabitants of France (an increase of + 6 pp in a week) and 50% in Germany (in this: 13% the anxiety was very high, 37%: high). The Italians had an analogical anxiety (66%). In order to limit the spreading of COVID-19, 48% of Latvians and 30% of Slovenians declared that they would take an application from the smartphone, at the same time 39% of Latvians and 64% of Slovenians are against this.
- health and health care: 9 (2xFR, DE, 2xIT, GR, RO, UK, BE). An increase of anxiety regarding a serious or very serious influence of the coronavirus on health was noted in France (from 12% to 20%), Germany (from 32% to 43%), Great Britain (from 23% to 34%) whereas in Italy at first a decrease (from 38% to 26%), and then a renewed increase of anxiety (35%). A reverse tendency is noted in France. From a report of the 3rd of June, a decrease was noted by 115 pp. of anxiety regarding the consequences/dangers of the pandemic for health (65%). In Germany 33% of those replying to the opinion poll feared health consequences/dangers more than economical ones (61%). However, 28% of Belgians fear the influence of the pandemic on psychic health. 80% of inhabitants of Rumania declare that they would concede their rights and liberties in order to preserve health security.
- perception of the virus as a threat to the country: 7 (2xFR, DE, UK, LV, GR, AT). In March, for 49% of the French the virus constituted a great or very great threat to their country. A 19 pp growth of anxiety, the greatest, is noted in the course of two weeks. 80% of Germans perceived the virus as difficult to foresee, in the opinion of 69% of the British this is due to a lack of knowledge concerning the virus and not because of negligence. According to inhabitants of France: 63% this is due to a lack of prevention by the government. Although in a report of the 27th of May 2020 in Austria a decrease from 60% to 25% was noted of perception of COVID-19 as a threat, at the same time, however, anxiety rose concerning the global expansion of the virus (June). In order to counter such a situation, 89% of Greeks postulate the introduction of an obligatory test for foreign tourists.
- a renewed expansion of the virus in the country/ second surge: 7 (2xFR, EE, HU, CZ, PT, DE). 68% of Hungarians fear a second surge of the epidemic in the country in autumn or winter. At the beginning of July, 74% of the French (an increase of 20 pp in the course of two

weeks) feared a second surge which would lead to a new round of isolation measures. Such fears were also expressed by 32% of inhabitants of Germany, 28% of Estonia, 21% of Portugal and of the Czech Republic.

- a lack of efficiency of preventive means: 4 (FR, IT, UK, DE). The fears of EU inhabitants are very varied. The majority in Germany (55%) fear that the means of social keeping distance, such as prohibition of travelling and isolation, will not prevent the spreading of the virus. At the same time, the majority in such countries as Italy (57%), France (56%), Great Britain think that preventive means will work.
- open borders: 3 (FR, DE, UK). The number of people who think that their borders should be closed until the virus has been halted, has increased. The most significant increase was noted in France (+28), Germany and Great Britain (+23).
- a lack of vaccine and/or its negative effects: 2 (SK, ES). The Spanish fear a lack of vaccine in 2020. In the opinion of the Slovaks, the acceptance of a vaccine may cause more serious health problems than COVID-19, they also fear its effectiveness. The decrease of people interested in receiving vaccine is noted, from 40,9% in April to 25,9% in May, something which is explained by the conspiracy theory regarding the origin of the virus. At the same time, 46% of Latvians declare that they would let themselves be vaccinated if a vaccine was available, 39% are just opposed to this.

Experiences. Opinions based on personal experiences in the domain of health consequences/dangers of COVID-19 were expressed by inhabitants of ten EU countries (DE, NL, RO, PL, ES, PT, EE, LV, IE, FR). The experiences comprise:

- false information: 4 (DE, RO, PL, ES). More than half of the inhabitants of Rumania (54%) and Poland (53%) think that politicians are the main suppliers of false information, and experts and the government conceal information concerning the present situation in the country and the world. Every fifth studied German maintains that politicians and the media exaggerate on purpose the threat of the coronavirus in order to cheat public opinion. The Estonians have a different opinion, with 17% believing the official number of deaths given by the government.
- efficiency of advice and action undertaken by the government: 3 (2xDE, NL). More than half of the studied inhabitants of Germany positively appraise the introduced restrictions in public life and the means moderating sanitary rigours, lessening the negative health consequences/dangers of the pandemic. 95% of the Dutch agree to avoiding crowds and staying at home in unison with the latest recommendation given by the government (82%) and 93% support the measures of keeping one's distance. 68% of the inhabitants of Estonia declare their keeping vigilance and respecting the principles of sanitary safety.
- mental illness and malnutrition: 3 (EE, LV, IE). In reports from June, respondents indicated experiences of illness. More than 33% of Estonians show above average anxiety indicating depression; nearly half (49%) of the Latvians a worsening of their frame of mind due to the pandemic. Malnutrition and mental problems have also increased in the poorer sectors of Ireland.
- appraisal of the risk of infection: 3 (EE, FR, PT). The opinions of the inhabitants of Estonia are noteworthy, where more than half (60%) already in May thought that the crisis was over, but still are careful. Two months later, an analogical opinion was expressed by the French: "stable situation" (34%). In Portugal in April, the perception of the danger of the illness fell from 62% to 41% in June. At the same time, half of its inhabitants declare that they will not leave home during the holidays.

In the domain of health consequences/dangers the greatest fear is caused by contact with COVID-19, which may result in infection: 14 fears. This result allows us to confirm the fourth hypothesis. At the same

time, it should be noted that fear concerning infection constitutes only a third of all noted fears in the health domain (14 fears out of 46). The incoherence of the public opinion of EU inhabitants in the domain of health consequences/dangers of the pandemic, should also be noted. Not all experiences are complementary in respect of revealed fears (among others, false information). Fears most of all fulfil a negative function (43 to 31) (The sum of functions ascribed differs from the number of fears, because to some fears both functions were ascribed) (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o).

3.2.2. Public opinion in the domain of economical consequences/dangers

In the domain of economical consequences/dangers, the greatest number of opinions was expressed in the month of June: 44, in May: 39, in July: 13, in April: 8 and in March: 7. Concern regarding the economical consequences/dangers of the crisis is on a high level throughout all of the period analyzed. From June, as opposed to health consequences/dangers of the crisis where a falling tendency was noted, an increase of fear of the effects of the crisis, an increase of economical repercussions and new methods of work, of travelling to work and of appraisal of information appear.

Fears. As regards the domain of economical consequences/dangers of the pandemic, fears were declared by the inhabitants of Great Britain and 23 EU countries (SE, FI, HU, HR, LV, CY, SI, GR, AT, RO, PL, CZ, BG, LT, ES, EL, PT, NL, EE, BE, DE, IT, FR). Most fear is generated concerning:

- an economical crisis: 37 (7xIT, 4xFR, 3xDE, 3xHU, 3xBE, 2xGR, 2xBG, 2xPT, 2xLV, 2xUK, AT, LT, CZ, CY, SE, RO, EE, HR). Although between February and March in France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain a decrease is noted of the perception of the coronavirus as a threat for the economy, business and work, in March the greatest increase of fears (41%) of those examined was noted in Italy. Similarly in all G7 countries (the UK: +16, France: +14). In the following months, the highest level of fear was declared by the inhabitants of Austria (70%), Italy (64%), France (an increase from 56% to 90%), Latvia (52%), Greece (41%). In addition, the Italians are afraid that the peak of the crisis is still before us, it will be serious and will last a long time, the economy will not return quickly to the level before the pandemic (59%). Action, therefore, connected with work should be restored as soon as possible in order to avoid a deterioration of the economical situation of the country (58%). In the opinion of 73% of the Portuguese, the crisis will be worse than in 2008, two third of Lithuanians and half of the inhabitants of Bulgaria think that coming out of the crisis will take a long time. 72% of the French foresee a long-term economical crisis already in the year 2021. Anxiety concerning the development of the economy next year was also expressed by the inhabitants of Rumania, Germany (33%), the Czech Republic (49%), Portugal (50%), who are more disturbed by the economical consequences/dangers than the health ones. 20% of respondents from Cyprus fear that it will be affected by the crisis in the space of the next 12 months. In order to counteract the crisis - in the opinion of the Bulgarians - the government ought to give priority to clean, friendly for the environment and inexpensive food, transport, protection of the environment, to raise the basic wages or the basic income for all. For Hungarians, the greatest problem is the bankruptcy of many companies, many people are in a difficult situation, in economical stagnation and a growth of corruption. The inhabitants of Latvia foresee a significant, but short-lived fall of the PKB. The economical situation of the country worries 80% of Greeks and the French, whereas 55% of Estonians believe that their economical situation will improve in the next 6 months when the mean result for the EU oscillates around 23%.
- Loss of work and unemployment: 17 (2xFR, 3xGR, 2xBG, 2xCZ, 2xIT, NL, ES, 2xPT, RO, BE). The inhabitants of the Czech Republic, Rumania and the Netherlands fear a growth of unemployment in the

next 12 months, Spain: the loss of continuity of work by a member of the family (Italy). Half of the inhabitants of Rumania fear that in the next 12 months they will change their employment due to the fact that their firm will not be able to fulfil professional expectations. 22% of workers in Belgium consider leaving work because of the way the employer deals with the pandemic. At the same time, they declare great interest in tele-employment in the future (91%), also in working part-time (Portuguese: 59%). 55% of Czechs see coronavirus as a threat to their employment, and 33,3% of employees fear redundancy. For 49% of Greeks, the most serious challenge at the time of the pandemic is unemployment.

- A fall or loss of income: 9 (IT, BG, BE, NL, ES, PT, SE, LV, HR). The inhabitants of Portugal are afraid that in the case of people earning less than 1000 euro a month, the loss of income may even mean half of their income (43%), they also fear the loss of demurrage (34%). The majority of Swedes fear the loss of the main source of income. In Lithuania, people working in the private sector fear a fall of income in the age group 35–64 years and for those with children with less earnings and 37% of inhabitants with high earnings. The majority of inhabitants of Croatia are afraid of a downward trend in the country's and global economy, in the standard of living of the family, of rising prices and lowering of earnings, 3 out of 4 aged between 35 and 44 fear a decrease of lowering of earnings, and 3 out of 5 from families with a low income fear losing their jobs.
- A lack of one's own financial security and that of the family: 9 (4xCZ, 4xIT, RO). Inhabitants of the Czech Republic are afraid that they will not have money to pay their bills, that they will have to use their savings, will not be able to pay their mortgage or credit rates, that they will not have enough for current expenses (Italians); they expect an increase of prices, fear not being able to pay off credits. Over 60% of Italians are anxious as regards their economical, financial and professional situation. 49% of Hungarians fear the financial situation, should the effects of the pandemic bring about in autumn restrictions in many spheres of life. Nearly 50% declare that they would be affected by the difficult financial situation. Most worried about their future are the senior citizens of the Czech Republic.
- Globalization seen as a risk (1) in Germany.
- Events in the country (1). Nearly half of the Greeks pessimistically judge the event in the country.
- Disturbances caused by the economical situation (1) in Belgium.

Experiences. Opinions based on personal experiences in the domain of economical consequences/dangers of COVID-19 comprise:

- a fall and/or loss of income, a deterioration of the financial situation: 30 (4xBE, 4xRO, 3xCZ, 3xEE, 2xDE, 2xES, 2xPT, BG, FR, NL, CY, IT, LV, LT, FI, PL, SI). A fall of income was indicated most of all by the Estonians (60%), whereas the Dutch felt it in the least (20%). Moreover it was experienced by 58% in April and 53% in June of Estonians, 51% of Belgians, 45% of Bulgarians, 41% of the French, 40% of Rumanians, 38% of Cyprians, 33% of Czechs. Apart from that 33% of Estonian families with children, lost half of their income, in May 45% of those in business in Belgium experienced a fall of income by about 30% and Spaniards establish a new basic income (77%: for; 21,6%: against). Businessmen lost nearly all their income and are not able to pay their rents, 20% had to dismiss employees or limit cooperation. The greatest losses in their income, being 71%, was noted by Portuguese employers, those in free trade and 14% of the retired. The Rumanians also noted a 49% reduction of sales and orders. As the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged, more and more EU respondents experience a worsening of the financial situation. In May, the mean result oscillated in the limits of 40% (33% in Germany, 41% in Bulgaria, 50% in Italy, 55% in Slovenia, 58% in Belgium). In June, the moods of French respondents reached the highest level since the middle of March, estimated as 6,8 out of 10. Analogically, the financial effects of the pandemic were experienced by 66% of

Portuguese, particularly those aged between 33 and 45 and 45–65 years. In the opinion of 42% of inhabitants of Lithuania, their financial situation is not good enough to survive the crisis. The crisis persuaded the inhabitants of Latvia to think of saving money. Social workers in Finland noticed a growing need for nutritional aid, 40% of the inhabitants had financial problems, among others, with arrears in rents which became more visible in the face of the state of emergency. 75% of Poles limited their expenditure apart from food. 67% of inhabitants of Rumania experienced a deterioration of the financial situation in comparison with the 6 previous months, and 38%: after paying their bills, find it hard to find money for other expenses. Much varied opinions of the Germans are noticed regarding the domain of aid programs: 34% see them as adequate; 33% as partly adequate, and 33% as inadequate (DE).

- **Economical crisis:** 11 (3xCZ, 2xIT, 2xES, CY, RO, HU, FR). The effects of the crisis were experienced by 52% of the Czech, 48% inhabitants of Cyprus. According to 47% of Italians, the peak of the economical crisis occurred already in April, in the opinion of 51% of Czechs, the crisis has not yet ended, and the inhabitants of Germany (66%) think that the economical situation is neither good, nor bad. Less optimistic opinions regarding the economical situation were expressed by those studied in June. 80% of inhabitants of Rumania think that the coronavirus pandemic affected their economy “in a considerable degree” or “in a very considerable degree”. 74% of Spaniards assess the economical situation as bad or very bad. In Hungary, the economical situation worsened in the last 12 months by 29,2pp in comparison with April 2019. Whereas in July, the deterioration of the economical situation was most experienced by people engaged in farming and businessmen in the Czech Republic, people of lower education; the crisis has not yet fully affected labourers.
- **Loss of work and unemployment:** 10 (2xHU, 2xBG, PL, BE, CZ, FR, RO, SI). In June, nearly half (48%) of the studied inhabitants of the Czech Republic experienced negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the form of loss of work or its limiting, and 75% of self-employed reported a decrease of orders or the necessity of closing the business. In France, a limitation of the hours of work was reported by 44% of those studied. In Poland, 27% of those in the opinion poll were deprived of some form of earning, 25%: made redundant by employers, forced to close their business activity, and even more often a relative lost work. In Hungary, active people in the work market are less affected psychically than the retired and those who do not work. Work was lost there by 10% of those studied, 25% of these have a basic education. Analogical data was noted in Bulgaria (10%), where every third person studied (34%) returned to work willingly in June. In July, a loss of employment or agreement in the case of the self-employed, the third highest level in the EU was noted in Slovenia (over 40%). The declaration of its inhabitants may be a surprise: 51% of those studied look with optimism into the future (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o).

From obtained data it results that in the domain of economical consequences/dangers the most fears: 37, are caused by the threat of an economical crisis. This conclusion does not permit the confirmation of the fifth hypothesis, according to which a culture of fear is produced by fear of loss of work and unemployment, or which 17 were noted. The fears and experiences of EU inhabitants created a compact opinion in the domain of economical consequences/dangers of the pandemic. The fears fulfil most of all a negative function (77/32).

3.2.3. Public opinion in the domain of social consequences/dangers

During the fifteen weeks analyzed in the domain of social consequences/dangers 75 opinions were expressed. Most of them in June: 32, least in April: 7. The key problem in April were the economical disturbances, in May closed borders in a context of the approaching holiday period, in June more and more of those studied felt a loneliness,

uncertainty and pessimism, whereas in July many EU inhabitants did not plan a return to everyday habits of the pre-COVID-19 period. The gathered research material contains 19 opinion in the domain of fear, 38: of experiences and 18 declarations.

Fears. EU inhabitants expressed their first fears in a report from 4.04.2020. In the first weeks, similarly to experiences, they constitute a small percent of opinions collected. Their definite increase is noted in June. In the domain of social consequences/dangers the most anxiety is brought about by:

- **Changes in social life:** 6 (ES, FR, FI, PT, IT, EE). Already in April, the majority of Spaniards expressed anxiety that their life may change, a month later 98% of Finns indicated that the pandemic will ruin society (in this 50%: much; 39%: short term changes). Whereas in July, the Portuguese were uneasy due to the risk of a growth of social inequalities, 63% of Italians feared the future, and 66% of the French an exit phase. At the same time the feeling of fear for the future fell in Estonia.
- **Social isolation:** 4 (DE, IT, FR, RO). The opinions of EU inhabitants are very varied. The majority (55%) in Germany feared that the means of social keeping distance, such as the ban of travelling and auto-isolation will not prevent the expansion of the virus. At the same time, the majority in such countries as Italy (57%) and France (56%) think that preventive means will be effective. The inhabitants of Rumania feared most of all in June (19%) isolation at home in a few months time.
- **Care of the weakest, defenceless:** 4 (ES, UK, FR, IT). In April, the majority of inhabitants of Spain and Great Britain (66%), France and Italy (60%) mentioned – as the most important – care of those who are weak and defenceless.
- **Vaccine for COVID-19 (1).** In June, a significant number of inhabitants of Belgium had many doubts regarding a vaccine for COVID-19; 22% feared that it may serve to control people by the implantation of a chip.
- **State of alert (1).** In June, 55% of inhabitants of Rumania were against extending a state of alert on the territory of the whole country; 38%: agreed.
- **False information (1).** 58% of inhabitants of Rumania are afraid of false information. More than half (54%) accuse politicians for this.
- **Influx of refugees/migrants:** 1 (GR: 7%).
- **Foreign tourists (1).** 69% of the Spanish.

Experiences. Experiences in the domain of social consequences/dangers of COVID-19, which were expressed by the inhabitants of Great Britain and 18 EU countries (HU, PT, IT, ES, FR, DE, CY, BE, AT, EE, SI, FI, DE, SK, HU, LT, IE, NL) comprise:

- **Social isolation, sanitary greater rigour:** 13 (2xDE, 2xLT, 2xPT, FI, IE, IT, BE, AT, NL, FR). Although a noticeable “habituation” of the pandemic implies lessening tendencies in the acceptance of sanitary greater rigour lockdown (in the Netherlands from 90% to 75% in May), however, they still remain on a high level. In June, 77% of the French and 58% of the Germans were content with the way in which the limitations were introduced and 58% of the Germans still declared keeping auto-isolation (a fall of 15 pp in comparison with March), also half of the inhabitants of Portugal remain in isolation and intend to continue the restrictions when it concerns meeting members of the family. The COVID-19 pandemic has modified interpersonal relations: 62% of inhabitants of Finland keeps in touch with friends less frequently; one in three declare a lessened feeling of intimacy and a greater feeling of loneliness which generates a fall of optimism (46%: women and 35% men). The Irish have become decidedly more lonely from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic; 23,6% of respondents to the opinion poll aged between 18 and 34 years ascertained that they were lonely through all or the whole two weeks because of the pandemic, in comparison with 20% in the

whole of the UE. 46% of Italians ascertained that interpersonal relations are more controlled now; 35%: cold; 30%: less pleasant. The obligation of social isolation influences the form and habits of spending free time. In July, 43% Belgians ascertained that they less frequently go to coffee-bars and restaurants, less than half of the Lithuanians (40%) meet with friends and relatives, travel in the country (41%), travel abroad (38%). 60% of Portuguese have not yet been in a restaurant. At the same time 53% of Austrians returned to habits of spending free time (shopping, visiting restaurants, sport).

- Need for information: 8 (2xPT, IT, ES, FR, UK, DE, CY). Definitely the greatest increase of a need for information, from the beginning of the year to the Middle of March was noted in Italy, the most affected European country: 142%; then: Spain (+74), France (+54), Great Britain (+44) and Germany (+29). In the following months slightly falling tendencies are noted. Somewhat less inclined to keeping track of information about the pandemic (75% in May in comparison to 81% in April) are the inhabitants of Cyprus. At the beginning of June, 92% of the Portuguese stated that they kept track less and less of information on the subject of COVID-19, whereas two weeks later 70% they were very interested in the subject, looked for information on the TV, radio, from friends, on internet pages of the ministry of health (the National Health Authority) and in the social media. 98% of those studied assessed the level of knowledge about the pandemic as good or moderate.
- Trustworthiness of information/trust: 7 (AT, FI, PT, 2xDE, SK, LT). The opinions of those studies are very varied. In Austria, in May 56% of those questioned believed what the public media said about COVID-19. In June, more than 70% of inhabitants of Finland trusted the government, experts and traditional media, whereas 20% the social media. The Portuguese most of all trusted the information disseminated by the doctors (98%), scientists (93%), National Health Institutions (89%). There were sceptical as regards information coming from politicians (38%) and the social media which they judge to be the least trustworthy source of information. The inhabitants of Slovakia also have less trust for the media and do not even read the traditional newspapers. An analogical decrease of trust was noted in Lithuania (29%: do not trust the media). However, in Germany an increase of trust by 13 pp was noted concerning the statements of scientists (43%).
- Changes in social life: 8 (2xHU, BE, SK, AT, EE, SI, MT). As regards the question of judging the social situation, opinions differ. In June, despite the crisis, 83% of the inhabitants of Austria thought themselves to be a "happy person". An increase of positive attitudes regarding the future (from 84% to 89%) was noted in Estonia. Reverse experiences were declared by the inhabitants of Slovenia, where 40% are discontent as regards the situation in their society. In the opinion of 70% of Hungarians, matters in their country are heading for the worse, their life has changed negatively (57%). According to the Maltese, the pandemic will change outlooks and social practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has also modified public transport; for 75% of Belgians from the beginning of the crisis a very important means of transport has become their own car. Nearly half of the inhabitants of Slovakia are engaged in voluntary work (they sewed and distributed masks).
- Domestic violence: 2 (FI, HU). As issues from the results of FRCs studies in June, psychological guidance and support belonged to the most urgent of problems of the inhabitants of Finland (51%). They experienced a greater number of acts of domestic violence, a worse behavioural development of children, and 71% asked for help for parents and families. Higher than usual inward tensions were also experienced by 31% of Hungarians, 13% decidedly felt more tensions at home than usual (EP, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k, 2020l, 2020m, 2020n, 2020o).

The sixth hypothesis assumed that anxieties concerning social

isolation create a phenomenon of fear. From an analysis of source material it is evident that this problem is more often experienced and present in the declaration of inhabitants of the European Union than in their fears. Fears concerning a social isolation were expressed by the inhabitants of four countries (DE, IT, FR, RO), whereas its effects, not only negative ones, were experienced by respondents from 10 EU countries (DE, LT, PT, FI, IE, IT, BE, AT, NL, FR). It should also be emphasized that a decided majority of declarations of persons studied (16 out of 18) refer to the problem of social distancing, auto-isolation and sanitary restrictions. More than half (63%) of the inhabitants of Cyprus foresee that social isolation will make them stronger, in the opinion of the Finns (36%) it will strengthen society and according to the Maltese, it will change social practices. The Estonians dream of spending time with their friends, of travelling in Europe and the world, Germans (55%) and Croatians want the borders to be opened before the tourist season, and more than half of the Spaniards (54%) want a return to normal activity. Similarly the Greeks, 64% would gladly go for a holiday in the country, half of the inhabitants of Spain hope to spend a few days of their holiday away from home, and 41% of Portuguese plan to spend less time in shops and more at home (39%). More than half of the Lithuanians declare that they will not return to their previous habits; a quarter of them will behave in a similar way as during the pandemic: one in three will try to distance him/herself, to avoid crowded places.

Nearly half of the Danes support restrictive controls on borders, and think that the external border of the EU and 40%: the internal borders of the Schengen zone should be controlled more after the crisis. 79% of the inhabitants of Rumania, 75% of Spain and 71% of Bulgaria would agree to an intensifying of measures of social isolation, if the situation demanded it (e.g. a second surge), although 34% of Spaniards would ask for them to be more lenient than before. The society of the Netherlands is divided as to the question of using an application monitoring with whom they had contact in the case of infection by COVID-19. So too the inhabitants of Ireland, only one out of twenty would approve a monitoring application by a private business, every fifth by the public administration. Public opinion in the domain of social consequences/dangers is created most of all by experiences of EU inhabitants. Although most of these comprise the problem of social isolation and restrictions (13) attention is drawn by the number of opinions referring to the increasing need of information (8) and its trustworthiness (7). The opinions of persons studied are varied and changing. A decrease of trust as regards information transmitted by the public media and politicians is noted, at the same time an increase of trust regarding information disseminated by doctors, experts/scientists. A slight difference in the social area (17 to 11) was noted between the number of negative and positive functions.

The final, seventh hypothesis assuming that anxiety due to the pandemic fulfils a positive function has been refuted. It is evident from data obtained that anxiety as regards the consequences/dangers of COVID-19 fulfil most of all a negative function (137 to 74), although their proportions are varied by the area of consequences/dangers. In the health (43 to 31) and social domain (17 to 11) a slight difference is noted between the number of negative and positive functions. However, in the economical domain (77:32) the negative functions ascribed to anxiety, more than twice exceed the positive ones. At the same time, one should note that both functions were ascribed to many anxieties. In many situations fears ought to be considered individually, because the same fear, for example, that of losing one's job, for some may be a factor of professional activity, for others - it may provoke a demobilizing fear regarding the future.

4. Conclusions

In order to solve the main problem, we accepted seven research hypotheses of which the majority was refuted. The first hypothesis assumed that fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects is at present a widespread problem more than the pandemic itself. From an analysis of source material it is evident that it does not correspond with the

actual number of infections and deaths. In Spain, where their greatest rate was noted, the inhabitants expressed only six fears, among these one in the health domain (the possibility of a second surge). From an analysis of research material one may conclude that the level of fear as regards the effects of the pandemic surpasses the level of negative experiences, something which allows us to confirm the second research hypothesis. In the period analyzed, inhabitants of the European Union revealed 140 fears, 102 experiences. The most fears (75/140) and experiences (51/102) were generated by economical effects, which constitute half of them, whereas the least were social effects (fears:19/140, experiences: 38/102). The level of anxiety and experiences of the inhabitants of EU countries is varied by the studied domains of consequences/dangers. In the health domain the level of anxiety more than thrice surpassed the level of experiences able to arouse fear and apprehension. In the economical domain these proportions are considerably less (75 to 51). However, in social consequences/dangers a reverse tendency is noted. Unlike the health and economical consequences/dangers, experiences in the domain of social consequences/dangers twice surpass the level of anxiety. The conclusion is brought to mind that the assumption of the second hypothesis only refer to the health and economical effects of the pandemic. In the third hypothesis we mistakenly assumed that the level of anxiety of the inhabitants of countries of the European Union concerning health consequences/dangers surpasses the level of anxiety regarding economical and social consequences/dangers. In the period studied, the level of anxiety regarding health consequences/dangers constituted only a third of the noted fears in general (46 to 140). In the domain of health consequences/dangers, the greatest fear was provoked by contact with COVID-19, which might cause infection: 14 fears. This result permits the confirmation of the fourth hypothesis. At the same time, it should be noted that anxiety regarding infection constitutes only a third of all noted fears in the analyzed domain (14 fears out of 46).

From data obtained, it is evident that in the domain of economical consequences/ dangers the most fears: 37, are produced by fear of an economical crisis. This conclusion does not permit the confirmation of the fifth hypothesis, according to which the culture of fear is produced by fears concerning the loss of work and unemployment, of which 17 were noted. The sixth hypothesis assumed that in social consequences/dangers anxiety concerning social isolation creates the phenomenon of fear. From an analysis of source material, it is evident that this problem is more often experienced (10) and present in declarations (17) of the inhabitants of the European Union than in their fears (4). The final, seventh hypothesis, assuming that anxiety due to the pandemic fulfils a positive function has been refuted. In the health (43 to 31) and social domain (17 to 11) a slight difference is noticed between the number of negative and positive functions of anxiety. However, in the economical domain (77:32) negative functions ascribed to anxiety, more than twice surpass the positive function. The assumption that the lack of a sense of security during the first wave of the pandemic was not so much the result of personal experience (real threat) as it was cultivated and communicated by the media, creating a culture of fear, has been confirmed.

The results of the analysis show that the fifth lesson of Ivan Krastev's (2020) article *Seven early lessons from the Coronavirus* of the 18th of March 2020 published in The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) persuading governments to frighten citizens in order to defeat the pandemic by panic, might not be effective, because in the case of an inadequate level of fear regarding the threat, it might provoke people to act irrationally or paralyze all activity. The skill of obtaining information, its critical assessment, inference and national action with the purpose of initiating remedial solutions seem to be crucial here. In the

last weeks, EU citizens are constantly flooded with information given by the media regarding illness, deaths, new centres of coronavirus, the inability of the health service and other economical and social consequences/dangers of Covid-19. At the same time, the informative media were in the 12 place and journalists in the 15, the last place among sources of information mentioned by EU inhabitants. One is not surprised that they actively looked for information beyond the official media circle. In this perspective, media literacy seems to be exceedingly important and should be introduced into the process of education, and programs of the type Be Media Smart focusing, among others, on the transparency of sources of the origin of published information, should be carried out on a large scale (Russell, 2019).

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