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## ***COVID-19 Epidemic in Serbia – Challenges of Finding an Appropriate Basis to Respond to a Health Crisis***

The Covid-19 pandemic represents a once-in-a-century challenge for health systems and decision makers globally. The World Health Organization declared the pandemic of Covid-19 on March 11, 2020, and Serbian institutions declared the state of emergency (SOE) on March 15, just days after the first case was officially detected in the country. This was done as a part of an unprecedented wave of emergency responses globally and in Europe in particular. As comparative studies demonstrate, states have reacted differently to prevent the spread of the virus. Decision makers in Serbia have opted for declaration of the state of emergency, followed by a series of governmental decrees and ministerial orders. The paper looks into the initial response and measures introduced at the beginning of the pandemic. The legislation that was in force in March 2020 is analysed in order to see the possibilities and instruments that the state authorities could have used. The research especially focuses on legislation governing infectious diseases and disaster responses which would have allowed for a declaration of an emergency situation, still allowing ample space to introduce legitimate restrictions to fight the outbreak. The paper concludes that the full potential of all available measures and instruments has not been exhausted, especially regarding the legislation providing a basis for an emergency situation.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, state of emergency, emergency situation, health crisis, rule of law