

#COVIDJOURNAL – Tales from Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Spain, and France

TIAGO, 30 – PORTUGAL



Tiago, 30 - Portugal

Portugal has declared the state of emergency already this month (*March*, editor's note) so the majority of the people is at home doing home office. The atmosphere in Portugal is heavy and difficult, there is a powerless feeling of fighting this virus, people are afraid to get infected, or their friends, or their relatives... and then in between somebody dies. When we look to other Countries as Spain or Italy, where the pandemic has developed much much faster taking the hospitals to the breaking point, is difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. On the other side, we have the uncertainty of the future: tourism and services account for a big part in the Portuguese

economy, so there have been lots of employees laid off or simply just fired...

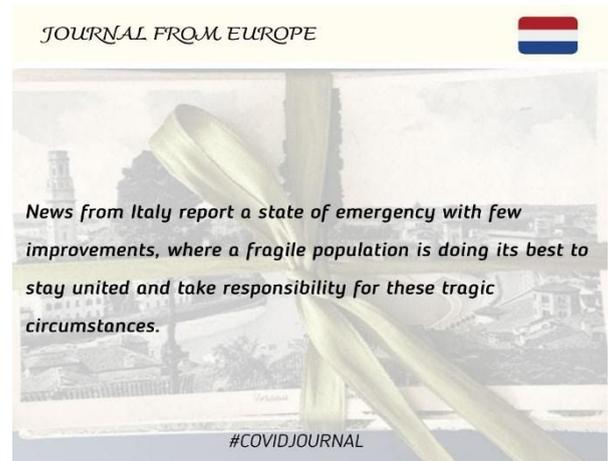
CECILIA, 26 – THE NETHERLANDS

In the past weeks, the Dutch Government has adopted some measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus: schools, restaurants, cafés, cultural centres, and gyms have been closed since 16 March. Weekly markets and those activities with much physical contact between people and/or clients have been suspended until 28 April, for the moment.

Many people across the Country are working from home and it has been recently decided that meetings, or gatherings in general, with more than 100 people will not take place until 1 June.

Shops are still open on condition that 'physical distancing is respected'.

Anyway, we are still allowed to go out, not only to do the grocery, but also to have a walk or to run or bike. As a consequence, there is a high number of people who practice sport in the open air and who still enjoy spring days. Hence, although Limbourg's regional Government has started to implement a series of fines for all those who go out in more than two people, there is still a great feeling of freedom (and maybe also a general weird conception of the situation and the relative



Cecilia, 26 - The Netherlands

potential risks). This is because the Government has decided not to adopt a full lockdown as it has happened in other European Countries such as Italy, where it is forbidden to leave one's place unless for exceptional circumstances.

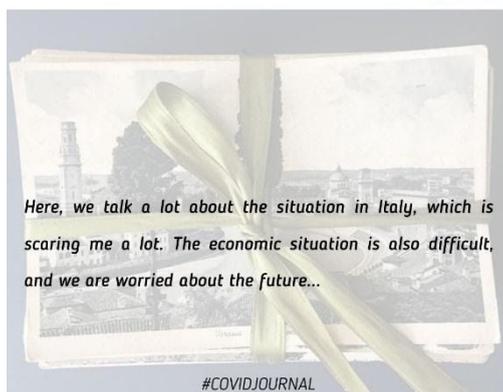
As an Italian citizen living in the Netherlands, I have the impression that the two Countries are going through different phases of the pandemic, the one in Italy being much more alarming and severe.

News from Italy report a state of emergency with few improvements, where a fragile population is doing its best to stay united and take responsibility for these tragic circumstances.

JOURNAL FROM EUROPE



PAULINA, 28 – POLAND



Paulina, 28 - Poland

In Poland we have almost 2000 people ill of this virus. Our Country has reacted quite quickly and since the beginning of this virus schools have been closed as well as well as shops. Those who can, work from home. Now, you can just go chemistry, or supermarket. You can take little walks, but alone... However, many do not respect those orders. The situation at the hospitals is difficult. Moreover, on the 10th of May, the presidential elections will be held. The government does not want to change the date, and this is causing lots of frustration among people and those at the opposition. Here, we talk a lot about the situation in Italy, which is scaring me a lot. The economic

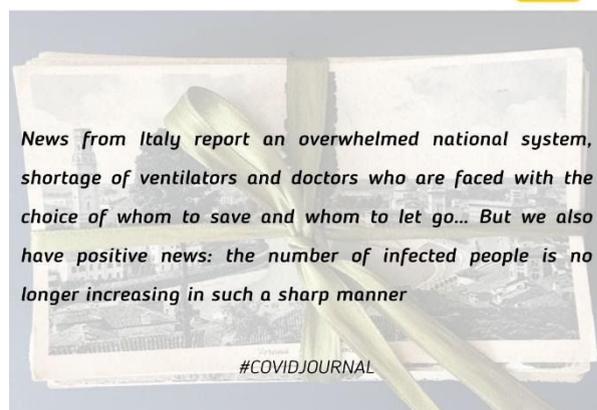
situation is also difficult, and we are worried about the future...

MAREN, 26 – GERMANY

In Germany we have been asked to stay home unless we carry out 'useful jobs for the system'. We need to reduce contact between us as much as possible and go out only to do the grocery. In contrast to Italy, we can still go out to play sports or have a walk. More than two people cannot go out together, otherwise they are fined 200€. In general, I believe that people are abiding by these rules, although, according to some newspapers articles, some decisions by the Government are apparently not in line with German law.

News from Italy report an overwhelmed national system, shortage of ventilators and doctors who are faced with the choice of whom to save and whom to let go... Moreover, there are pictures of vehicles carrying away the victims... But we also have positive news: the number of infected people is no longer increasing in such a sharp manner, and people are singing from their balconies to keep the spirits high.

JOURNAL FROM EUROPE



Maren, 26 - Germany



In the Czech Republic as well as in Italy, we will make it through stronger than ever. This is the time to show real solidarity as an authentic Europe, a united Europe which thinks about the good of the people and beyond: a truly human and supportive Europe.

#COVIDJOURNAL

Edoardo, 27 - Czech Republic

At the outset, cases were a few but in two weeks they started to increase, to the point that the Czech Government was forced to adopt stricter and stricter measures. We went from interrupting flights to and from the hardest hit Countries to closing the borders, as well as educational facilities. Commercial establishments' opening times have been reduced, with the exception of supermarkets, drug stores, food and IT stores – in other words, of essential goods. It is now mandatory

to wear a protective mask or a foulard to cover one's nose and mouth, minimal distance between two people is 2 metres, and it is forbidden to be more than two people in public places (save for members of small households). Furthermore, it is forbidden to go out unless for purchasing essential goods, to walk in parks, to go see friends and relatives and to attend funerals. In Southern Moravia, where Brno is the capital city, they intend to trace money transactions of affected people in order to localise potential hotspots. At the end of March we have witnessed a new peak of infections, but now that April is coming it seems that infections are decreasing. This makes us more hopeful that the end of the state of emergency is close, beside the fact that some drug testing seem to be fruitful.

With 300 recoveries and 17 casualties, in Czech Republic there are still less than 3000 active cases. This notwithstanding, I have confidence in the measures that have been gradually adopted to counter the coronavirus outbreak, thanks to the first decrease in infection rates which we are witnessing after last week's peaks. Not to mention the fact that when I did the grocery during this state of emergency, I have never found such desperate situation: I have always managed to find essential goods I needed.

The firm I work for has decided that we work from home until 19 April, hoping for an improvement of the situation. I must admit that a longer-term home-office experience is proving fruitful since I am learning to better manage my time and resources, both from a work and personal perspective. At the beginning it was hard, but I can assure you that in three weeks' time – where I only go out for the grocery – my creativity has improved so that I can better spend my time at home.

All these factors lead me to think that from this experience, in the Czech Republic as well as in Italy, we will make it through stronger than ever. While it is true that each Country is in a different situation from the others, and it is facing it with different means, in this way we can learn from one another to better coordinate our resources. After all, our common objective is to defeat coronavirus. This is the time to show real solidarity as an authentic Europe, a united Europe which thinks about the good of the people and beyond: a truly human and supportive Europe.

ANA, 30 – SPAIN

I work as a geographer for the public administration. I don't have many knowledge about medical issues but I try to be informed and in alert about the news of what happens around me and worldwide. I must say that, when this situation began (late February and firsts days of March), I had the feeling (me as a citizen) that we were having a good management of the situation and that the danger was really far away. About the situation in Italy, the news were talking quite a lot about it. The feeling was that the situation there was everyday worse, more chaotic, and uncontrolled. My particular perception was that the management was not correct, that there was no coordination. Nevertheless, I also think that this kind of exceptional and hard cases must be very complicated to manage.



Ana, 30 - Spain

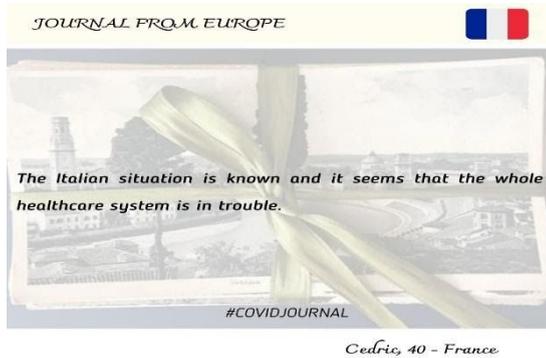
My perception changed totally in less than 2 weeks. First of all, there were appearing some intense clusters of the virus in some villages or cities that were closed more or less fast. Then the government closed the schools and slowly every event was being cancelled. My principal perception was that the three main zones had time to move around the country before the government decree the confinement: from Madrid people went to their second houses in other regions as Murcia and Galicia, or from the city of Barcelona the people move to their houses on the mountain or the beach. At this point the situation was that all was chaotic because the rules were not restrictive as they should be and also that many experts who were alerting of it, they were not heard by the politicians. It seemed logical that isolating the main zones of propagation of the virus (the communities of Madrid, Catalonia, and Basque Country) the virus won't be spreading to the other parts. They decided that this was not necessary.

As a context, in the Spanish case, the decisions were taken by the communities (they manage their own health systems) but coordinated with the Spanish government. That was like this till the 13-14th March, when Spain decree the "Alarm State" and centralised the major part of taking restrictive measures as isolating a village. So, from that moment the regions cannot decree nothing, and only make recommendations. After 15 days of confinement the restriction was enlarged and from the 30th March only the essential activities can go to their jobs.

The atmosphere is strange and uncertain, and I suppose that in many cases is also distressing because the perception is that the number of cases and deaths grew really fast, and that scares. It must be said that in a country where many people had not recovered themselves from the economic crisis (2008), the perception is that the COVID-19 crisis has only take to the surface many things that were happening but "were not seen: the bad condition jobs, the social inequality or the cuts in the public health system that had happen in the last years.

About the Italian news, they were very important the days before the confinement. Nowadays, there are always some news talking about the Italian situation but the attention is taken by what is happening here. The perception now is that the situation in Italy was the trailer of the film that we

are living here, but at first, we thought that it would not happen, or that we will manage it better. The experts and doctors were alarmed but the social feeling was that all came so fast.



CEDRIC, 40 – FRANCE

France is in lockdown since 10 March. Luckily, I live in the countryside and so am coping with this situation well enough as I can be in the open air while staying at home. In my opinion, the Government has underestimated the scope of the emergency in making the mistake of not carrying out large-scale tests and not confining infected people from the start, like South Korea did, for example. Since the French tend not to respect the rules until they are accompanied with

heavy sanctions...at the beginning they kept behaving as if nothing was happening. The Italian situation is known and it seems that the whole healthcare system is in trouble, probably because the public healthcare system has been suffering from huge spending cuts during the past years.