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Were the measures appropriate?

The question of the appropriateness of the measures taken during the coronavirus pandemic is a much-debated topic that should be considered from different angles. On the one hand, strict measures such as lockdowns and contact restrictions were sensible to protect the healthcare system from overload and save lives, especially at a time when the dangers of a novel virus could not yet be fully assessed (deutschlandfunkkultur.de, 2021). These measures stemmed from a legitimate concern to protect public health (which was of paramount importance in the early stages of the pandemic). However, the measures potentially led to other important aspects of individual and societal importance being neglected.

There are some serious criticisms of the appropriateness of these measures. Legal scholar Frauke Rostalski expressed clear concerns and criticised in particular the ‘diffusion of responsibility’ between politicians, experts, parliament and the judiciary. In her view, this confusion of responsibilities led to a lack of clear accountability, which made it all the more urgent to carefully scrutinise the decisions made (Anderl & Wefing, 2024). Rostalski also criticised the narrative of the ‘pandemic of the unvaccinated’, which in her opinion oversimplified a complex situation and led to considerable encroachment on citizens' civil liberties and the stigmatisation of certain population groups (Anderl & Wefing, 2024). This resulted in a massive division in society.

Another crucial aspect is the question of proportionality and social acceptance of the measures. The philosopher Julian Nida-Rümelin emphasises that such measures must be proportionate and well-founded. The strong fixation on certain key figures such as incidence rates and the lack of clear and coherent criteria raise doubts as to whether the measures were sensible and socially acceptable in the long term (deutschlandfunkkultur.de, 2021).

Furthermore, the psychological effects of the measures should not be ignored. Isolation, social distancing and economic insecurity have led to considerable psychological stress for many people, which must be included in the assessment of the appropriateness of the measures. This raises the question of whether the right balance has been struck between protecting against a new type of risk and safeguarding mental and social health.

The political debate on how to deal with the coronavirus measures is also of great importance. The question of whether the coronavirus measures were appropriate was discussed intensively in the Bundestag. There is a consensus that the political decisions need to be scrutinised in

order to learn lessons for future pandemics. However, there is disagreement as to how this reappraisal should take place. The FDP criticises many measures, such as school closures and curfews, as disproportionate encroachments on civil liberties. It is calling for a commission of enquiry to review the basis for the decisions and make recommendations. Former Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht and the AFD are calling for a committee of enquiry. In their opinion, a commission of enquiry would not be enough. Federal Health Minister Karl Lauterbach, on the other hand, favours an expert commission led by scientists. This should provide an unbiased analysis to counteract conspiracy theories. The CDU/CSU and patient advocates support the review, but emphasise that the aim should be to learn from the mistakes without holding a ‘shambles court’. Top Green politicians in the government are also in favour of a general reappraisal. Robert Habeck says that politicians must have the courage to scrutinise the consequences and learn lessons. He admits that the former federal government, the grand coalition, was in a difficult situation. (Zimmermann, 2024)

To summarise, although the measures taken during the pandemic arose from a legitimate concern, namely the protection of public health, the way in which they were implemented and the resulting consequences, particularly in terms of civil liberties, social division and psychological effects, give rise to critical reflection. The question of the appropriateness of the measures therefore remains complex and requires a more differentiated view that takes into account the protection of human life, the protection of mental health as well as social vitality and freedom (Anderl & Wefing, 2024; Zimmermann, 2024).

List of references:

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