

Wednesday, 8/4/2020

**Statement by the President of the Republic, Mr. Nicos Anastasiades,
on the Council of Ministers' decisions regarding COVID-19**

Today's intervention aims to inform you about the results, thus far, of the measures that have been adopted to combat the pandemic, and, at the same time, to inform you about a series of measures that the Council of Ministers decided today.

Regarding the results of the measures, without any intention to cultivate unjustified optimism, I would like to mention that, based on the estimates of the scientific team, the measures we have taken are effective and a ray of light is visible. I repeat, just a ray of light.

At the same time, I would like to make it clear that we have not allowed any deviation or loosening of the measures that have been taken, as any opposite act would lead to an unprecedented reversal, with catastrophic consequences.

That is why the decisions that the government has taken today, are part of the framework I have outlined.

One of the most important results of the measures adopted, was the neutralization of imported cases from abroad.

Perhaps, the most painful measure was the decision to prevent the return of thousands of students studying abroad.

Our aim was to protect both the students themselves and the people of our country, from a possible uncontrolled import and spread of new cases.

Our concern for the protection and assistance of our youth studying abroad is a given. It is proven by the decisions of the Government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to support them financially, but also, through an organized plan, to provide them with medical, pharmaceutical and other assistance, depending on the needs of each student.

The responsibility lies with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has taken on the task of drawing up a plan for the safe, gradual repatriation of those wishing to return, students or employees.

The decisions of the Council of Ministers determine in detail, both the numbers and the timeframe of their return, while strict measures to prevent the spread of new cases and to protect the whole population have been determined. Details will be announced by the Foreign Minister.

The second set of decisions concerns additional measures to ensure income and employment, with the support of employees and businesses, as well as financially vulnerable groups.

Today's announcement of the new measures indicates our determination to maintain the possibility of a dynamic restart of the economy, as soon as conditions allow that to happen.

In the context of what I have already stated, the Council of Ministers, during today's meeting, decided the following:

1. An extension, until April 30, of the measures that have already been decided, either by the Minister of Health or by the competent Ministers, through the relevant decrees. Today's decision comes with no exception for the Easter holidays. This is something I would like to stress.

It is self-evident that the measures also include any kind of gatherings to celebrate the customs of Easter.

2. Regarding the repatriation of our fellow citizens, in addition to the existing categories for which their return to Cyprus has already been launched, we decided today for the gradual return of Cypriot citizens who are included into the following categories:

(i) Those who are staying in university dormitories and who are enrolled in the preparatory programs during the current academic year, the so-called Foundation Courses, or, are in the first year of undergraduate studies.

(ii) Persons permanently residing in the Republic of Cyprus who are at the present time, in foreign countries for purposes of temporary employment and whose employment has been suspended or terminated due to COVID-19.

(iii) Citizens permanently residing in the Republic of Cyprus who are in foreign countries and whose return is deemed necessary for humanitarian reasons, such as:

- Providing care to persons who, due to serious injury after the issuance of the decrees, are unable to self-serve,
- They are organ recipients or donors, who are called for urgent transplants.
- Unaccompanied minors.

Entry to the Republic of Cyprus will also be allowed to persons, regardless of nationality, whose assistance, due to their professional or scientific capacity, is deemed necessary in the efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that the decisions to repatriate people who belong to the categories I have already mentioned, our Cypriot compatriots or others, will be taken on the basis of the prevailing situation and the necessary opinion of the Government's scientific associates.

3. In order to tackle the pandemic, the following precautionary measures have been decided:

(i) Randomly selected samples are going to be collected and examined from each district, in accordance to the guidelines provided by the scientific group. A similar procedure has already been followed in Pafos.

(ii) Within the following days, 20.000 more samples are going to be collected from randomly selected people that, on the basis of the Decrees issued by the Minister of Health, continue working, either in the private sector or in the broader public sector, including the National Guard.

(iii) Samples collected from all the people that will return to Cyprus on the basis of the gradual and controlled repatriation program, are going to be examined.

With regard to financial measures –this is the second package- it has been decided that employees and businesses will receive further support from the government up until the 12th of June 2020.

Furthermore, for a period of four months, after the period mentioned above has expired, employees and businesses are going to receive further support from the government on the basis of relevant criteria, which are going to be explained in detail by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

Paraphrasing the Ecumenical Patriarch, who wisely said that “it’s not the faith but it’s the faithful people that are in danger”, I would say that it’s not our way of living that is in danger, but our life itself.

In order to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, we must not succumb to the difficulties that have undoubtedly been caused by the measures adopted

What I do want you to know is that the duration of these measures, depends mainly upon the level of our discipline, despite the discomfort they cause.

I do know that the measures will be more painful during the Easter period, which we were planning to celebrate with our beloved persons.

What I do want is that when we are together again, at the next festive table, no one of our children, our parents, our grandparents will be missing.

This is not the first time we have to go through similar or even worse situations. We managed to survive, because all of us, when we had to go through such situations, were able to overcome difficulties and become even stronger, thanks to our perseverance and determination.

Furthermore, various encouraging facts that have been noted, did not happen by coincidence.

For this reason, I would like to warmly thank the overwhelming majority of our fellow citizens for the maturity and the discipline they have shown. At the same time they provide examples to follow, for those who refuse to show respect to each other and express solidarity to our fellow citizens.

It is once again required from all of us, to prove strong enough in order to protect our family, our beloved persons as well as ourselves.

Every day that goes by, demonstrating a decrease that the number of new covid-19 cases, brings you closer to the return to your ordinary routine.

For this purpose, once again, I appeal to you all: stay home, stay in your shelters and we will make it.