

SOCIAL FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 MORBIDITY AND COUNTERACTION IN THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL-EASTERN, SOUTH-EASTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE: REGIONAL COMPARISON AS OF 2020–2021

The article provides a regional comparison of social, political and economic factors and consequences of morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19 in the countries of Central-Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe during the 2020–2021 period. To do this, there have been made correlations between the morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19 in the analyzed regions and its individual countries with such indicators as the dynamics of political regimes change, human development, equality or inequality of resource allocation, GDP per capita, governance efficiency, etc. Some of the correlations have been shown to be positive and some of them to be negative ones. Most importantly is, however, that the situation with COVID-19 has an extremely negative impact on the dynamics of political regimes in the analyzed regions, in particular on the “erosion” of democracy and autocratization.

Keywords: COVID-19, democracy, autocracy, hybrid regimes, morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19, countries of Central-Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe.

CZYNNIKI SPOŁECZNE, KONSEKWENCJE CHOROBY ORAZ KONTROLA COVID-19 W KRAJACH EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ, POŁUDNIOWO-WSCHODNIEJ I WSCHODNIEJ: PORÓWNANIE REGIONALNE W LATACH 2020-2021

W artykule dokonano regionalnego porównania społecznych, politycznych i ekonomicznych czynników oraz konsekwencji zapadalności i przeciwdziałania COVID-19 w krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Południowo-Wschodniej i Wschodniej w latach 2020–2021. W tym celu dokonano korelacji między występowaniem i przeciwdziałaniem COVID-19 w analizowanych regionach i poszczególnych krajach z takimi wskaźnikami, jak dynamika zmian politycznych, rozwój społeczny, równość lub nierówność alokacji zasobów, PKB na mieszkańca, zarządzanie itp. Niektóre korelacje okazały się dodatnie, a niektóre ujemne. Co jednak najważniejsze, sytuacja z COVID-19 ma niezwykle negatywny wpływ na dynamikę reżimów politycznych w analizowanych regionach, w szczególności na „erozję” demokracji i autoryzację.

Słowa kluczowe: COVID-19, demokracja, autokracja, reżimy hybrydowe, zapadalność i przeciwdziałanie COVID-19, kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Południowo-Wschodniej i Wschodniej.

СОЦІАЛЬНІ ЧИННИКИ І НАСЛІДКИ ЗАХВОРЮВАНОСТІ ТА ПРОТИДІЇ COVID-19 В КРАЇНАХ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНО-СХІДНОЇ, ПІВДЕННО-СХІДНОЇ І СХІДНОЇ ЄВРОПИ: РЕГІОНАЛЬНЕ ПОРІВНЯННЯ СТАНОМ НА 2020–2021 РОКИ

У статті здійснено регіональне порівняння соціальних, політичних та економічних чинників й наслідків захворюваності та протидії COVID-19 в країнах Центрально-Східної, Південно-Східної і Східної Європи упродовж періоду 2020–2021 років. Для цього здійснено кореляції захворюваності та протидії COVID-19 в аналізованих регіонах та його окремих країнах із такими показниками, як динаміка зміни політичних режимів, показники людського розвитку, рівності чи нерівності розподілу ресурсів, ВВП на душу населення, ефективність урядування тощо. Продемонстровано, що деякі кореляції є позитивними, а деякі негативними. Однак найважливіше те, що ситуація з COVID-19 вкрай негативно впливає на динаміку розвитку політичних режимів в аналізованих регіонах, зокрема на “ерозію” демократії і автократизацію.

Ключові слова: COVID-19, демократія, автократія, гібридні режими, захворюваність та протидія COVID-19, країни Центрально-Східної, Південно-Східної і Східної Європи

At the beginning of 2020, our world began to (suddenly and unexpectedly, but gradually) plunge into the era of morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19. For almost two years, all countries of the world have been living within the new reality, which puts on the agenda not only the issue of personal and national health, but also its relationship with the parameters of socio-economic and socio-political development – both in the global scale, at the regional level and at the level of individual states, etc. The countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe – primarily in their geographical sense – are no exception in this context, these are of particular interest analytically and predictively, as they differ in their political regimes (democracies, autocracies or “hybrids”), indicators of human development, equality or inequality of resource allocation, GDP, government efficiency, etc., they are quite different – both individually and regionally – in the indicators of morbidity and resistance to COVID-19. Therefore, taking into account such differences between various indicators and their comparison should be interpreted as quite interesting and relevant analytically and predicatively – empirically.

This is especially evident given the indisputable fact that the countries of these regions of Europe successfully and mostly (in most cases – on average) demonstrate a global trend, which is that the COVID-19 era intensified the so-called processes of “erosion” of democracy, which in a number of case countries began at the end of the last decade, but (until 2019-2020) have somewhat mostly slowed down recently. This manifested itself in the fact that the corona virus pandemic led to a massive – and even the largest in peacetime decline in political rights and civil liberties and fueled the current trend of intolerance and censorship of mutually contradictory or opposing views. It was inherited from the fact that on the basis of various evidence of a new deadly disease, most people came to the conclusion that the prevention of catastrophic deaths justifies the temporary loss of rights and freedoms.

Also theoretically and in the context of world civilization development it is important and empirically obvious that with the spread of COVID-19, particularly during 2019-2020, the governments of quite a few democracies or countries of the so-called democratic orientation and spectrum (not to mention autocracies and hybrid political regimes) have not only once but sometimes systematically resorted and appealed to excessively (for habitual conditions) strict and direct control over social life and to rather significant discriminatory restrictions on human and civil rights and freedoms, primarily for assembly and right to move freely (according to some sources, these were the largest restrictions in the history of the peaceful political process)¹.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that in almost all countries of the world, including the analyzed regions of Europe, the wave of false and misleading information, which in some cases was intentionally generated by political organizations and leaders, flooded communication systems and networks of many countries obscuring reliable data and endangering the very lives of individuals. As a result, some authoritarian or targeted actions by the authorities have become necessary, which on average have been and remain to be aimed at the national security protection in the categories of the nations. However, with the peculiarity that purely theoretical such actions of the authorities in countries with developed and consolidated democracies are nominally initiated and implemented within the limits of freedom as necessary and extreme measures, proportional and appropriate to certain threats from COVID-19. Instead, in a number of autocracies and even hybrid regimes, various actions of the government, including under the guise of counteracting the epidemic, were mainly used against the opposition and to strengthen political regimes and so on². Accordingly, it inevitably follows that among the vast array of factors and consequences

¹ Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health?, Wyd. The Economist Intelligence Unit 2021, s. 14, źródło: https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=democracy2020 [odczyt: 20.10.21].; Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021, Wyd. V-Dem Institute 2021, źródło: https://www-dem.net/media/filer_public/c9/3f/c93f8e74-a3fd-4bac-adfd-ee2cfbc0a375/dr_2021.pdf [odczyt: 20.10.21].

² Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege> [odczyt: 20.10.21].; Special Report 2020: Democracy under Lockdown, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/democracy-under-lockdown> [odczyt: 20.10.21].; Maerz S., Lührmann A., Lachapelle J., Edgell A., Worth the sacrifice? Illiberal and authoritarian practices during Covid-19, “The Varieties of Democracy Institute Working Paper” 2020, nr. 110, źródło: https://www-dem.net/media/filer_public/14/e0/14e03f3b-1c44-4389-8edf-36a14f08a2d/wp_110_final.pdf [odczyt: 20.10.21].

of morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19, many, but a very important part is occupied by political or socio-political, including political regimes.

In general, today almost all theorists and practitioners and most analytical organizations around the world and at various international structures state that due to the fact that COVID-19 has spread around the world, the global community is characterized by a fairly persistent global stagnation of freedom. It is manifested in the fact that democracy degrades in almost all profiles and planes, but above all in the competition of elections, the rule of law, the restriction of socio-economic freedoms, movement, and assembly, etc. As a consequence, the decline in the level of democracy is characteristic both directly for democracies as such and for other types of political regimes, which are at least minimally characterized by at least some sprouts of pluralism and liberalism, while being completely undemocratic in systemic terms. On this basis, it is clear that the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have left many societies, with different types of political regimes, different income levels and different demographics, in a much worse political situation than before, in particular, with a more expressed political, racial, ethnic and gender inequalities, etc., and thus with a much greater vulnerability to the future and expected consequences of current processes³.

Most importantly, however, even if the pandemic is slowed down or overcome, the effects of the “erosion” of democracy will not be immediately reversed and removed, due to the reactions of states and governments to the increase in the morbidity of COVID-19⁴. This is due to the fact that almost all the restrictions that have been introduced and may continue to be implemented in the fight against COVID-19 are not entirely consensual and debatable in terms of the pros and cons of government policy of a state, after all, it is the tendency of many politicians and government officials to silence discussions that is most detrimental to the “restoration” and progress of democracy. In other words, this is due to the fact that, both in democracies and especially in authoritarian states, the impatience with which politicians and the media have tried or are trying to suppress debate and censor critics of restrictive policies under COVID-19 is of the greatest concern.

In practical terms, we can trace this situation on the example of the analyzed regions of Europe on the basis of appeals to the indicators and dynamics of the level of democracy (or autocracy) of all analyzed countries in the sample during 2019-2020 (of course, according to the results presented, respectively, in 2020-2021), in particular in the framework of projects “Freedom in the World” (FiW) (organization “Freedom House”)⁵, “Democracy Index” (DI) (organization “The Economist Intelligence Unit”)⁶ and “Varieties of Democracy” (V-Dem,

³ Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

⁴ New Report: The global decline in democracy has accelerated, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-global-decline-democracy-has-accelerated> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

⁵ Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

⁶ Democracy Index 2020: Illness and in health, Wyd. Economist Intelligence Unit 2021, źródło: <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

in terms of the so-called “Liberal Democracy Index (LD)” (see The V-Dem Institute)⁷ (for details, see Table 1). The fact is that in 2020 (according to surveys published in 2021) – compared to 2019 (according to surveys published in 2020) – the situation with the level of democracy, regardless of existing political regimes, on average (taking into account the data of the listed projects, and taking into account the average indicators) and at least partially: has worsened in Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Hungary and Ukraine; has remained relatively or approximately stable – in Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Romania, Croatia and the Czech Republic, as well as in autocratic Azerbaijan and Russia; has improved – exclusively in Moldova, Slovakia, Slovenia, Montenegro and autocratic Turkey. At the same time, in the regional context, the situation with the relative level of democracy has deteriorated the most, which is rather surprising in the most democratic (compared to other analyzed regions of Europe) region of Central and Eastern Europe, to a lesser extent in the less democratic region of South-Eastern Europe to a lesser extent – in the least democratic region of Eastern Europe, and then ultimately – on average in the entire sample of analyzed European countries.

Complementing the situation is the fact that statistically this conclusion is confirmed by the data of the projects “Democracy Index” (DI) and “Varieties of Democracy” (V-Dem), but instead no average correlations in the dynamics of political regimes (excluding changes in individual European countries) were observed in the case of recourse to the project “Freedom in the World” (FiW) (for details, see Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of political development and dynamics of change of political regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe against the background of the COVID-19 epidemic (time section and comparison of data as of 2020 and 2021)

Country	Dynamics of change of political regimes, averaged over the situation as of 2019–2020					
	FiW, 2021 (2020)	FiW, 2020 (2019)	DI, 2020	DI, 2019	V-Dem (LD), 2020	V-Dem (LD), 2019
COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE						
Bulgaria	2,0 / 78	2,0 / 80	6,71	7,03	0,491	0,513
Estonia	1,0 / 94	1,0 / 94	7,84	7,90	0,832	0,841
Latvia	1,5 / 89	1,5 / 89	7,24	7,49	0,736	0,743
Lithuania	1,5 / 90	1,0 / 91	7,13	7,50	0,760	0,764

⁷ V-Dem Dataset: Version 11.1, Wyd. V-Dem 2021, źródło: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/> [odczyt: 20.10.21].; Pandemic Backsliding: Democracy During COVID-19 (March 2020 to June 2021), [w:] Pandemic Backsliding Project (Pan-Dem), Wyd. V-Dem 2021, źródło: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/PanDem/> [odczyt: 20.10.21].; About the Global Monitor of COVID-19's impact on Democracy and Human Rights, [w:] The Global State of Democracy Indices, IDEA 2021, źródło: <https://www.idea.int/gsoi-indices/about-covid19> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

Country	Dynamics of change of political regimes, averaged over the situation as of 2019–2020					
	FIW, 2021 (2020)	FIW, 2020 (2019)	DI, 2020	DI, 2019	V-Dem (LD), 2020	V-Dem (LD), 2019
Poland	2,0 / 82	2,0 / 84	6,85	6,62	0,487	0,533
Romania	2,0 / 83	2,0 / 83	6,40	6,49	0,552	0,467
Slovakia	1,0 / 90	1,5 / 88	6,97	7,17	0,756	0,732
Slovenia	1,0 / 95	1,0 / 94	7,54	7,50	0,651	0,737
Hungary	3,0 / 69	3,0 / 70	6,56	6,63	0,368	0,370
Croatia	1,5 / 85	1,5 / 85	6,50	6,57	0,641	0,619
Czech Republic	1,0 / 91	1,0 / 91	7,67	7,69	0,708	0,703
On average in the region	1,6 / 86	1,6 / 86	7,04	7,14	0,635	0,638
COUNTRIES OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE						
Albania	3,0 / 66	3,0 / 67	6,08	5,89	0,403	0,407
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,0 / 53	4,0 / 53	4,84	4,86	0,340	0,345
Kosovo	4,0 / 54	3,5 / 56	–	–	0,430	0,423
Northern Macedonia	3,0 / 66	3,0 / 63	5,89	5,97	0,428	0,428
Serbia	3,5 / 64	3,5 / 66	6,22	6,41	0,239	0,260
Turkey	5,5 / 32	5,5 / 32	4,48	4,09	0,111	0,109
Montenegro	3,0 / 63	3,5 / 62	5,77	5,65	0,347	0,347
On average in the region	3,7 / 57	3,7 / 57	5,55	5,48	0,328	0,331
EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES						
Azerbaijan	6,5 / 10	6,5 / 10	2,68	2,75	0,066	0,060
Belarus	6,5 / 11	6,5 / 19	2,59	2,48	0,076	0,112
Armenia	4,0 / 55	4,0 / 53	5,35	5,54	0,597	0,636
Georgia	3,5 / 60	3,0 / 61	5,31	5,42	0,506	0,512
Moldova	3,0 / 61	3,5 / 60	5,78	5,75	0,467	0,450
Russia	6,5 / 20	6,5 / 20	3,31	3,11	0,104	0,110
Ukraine	3,5 / 60	3,0 / 62	5,81	5,90	0,348	0,316
On average in the region	4,8 / 40	4,7 / 41	4,40	4,42	0,309	0,314
On average in the sample	3,1 / 65	3,1 / 65	5,90	5,93	0,458	0,461

Zródło: *Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege*, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>[odczyt: 20.10.21].; *Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health?*, Wyd. The Economist Intelligence Unit 2021, :<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>[odczyt: 20.10.21].; *V-Dem Dataset: Version 11.1*, Wyd. V-Dem 2021, źródło: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v111/>[odczyt: 20.10.21].

In a single context and on the example of individual states of the analyzed regions of Europe, the above mentioned conclusions and correlations have a lot of interesting confirmations and manifestations. Thus, in Hungary, a number of emergency measures allowed the government in summer and autumn of 2020 to make emergency decisions, even though the cases of coronavirus in that country at that time were insignificant. In political terms, the fact that Orbán's national government began to abuse its powers excessively, in particular by canceling financial assistance to municipalities headed by the opposition and opposition political forces⁸. This was certainly facilitated by the fact that over the last decade, as Prime Minister, V. Orbán has managed to strengthen his personal, political and institutional influence, and Hungary has slipped from a free state or consolidated democracy to a partially free state or a hybrid political regime. A landmark step in this regard took place in December 2020, when Hungary's flexible and "manual" parliament approved amendments to the country's constitution that transferred state assets to institutions leading policies loyal to the ruling coalition, significantly reducing independent oversight and control over government spending.

Similar restrictions are implemented in other countries of the analyzed regions of Europe. Thus, in Russia, they found themselves in the fact that, for example, Moscow officials and bureaucrats at one time imposed openly politicized restrictions on mass gatherings. In particular, the restrictions applied to meetings as such, but did not affect rallies organized with the support of central and official authorities. In Serbia, on the other hand, the situation unfolded in such a way that it was due to certain actions and restrictions as a result of COVID-19, primarily in terms of meetings and social contacts that the term of the national parliament was extended and its early elections postponed⁹, in particular from April to August 2020. Thus, the emphasis is on the fact that it is the coronavirus that has caused gender inequality, in particular due to the specific restriction of press freedom.

The opposite situation was typical for Belarus, whose president Alexander Lukashenko was perhaps the biggest opponent of the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world, as he and the official authorities for a long time refused to officially not only recognize but also accept the threat of this disease.

This, in contrast, led to a huge outbreak of coronavirus in this country, which by European standards is not very large in population. It follows that the situation regarding the fight against COVID-19 in Belarus was controlled not so much by the state as by civil society, which has traditionally been perceived and has recently been particularly perceived as anti-government and directed against Lukashenko, especially against the background of the

⁸ Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege, Wyd. Freedom House 2021, źródło: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>[odczyt: 20.10.21].

⁹ Serbia postpones April 26 elections due to coronavirus outbreak – state election commission, "Reuters", March 16, 2020, źródło: <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-serbia/serbia-postpones-april-26-elections-due-to-coronavirus-outbreak-state-election-commission-idUSL8N2B99BP>[odczyt: 20.10.21].

position of civil society on the falsification by the President the last presidential election in 2020. Even more, because Minsk's official position on COVID-19 was one of the factors in the fall in the ratings of the self-proclaimed president of Belarus. Therefore, it follows that the refusal to recognize and oppose COVID-19, and not vice versa, was one of the factors of further autocratization of the political regime in the state.

At the same time and even more, theoretically, methodologically and analytically important is not only the demonstrated influence of the era of morbidity and counteraction to the COVID-19 epidemic on the general "erosion" and conditional "rollback" of democracy in Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, however, and the impact of the level of democracy or autocracy (hybridism) and various socio-economic factors and effects of development of the region on the situation and the fight against the pandemic¹⁰ (statistically see the comparison of data Tables 1, 2 and 3, and instead correlation see table 4). In particular, in this context, it has been found in our study that a higher level of democracy (democracy rather than hybrid political regimes and autocracies), at least as of 2020 (averaged under various projects), i.e. according to research from 2021, is positively compared and correlated with the increase in the number of cases of morbidity and deaths per 1 million people, as well as with the percentage of mortality and vaccination against the disease (primarily due to greater reliability and objectivity of information in democratic political regimes), however, in contrast, it mostly or not at all correlates with an increase in the number of tests per 1,000 people, a decrease in the share of positive tests, and an increase in the number of hospital beds per 1,000 people in a given state and region. Interestingly, more democratic political regimes, on average, resort to tougher government action to combat COVID-19, which is one of the main reasons for their very objective and greatest decline in democracy (although, with all this, they continue to be the most democratic compared to other countries in a region of Europe).

¹⁰ Maerz S., Lührmann A., Lachapelle J., Edgell A., Worth the sacrifice: Illiberal and authoritarian practices during Covid-19, "The Varieties of Democracy Institute Working Paper" 2020, nr. 110, źródło: https://www.v-dem.net/media/finder_public/14/c0/14c03f3b-1c44-4389-8cdf-36a141f08a2d/wp_110_final.pdf[odczyt: 20.10.21].

Table 2. Statistics and dynamics of changes in the morbidity and response of COVID-19 in Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (time section and comparison of data as of March 27, 2021 and October 11, 2021)

Country	Averaged and cumulative indicators of morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19 in relation to the situation since the beginning of the pandemic and as of 27.03.2021 and 11.10.2021.																				
	Cases per 1 million people		Deaths per 1 million people		Mortality, %		Tests per 1 million people		Share of positive tests%		Vaccinations: at least once per 100 people		Vaccinations: twice per 100 people		The level of the government action rigidity%		Beds per 1000		Опийтава тиванисъквита		
	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	27.03.21	11.10.21	
	COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE																				
Bulgaria	47171	76027	1820,5	3162,8	3,86	4,16	291,3	723,6	23,2	12,6	4,99	20,41	1,26	19,79	50,93	47,22	7,45	75,05			
Estonia	77448	124771	648,3	1056,5	0,84	0,85	841,9	1507,0	20,8	14,3	14,45	57,83	4,56	54,41	62,04	25,00	4,69	78,74			
Latvia	53396	92279	992,5	1503,0	1,86	1,63	935,2	н.д.	3,9	н.д.	5,53	51,59	1,16	48,10	56,48	37,96	5,57	75,29			
Lithuania	78407	131341	1300,0	1951,0	1,66	1,49	838,7	2000,8	6,4	10,4	11,91	65,75	5,54	60,88	63,89	30,09	6,56	75,93			
Poland	58703	77342	1367,4	2007,3	2,33	2,60	303,9	547,9	19,8	3,5	10,00	52,61	5,20	51,70	75,00	38,89	6,62	78,73			
Romania	48456	71403	1195,4	2071,8	2,47	2,90	340,4	695,1	23,5	22,3	9,81	32,05	4,75	28,92	63,89	55,56	6,89	76,05			
Slovakia	65386	78006	1726,5	2332,1	2,64	2,99	4274,3	7741,0	1,0	5,6	11,27	45,26	4,68	41,64	71,30	34,72	5,82	77,54			
Slovenia	101995	145110	1929,4	2221,1	1,89	1,53	1202,6	782,3	2,9	19,6	9,20	54,64	5,03	50,37	69,44	35,19	4,50	81,32			
Hungary	64675	86095	2044,6	3145,4	3,16	3,65	413,3	687,2	26,7	5,0	19,70	61,36	7,10	58,98	79,63	27,78	7,02	76,88			
Croatia	64771	102416	1430,4	2150,6	2,21	2,10	366,2	713,7	13,8	14,3	8,18	45,40	1,97	40,03	43,52	33,80	5,54	78,49			
Czech Republic	141098	158522	2407,1	2844,3	1,71	1,79	н.д.	н.д.	5,2	1,5	10,47	56,98	4,11	56,00	81,48	32,41	6,63	79,38			
On average	72864	103937	1533,0	2222,4	2,24	2,34	980,8	1711,0	13,6	10,9	10,50	49,44	4,12	46,44	65,24	36,24	6,12	77,58			
COUNTRIES OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE																					
Albania	42964	60970	765,9	966,6	1,78	1,58	179,7	н.д.	17,3	н.д.	0,21	33,49	0,02	29,00	60,19	41,67	2,89	78,57			
Bosnia and H-na	49388	73918	1895,9	3359,9	3,84	4,55	232,9	384,1	33,0	23,8	н.д.	22,50	н.д.	15,57	45,37	35,19	3,50	77,40			

Kosovo	43550	90347	937,0	1674,0	2,15	1,85	н.д.	685,7	н.д.	н.д.	1,3	н.д.	46,43	н.д.	35,63	62,04	52,78	н.д.	н.д.
Northem Macedonia	60589	93631	1748,1	3288,6	2,89	3,51	289,5	н.д.	28,3	н.д.	н.д.	0,25	38,22	0,0	35,94	н.д.	н.д.	н.д.	75,80
Serbia	85474	146328	757,0	1272,1	0,89	0,87	489,5	850,4	31,1	29,8	20,08	44,31	13,47	42,41	54,63	47,22	5,61	76,00	
Turkey	37694	87898	366,7	780,4	0,97	0,89	441,2	1060,2	11,9	8,4	9,74	64,16	7,63	54,60	72,22	58,33	2,81	77,69	
Montenegro	142871	215799	1975,9	3171,7	1,38	1,47	н.д.	н.д.	н.д.	н.д.	н.д.	2,36	39,96	0,25	35,80	н.д.	н.д.	3,86	76,88
On average	66076	109842	1206,6	2073,3	1,99	2,10	326,6	745,1	24,3	15,8	6,53	41,30	4,27	35,56	58,89	47,04	3,83	77,06	

EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Azerbaijan	25088	48202	341,6	653,1	1,36	1,35	н.д.	484,5	н.д.	н.д.	8,7	5,03	47,83	н.д.	40,18	70,37	58,33	4,70	73,00
Belarus	33614	59274	234,0	455,8	0,70	0,77	558,0	н.д.	7,5	н.д.	н.д.	0,21	23,67	0,11	17,24	27,78	19,44	11,00	74,79
Armenia	63964	91963	1164,3	1878,3	1,82	2,04	277,6	596,6	18,6	10,2	н.д.	н.д.	11,59	н.д.	5,73	н.д.	н.д.	4,20	75,09
Georgia	70774	159703	939,0	2329,0	1,34	1,46	н.д.	2236,3	н.д.	н.д.	5,5	н.д.	25,19	н.д.	22,10	64,81	39,81	2,60	73,77
Moldova	55940	76337	1186,2	1751,5	2,12	2,29	н.д.	453,0	н.д.	н.д.	18,9	0,84	20,50	0,00	20,20	65,74	25,93	5,80	71,90
Russia	30564	52686	656,4	1463,4	2,15	2,78	814,4	1340,8	3,0	4,9	4,32	33,97	2,95	30,91	40,28	57,87	8,05	8,80	72,58
Ukraine	38745	61364	762,9	1439,0	1,97	2,35	180,4	305,5	29,9	30,6	0,44	17,51	0,00	14,26	62,04	58,33	8,80	72,06	
On average	45441	78504	754,9	1424,3	1,64	1,86	457,6	902,8	14,8	13,1	2,17	25,75	0,77	21,52	55,17	40,28	6,45	73,31	
	63285	98469	1223,7	1957,2	2,00	2,14	698,5	1252,4	16,5	12,6	7,57	40,53	3,49	36,42	61,05	39,77	5,64	76,21	

Zródło: Ritchie H., Mathieu E., Rod es-Guirao L., Appel C., Giattino C., Ortiz-Ospina E., Hasell J., Macdonald B., Beltekian D., Roser M., *Coronavirus Pandemic* (COVID-19), Wydz. OurWorldInData.org, zrodlo: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; Hale T., Angrist N., Goldszmidt R., Kira B., Petherick A., Phillips T., Webster S., Cameron-Blake E., Hallas L., Mejumdar S., Tatlow H., A. *Global panel database of pandemic policies* (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker), Wyd. Nature Human Behaviour 2021, zrodlo: <https://www.bsp.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/oxford-covid-19-government-response-tracker> [odczyt: 20.10.21]

Accordingly, in this sense, there is a significant paradox of the situation, as such correlations and ratios work in part in the event of a deterioration in the level of democracy, at least in comparison with data as of 2020 compared to as of 2019, but primarily due to the largest and not the least democratic countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (for details see Table 1). However, in general, the respective improvement in the level of democracy is relatively positively correlated with an increase in the number of cases (per 1 million people), the number of deaths (per 1 million people) and the number of tests (per 1,000 people) (primarily due to greater reliability) and objectivity of information in the case of democratization), as well as with a decrease in the share of positive tests (as a percentage), but does not correlate at all with the increase in the mortality rate (as a percentage), the number of vaccinations (per 100 people) and the increase in the number of hospital beds (per 1 thousand people) (see Table 2). In contrast, it has been observed that the level of vaccination in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe increases on average with a relative deterioration of the level of democracy in these regions of Europe. But the biggest paradox in this context is the fact that the reductions in the level of democracy of political regimes in the three regions of Europe on average it does not depend and does not affect the tightening of government action to combat COVID-19 (see Table 2), instead, these processes are completely parallel. Therefore, in this regard, it can be stated that political factors – primarily the dynamics of changes in political regimes – in the analyzed context are quite significant, but they depend primarily on the objectivity of information and willingness to actually solve current problems with COVID-19.

On the other hand, it is political or socio-political factors, in particular the dynamics of change of political regimes, that mainly determine how socio-economic factors and consequences of COVID-19 morbidity and counteraction work or do not work on the example of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern countries and Eastern Europe, in particular in terms of such indicators, as the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI)¹¹, the Gini-I Resource Inequality Index¹², nominal GDP per capita (GDP PC Nom.)¹³, Government Performance Index under the “Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI GE) project¹⁴”, Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)¹⁵, primarily with regard to the situation as of 2020 (as at the time of the study data on 2021 are almost not available).

Accordingly, their correlation with the level of morbidity and resistance to COVID-19 is also relevant or at least interesting, as it may cause either certain systemic and recurring connections and consequences, independent or less dependent on political motives, or certain

¹¹ Human Development Index, Wýd. UNDP 2021, źródło: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137506> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

¹² Gini index, Wýd. The World Bank 2021, źródło: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SIPOV.GINI> [odczyt: 20.10.21].; Gini Coefficient by Country 2021, Wýd. World Population Review, źródło: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

¹³ GDP per capita (current US\$), Wýd. The World Bank 2021, źródło: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDPPCAP.CD> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

¹⁴ The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project, Wýd. World Bank 2021, źródło: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

¹⁵ Corruption Perceptions Index, Wýd. Transparency International 2021, źródło: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/table/nzl> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

situational conclusions, which depend on the political or socio-political context (statistically, see the comparison of data in Tables 1, 2 and 3, and instead correlated, see Table 4).

Table 3. Indicators and parameters of socio-economic development in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe against the background of the epidemic COVID-19 (time section of 2019 and 2020)

Country	Socio-economic factors and consequences, governance context, averaged over the situation in 2020				
	HDI, 2020 (2019)	Gini-I, 2020	GDP PC Nom. 2020, \$	WGI GE, 2020 (2019)	CPI, 2021 (2020)
COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE					
Bulgaria	0,816	37,15	9 826	65,38	44
Estonia	0,892	32,18	22986	85,58	75
Latvia	0,866	33,71	17230	83,65	57
Lithuania	0,882	36,98	19883	81,25	60
Poland	0,880	30,19	15304	73,08	56
Romania	0,828	35,14	12813	40,38	44
Slovakia	0,860	25,77	18669	74,04	49
Slovenia	0,917	24,84	22627	82,21	60
Hungary	0,854	29,76	15373	70,19	44
Croatia	0,851	29,80	14033	67,31	47
Czech Republic	0,900	25,43	25039	78,37	54
On average in the region	0,878	31,00	17 617	72,86	54
COUNTRIES OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE					
Albania	0,795	28,49	4898	50,48	36
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0,780	32,29	4721	28,85	35
Kosovo	–	–	4141	39,42	36
Northern Macedonia	0,774	35,44	6019	52,40	35
Serbia	0,806	27,85	7497	53,37	38
Turkey	0,820	43,61	7715	54,33	40
Montenegro	0,829	31,60	7933	58,65	45
On average in the region	0,801	33,21	6 132	48,21	38
EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES					
Azerbaijan	0,756	22,45	7295	46,15	30
Belarus	0,823	24,75	6134	44,23	47
Armenia	0,776	34,56	4315	50,00	49
Georgia	0,812	36,72	4405	76,92	56
Moldova	0,750	24,50	4268	37,98	34
Russia	0,824	35,32	9972	58,17	30
Ukraine	0,779	25,36	3425	39,90	33
On average in the region	0,789	29,09	5 688	50,48	40
On average in the sample	0,828	31,00	11 061	59,69	45

Zródło: *Human Development Index*, Wyd. UNDP 2021, źródło: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137506> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; *The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project*, Wyd. World Bank 2021, źródło: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; *Corruption Perceptions Index*, Wyd. Transparency International 2021, źródło: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/table/nzl> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; *Gini index*, Wyd. The World Bank 2021, źródło: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; *Gini Coefficient by Country 2021*, Wyd. World Population Review, źródło: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country> [odczyt: 20.10.21]; *GDP per capita (current US\$)*, Wyd. The World Bank 2021, źródło: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> [odczyt: 20.10.21].

There are many manifestations of such relationships in the general theoretical and world context, because it is generally established that the crisis of public health is causing a major economic crisis as countries around the world fall into recession and millions of people lose their jobs. Consequently, the marginalized population bears the burden of both the coronavirus and its economic impact, which, among other disparities, has exacerbated and continues to exacerbate income inequality. Against this background, it was observed that, in general, countries with a larger income gap have much weaker protection of fundamental rights, suggesting that the socio-economic consequences of a pandemic could have detrimental consequences for democracy (discussed above).

In particular, our study found that a higher level of the human development index, nominal GDP per capita and the efficiency of governments and governance, as well as a lower level of inequality in the distribution of income and resources and the corruption perception index in Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern European countries is on average positive, what is pretty weird, correlates with an increase in the morbidity of COVID-19 and (excluding GDP per capita) deaths from COVID-19 (per 1 million people), as well as, in contrast and quite logically – with a decrease in the proportion of positive tests (as a percentage) and an increase in the number of vaccinations (per 100 people), but does not correlate at all with the increase in the mortality rate from COVID-19 (as a percentage) and does not partially correlate with other indicators. At the same time, all socio-economic indicators that we analyze in our article, with the exception of reducing the level of corruption perception index, on average contribute to increasing the number of tests for COVID-19 (per 1 thousand people) and the level of vaccination against COVID-19 (per 100 people). Instead, the relationship is much weaker in the case of government rigidity and the number of hospital beds (per 1,000 people), as these variables are weakly or not fully correlated with the parameters of socio-economic development in the analyzed regions of Europe, especially with the nominal GDP per capita (for details, see the comparison of data in Tables 2 and 3).

In general, the comparative analysis gives grounds to state that the majority of socio-economic indicators on the example of the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe are relatively weakly correlated with the full array of indicators COVID-19, but correlates quite effectively, in contrast, with some of them, on the basis of which it was concluded that the studied relationship is not quite logical, specific and indirect (see Table 4)

Table 4. Verification of possible correlations of political and socio-economic factors and consequences and indicators of morbidity and counteraction of COVID-19 in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (time section and comparison of data as of March 27, 2021 and October 11, 2021)

Correlation indicators	Increasing the number of cases of morbidity per 1 million people	Increasing the number of deaths, per 1 million people	Increasing the mortality rate, in%	Increasing the number of tests per 1 thousand people	Decrease in the share of positive tests, in%	Increasing the number of vaccinations, per 100 people	Increasing the level of government rigidity, in%	Increasing the number of beds per 1 thousand people
Higher level of democracy in 2020	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	-
Increasing the level of democracy in 2020 compared to 2019 in dynamics	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-
Higher level of the human development index in 2020	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+
Lower level of inequality of resource allocation in 2020	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
Higher level of nominal GDP per capita in 2020	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-
Lower level of corruption perception index in 2020	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
Lower level of corruption perception index in 2020	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
Lower level of corruption perception index in 2020	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-

This is manifested primarily in the fact that very often relatively better and more effective socio-economic indicators lead to much worse rates and even worsening in terms of morbidity and mortality from COVID-19, but much better rates and overall improvements in terms of counteracting COVID-19 in testing and vaccination format. At the same time, it is also important in this context that the best socio-economic indicators are relatively linearly and positively correlated with the best political or socio-political indicators and a higher level of democracy / democratization (lower level of autocratization) in the Central-Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. On this basis, it can be clearly assumed that the primary and more valid is the awareness and freedom of man and citizen, along with strict government control and minor restrictions on countering COVID-19, rather than a more developed socio-economic infrastructure. Because, as is typical for periods of turbulence and cataclysms, it is the primary and purposeful actions and true information about them help much better to solve the situation than long-term and systemic indicators of socio-economic development. Although, in contrast, socio-economic factors should still be perceived as regulating the parameters and effects of morbidity and counteraction to COVID-19 in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, especially if we think about it primarily in sub regional categories, i.e., in samples of similar countries.

In general, and in this context, it should be noted that a relatively significant or greatest correlation is observed between the incidence and response to COVID-19 and the reduction of inequality in resource allocation and the increase in government efficiency in Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe is slightly smaller but significant correlation between the former and the human development index, and the smallest correlation is between the former and the level of democracy and democratization, the level of nominal GDP per capita and the level of the corruption perception index. However, one way or another, the socio-political and socio-economic consequences of the incidence and counteraction of COVID-19 in the countries of Central and Eastern, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe are certainly significant, and their effects will be prolonged even in the future.

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