The COVID-19 Chronicles: Eastern Europe

Like much of Asia, Eastern Europe appears to have weathered the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) crisis relatively well, at least in terms of overcoming a health crisis.

Total reported infections and deaths have been much lower across these nations, and the Western media has taken turns wondering just how this is possible.

Health Impact

Statistics indicate that Covid-19 has impacted Eastern European nations in about the same manner as the annual flu or common cold. Nations like Belarus have in fact been hit harder by the annual flu than by the recent Covid-19 outbreak.

While headlines claimed nations would be scrambling for critical medical equipment including ventilators, Eastern Europe has since had no widespread or widely reported shortages nor reports of overcrowded or overwhelmed healthcare facilities.

The table below gives a quick look at the impact of Covid-19 nearly half a year into the supposed “pandemic” and is easily comparable to annual flu burden in each respective nation.

**Belarus:** 27,730 infections, 156 deaths  
**Bulgaria:** 2,174 infections, 105 deaths  
**Czechia:** 8,406 infections, 295 deaths  
**Hungary:** 3,473 infections, 448 deaths  
**Poland:** 18,016 infections, 907 deaths  
**Moldova:** 5,745 infections, 202 deaths  
**Romania:** 16,437 infections, 1,070 deaths  
**Russia:** 262,843 infections, 2,418 deaths  
**Slovakia:** 1,480 infections, 27 deaths  
**Ukraine:** 17,858 infections, 497 deaths

The health impact has been minimal with Eastern European nations imposing measures that ranged from the extreme to, in Belarus' case, very minimum in the face of global panic over the virus.

Measures

Eastern European nations did indeed put measures in place including the closure of public venues, issuing guidelines regarding social distancing and the use of facemasks. Poland had closed public venues and businesses, restricted public activities including gatherings and instituted the use of face masks, but has since begun easing such measures.
In other instances, measures have been so lax that it incurred complaints from neighboring nations. Belarus, for example, has been accused by Lithuania of hiding the impact of Covid-19 on its population and responding inadequately.

US State Department propaganda Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in an article titled, "COVID-19: WHO Urges Belarus To Implement Distancing Measures; Georgia To Extend State Of Emergency," would complain about Belarus' insistence on not caving in to what Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka called "mass psychosis."

Western media is condemning several Eastern European nations for not being "serious" enough about Covid-19. What measures have been put in place are in turn targeted by the same Western media as "abuse of power," indicating that Western concern is rooted more in political motivation than out of any genuine concern for the health of Eastern Europeans.

Questioning the measures put in place by some Eastern European nations and their gathering of Covid-19 related statistics has also become a political tool used to place pressure on governments unpopular with the West long before Covid-19 appeared on the horizon.

Ultimately it seems President Lukashenka was right for not paralyzing his nation socioeconomically for a pathogen apparently no more dangerous than the annual flu. While ordinary flu cases coupled with Covid-19 cases could present extra burden to national healthcare infrastructure, it is still not a crisis big enough to justify the self-inflicted socioeconomic calamity Western nations have subjected themselves to and are now mired in.

**Socioeconomic Impact**

Despite the minimum health impact and in many cases, a minimum response in terms of measures, nations like Belarus are still applying for loans from international financial institutions including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Many Eastern European nations depend on international trade, especially with Western Europe. If Western Europe has shuttered their economies, the impact on Eastern Europe will be felt regardless of how it itself overcame Covid-19.

Just as is the case for much of Asia, Eastern European businesses will face a choice between waiting for the West to recover and reopen, or expand into markets Eastward. Either way, it will be difficult and Eastern European governments find themselves nonetheless implementing a raft of policies in response to reduced business or even unemployment associated with Covid-19.

Eastern Europe represents another example of how Covid-19 the pathogen failed to live up to chaos Covid-19 the panic triggered. The damage being done is socioeconomic and political rather than health-related and should give Eastern European governments pause for thought about how they move forward safely into a future where another "Covid-19 pandemic" may unfold and threaten their individual and collective socioeconomic stability.

The creation of policies, infrastructure and economic relations with other like-minded nations who agree upon a common structure for responding to and overcoming future outbreaks will be necessary to ensure there is not another repeat of the Covid-19 crisis. Only time will tell if Eastern Europe, along with other regions like Asia, are able to do so.

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