

**PANDEMIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY  
(case: Spain and Poland)**

**STRATEGIE KOMUNIKOWANIA W WARUNKACH PANDEMII:  
IMPLIKACJE DLA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA NARODOWEGO  
(przypadek: Hiszpania i Polska)**

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**Abstract.** The current pandemic has provided many examples of effective and not so effective communication strategies from government agencies. In this short article, the authors focus on an analysis of the COVID-19 crisis communication from selected governments of Spain and Poland. Despite the differences in communication strategies of both countries, resulting from characteristic administrative structures and constitutional competences, common features as well as errors and shortcomings can be observed. The authors conclude that the particularism of political interests of the party politicians, who were in power at the time of the pandemic outbreak (regardless of their political foundations) may be a threat to the national security of a given country undermining the public trust, causing unwanted behaviours and thus translating into an extent and a duration of the pandemic as well as negative economic consequences. The crisis of the virus turns out to be a test that highlights the shortcomings of the political and social systems of both countries and opens up the field for further research.

**Abstrakt.** Obecna pandemia dostarczyła wielu przykładów skutecznych i niezbyt skutecznych strategii komunikacyjnych instytucji rządowych. W tym krótkim artykule autorzy skupiają się na analizie komunikacji kryzysowej COVID-19 wybranych rządów: Hiszpanii i Polski. Pomimo różnic w strategiach komunikacyjnych w obu krajach, wynikających z odmiennych struktur administracyjnych i konstytucyjnych kompetencji, można zaobserwować ich cechy wspólne, a także ich błędy i niedociągnięcia. Wydają się one wynikać z uwarunkowań innych niż przeciwdziałanie pandemii. Autorzy konkludują, iż partykularyzm politycznych interesów partyjnych polityków, którzy sprawowali władzę w momencie wybuchu epidemii (niezależnie od ich poglądów politycznych), może być zagrożeniem dla bezpieczeństwa narodowego danego kraju, gdyż przekłada się na zasięg i czas trwania pandemii oraz na negatywne skutki gospodarcze. Kryzys wirusa okazuje się być testem, który uwydatnia wady systemów polityczno-społecznych obu krajów i otwiera pole do dalszych badań.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, communication strategy, Spain, Poland

**Słowa kluczowe:** COVID-19, strategia komunikowania, Hiszpania, Polska

## **Introduction**

The current pandemic has provided many examples of effective and not-so-effective communications strategies. In this brief article, the authors focus on a unique type of crisis communication – communication of both government institutions as well as of private sector agents in times of global pandemics. This type of crisis communication should not only highlight legitimization strategies but also indicate how institutions themselves make sense of crises by mobilising pre-existing social representations.

Analysing the crisis communication of COVID-19 by selected governments of Spain and Poland is particularly feasible and relevant in the current situation: because the literature on government crisis communication has rarely taken a comparative perspective. The authors compare both the government communication strategies of Spain and Poland and consider their implications for national economic security (limited to the tourist industry's crisis only). This crisis though has divulged existing communication deficiencies within societies and institutions, generations and cultures and has exposed fundamental differences in perception and interpretation of facts, allowing manipulation and control of opinions (Kasprzak, 2020).

## **WHO/PAHO guidelines for communicating about threat of Pandemic Influenza**

Communication strategies serve as an integral component of national pandemic influenza plans, enabling ideas to be turned into actions. As COVID-19 is not the first global influenza case of the global pandemic. (See avian or swine influenza) hence, WHO and its American branch PAHO (PAHO, 2009) have already prepared a set of guidelines for member governments on outbreak communication strategies.

WHO's outbreak communication guidelines (WHO 2008) state, "The overriding public health goal is to bring the outbreak under control as quickly as possible, with as little social disruption as possible. Effective outbreak communication is one tool to achieve that goal".

The main guidelines of these documents can be summarized as follows:

„Building trust now is laying the groundwork for pandemic communication. (...) To instil and maintain the public's trust in the global and national public health system and to convey realistic expectations in its ability to respond to and manage the initial outbreak of efficient transmission of a pandemic virus.

## Define who will lead the communication efforts.

**Create a communications group** that includes communication staff from throughout the government. (...) It should create consistent messages about pandemic influenza, leverage government resources, develop activities, coordinate media planning and outreach to partners, and ensure a coordinated response by the government for the public.

When an outbreak or pandemic emerges, shift communication goals to **focus on accompanying containment activities**, ensuring that the public, in part via media, is provided health messages, supports recommendations, and that health personnel are informed, prepared and ready to act; to **build support for pandemic preparedness** efforts and to encourage similar efforts in the private sector, local governments and civil society”.

The above-mentioned main recommendations and guidelines for formulating an effective communication strategy in the event of pandemic influenza, when confronted with reality, turn out to be a set of “wishful thinking”. In the real-life, we are dealing with a situation in which the particular interests of governments (guided by political interests), the private sector (driven by the motive of maximizing profit), or e. g. the church (driven by religious considerations) prevent in practice a coordinated and therefore more effective implementation of the communication strategy. It is perfectly illustrated by the described below case of swine flu influenza pandemic, where the communication strategy dictated by the giants of the pharmaceutical industry, was not to build trust but to create fear to increase vaccine sales.

## Lessons from communication “shortcomings” of handling swine flu pandemic

On April 12, 2010, the World Health Organization admitted serious “shortcomings” in the agencies handling of the H1N1 swine flu pandemic (Nebhay, 2010). Being more precise – WHO admitted a failure to communicate uncertainties about the new virus as it spread around the world in the following statement: “A vocal minority of scientists and government officials around the world have accused WHO of overplaying **the danger of the virus, while others have claimed its decision to declare a pandemic was unduly influenced by commercial interests**. Critics have said the WHO created panic about the swine flu virus (which turned out to be moderate in its effect) and caused governments to stockpile vaccines which went unused. Questions have been voiced regarding the WHO’s links to the pharmaceutical industry after companies like GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi-Aventis made massive profits from producing H1N1 vaccine”.

The global campaign for the “false” swine flu pandemic may serve as an excellent case study, demonstrating the influence of the private sector using the power of public relations and the communication industry (Ławniczak, 2013).

Such a campaign could not be effectively orchestrated without (almost unseen) “help” of the global public relations /communication agencies, like WPP, OMNI-COM or PUBLICIS.

In December 2009, Dr Wolfgang Wodard, Chairman of the Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) introduced a motion demanding to launch an inquiry “on the influence of the pharmaceutical companies on the global swine flu campaign of disinformation”. The campaign was organised in two phases:

- **Phase I:** Campaign of lobbying and spreading the fear – hidden, almost impossible to prove. The aims of this phase were following:
  - Step 1) Convince the WHO to hype up the pandemic risk by declaring phase 6 pandemic.
  - Step 2) Persuade the national health authorities around the world to echo the message.
  - Step 3) Keep people in a state of fear to keep demand for the vaccines as heavy as possible.

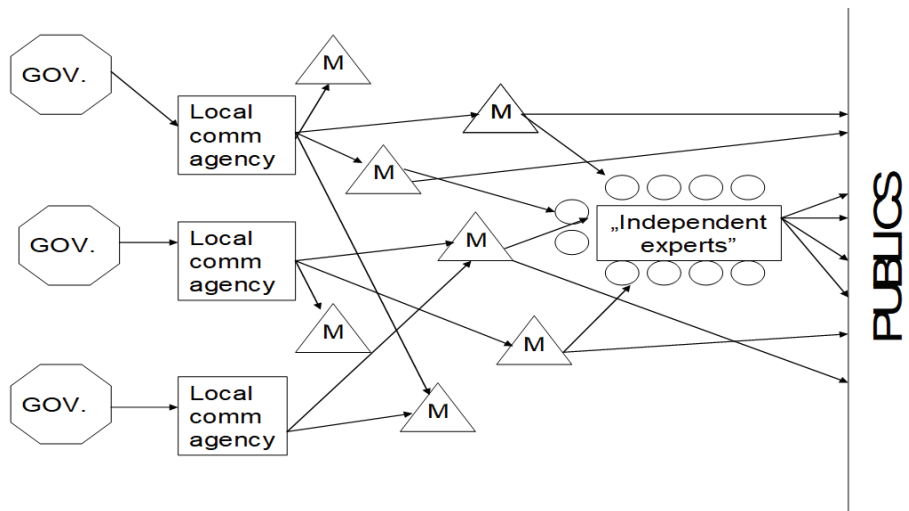


Fig. 1. A model of the global communication agencies' influence

Source: Ławniczak, 2013

To achieve the above aims, both WHO, governments and media intensified the fear by warning that H1N1 was extremely dangerous, and everybody should be vaccinated. So mid-May 2009, thirty senior representatives of the pharmaceutical industry

met with the WHO Director-General Dr M. Chan to ensure that countries around the world would be timely provided with the pandemic vaccine in case of emergency.

– **Phase II:** Public administrations campaigns to impose flu vaccination.

In that phase, the global holdings and independent PR agencies were officially invited by national health authorities to help to convince their respective citizens to take/buy vaccine against swine flu. Most of the governments did it except for then the Polish Minister of Health.

The above example of pharmaceutical companies lobbying to boost vaccine sales has sparked growing anti-vaccination community in almost all countries and resulted in millions of dollars worth losses due to stockpiles of the vaccine because the citizens refused to take it. It can be safely assumed that it also influenced the scepticism of societies about the real threat of COVID-19 pandemics, thus also weakening the effectiveness of anti-covid campaigns of individual governments, including Spain and Poland.

## **Government communication strategies compared**

In every crisis, it is essential that government and public-sector leaders provide a calming down story. An effective crisis communication should shape public perceptions and channels public emotions and collective behaviour in positive directions. Some scholars (Boin et al. 2020) call this “meaning-making”. It combines the various tools of political communication written (press releases, legislative briefings, staff emails), verbal (speeches, press conferences, media interviews, debates, vlogs) and symbolic instruments (visiting sites and facilities; engaging with victims, responders and staff; and attending funerals and memorial services).

The COVID-19 crisis government communication of both analysed countries: Spain and Poland, provides a sizeable list of avoidable errors, which the above quoted scholars have correctly specified as follow: “prolonged prevarication, confused and contradictory messages, too much talking, not enough listening, maintaining a facade of being in control, making promises that cannot be kept, and initiating blame games”. Below the authors have unpacked communication failures of COVID-19 government communication in Spain and Poland, and its national security implications.

Both countries are comparable in terms of population – Spain 47 million inhabitants in, and Poland 38 million. However, the administrative and legal structure sets completely different conditions for the implementation of an effective pandemic communication strategy. Relatively better-developed system of healthcare is a competence of Spain’s autonomic regions. However, these are at various levels of economic build up and were differently hit by the virus. It can create tensions between the regions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.elplural.com/politica/espana/castilla-leon-acusa-ayuso-romper-acuerdo-cierre-perimetral\\_251864102](https://www.elplural.com/politica/espana/castilla-leon-acusa-ayuso-romper-acuerdo-cierre-perimetral_251864102) (dostęp 10.05.2020).

The real confrontation became visible when contagion data were questioned<sup>2</sup> and when Madrid's Superior Court of Justice has overturned the movement restrictions imposed by the central government<sup>3</sup>. Postulates for an independent evaluation by a group of international and national experts on the actions of the Government and the 17 autonomous communities have also been risen<sup>4</sup>.

This way, the decentralised approach in designing the anti-virus policy could give rise to an opinion that "Spanish politics has lacked any consensus or spirit of collaboration in managing the coronavirus crisis. While the national government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has faced accusations from rivals of lying about death rates, the regional government in Madrid run by the conservative Popular Party, has attracted equally fierce criticism" (Badcock, 2020).

On the other hand, the centralised approach of Polish government anti-covid strategy seemed to be more efficient. Nevertheless, further research would be required to explore the reasons for this initially striking consensus on government's solutions being forced, despite legally dubious decisions, massive debt creation, etc.

Both governments have communicated with the general public via four channels: the head of state, the Prime Minister and ministers, and as well – local governments.

## Spanish government communication

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The role of **King of Spain** played in the anti-covid-19 pandemic can be seen as much different from the role played by the Polish President. It results from the unique roles they play in particular political systems of the countries. The Polish President, involved in the ongoing presidential campaign and a day-to-day political conflict in Poland, took a highly active position on detailed aspects of the pandemic and the current state of affairs, while the Spanish King focused his messages on health issues and the unity of the nation.

However, taking under consideration the corruption allegations<sup>5</sup>, which appeared against the former king during the coronavirus crisis, and the fact that the government coalition party Unidas Podemos has recently provoked a debate on the role of the Monarchy in Spain, have caused that this picture might get more complex in the nearest future. Nevertheless, the Monarchy has been proving its stabilizing role since the fall of the dictatorship in Spain.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://okdiario.com/espana/8-datos-oms-sanidad-comunidad-que-demuestran-que-virus-retrocede-madrid-6258649> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7wr0q3> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lainformacion.com/asuntos-sociales/cientificos-medicos-lancet-carta-presion-investigacion-independiente-gestion-covid-politicos/2815753/> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN24Z2B5> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

Spanish **Prime Minister's** Pedro Sanchez role in the communication strategy to fight the pandemic may be in short described as: pledging that the government is doing everything to beat the surge in COVID-19 cases that has hit the nation, but this communication has been vividly changing throughout the pandemic.

After the first case of coronavirus on the Spanish territory was detected in the Canary Islands at the end of January 2020, the Spanish government took a rather balanced strategy to confront the virus. It communicated no heavy preventive measures like mass tests, social distancing, obligatory masks use or restriction of movements and lockdowns. The socialist president of the coalition government Pedro Sanchez stated: "Spain has a strong health system and a network of alert and detection with professional experts, who from the first-minute work following the recommendations of the WHO"<sup>6</sup>.

One week after mass demonstrations of March 8, strongly supported by ministras of the socialist government, Pedro Sanchez announced the state of alarm for the whole country calling for nation's unity and responsibility (and later introducing one of the toughest lockdowns in Europe). It has lasted until late June when "new normality" was introduced.

After presumed normalization of the situation, in his speech accusing the extreme-right opposition *Vox* of using the virus in order to overthrow a legally elected government, Sanchez declared: "We have defeated the virus". In October, facing record-high infections of the pandemic's second wave, he has called for another state of alarm for a period of more than 6 months, which would "correspond only to scientific criteria"<sup>7</sup>. Pedro Sanchez proudly announced that the first state of alarm and the lockdown "allowed to save 450 thousand of lives"<sup>8</sup>. He also strongly underlined the importance of the European Union's necessity of action, by stating: „This time Europe must save Europe". Undoubtedly, this is a huge argument for the Spanish political scene's unity, as expectations of financial aid are enormous<sup>9</sup>.

However, insufficient tracking of the outbreaks has been identified by experts as one of Spain's main failures in dealing with the aftermath of the first virus wave. To address that situation, Sanchez announced<sup>10</sup> 2,000 military personal trained to carry out contact tracing would be made available to the country's 17 regions to help stem the tide of the virus. A similar move was undertaken by the mobilisation of the Polish territorial defence forces.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.elmundo.es/salud/2020/02/01/5e354c72fdddf45498b4618.html> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/gobierno-estado-alarma\\_0\\_1404159633.html](https://www.vozpopuli.com/espana/gobierno-estado-alarma_0_1404159633.html) (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMAvcwEIJMo> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20200620/sanchez-sube-numero-vidas-salvado-politica-gobierno/4992003470.html> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2020/0825/1161205-spain-army-tracking-covid/> (dostęp 10.05.2020).



**The Spanish Ministry of Health** and the country's Health Emergency Coordination Centre seem to be on the front line of the communication campaign<sup>11</sup> and they are all the time confronted with media accusations<sup>12</sup> regarding incompetent and poor management of the virus crisis. For example, considering doubts regarding the lack of government's action before Sunday, March 8, the health minister Salvador Illa claimed that the change in the situation in the health crisis occurred only "on Sunday evening" (with a "very significant increase in cases in Madrid and Vitoria" and that "there was no other determining factor in the measures taken than the public health"<sup>13</sup>). According to jurists, the government did not have a solid legal basis to suspend the demonstrations, without imposing the state of alarm first. Devoting people from their fundamental right to demonstrate could not be an option.

Furthermore, the Spanish government initially has imposed filtering of questions of journalists in its virtual press conferences excluding direct dialogue with the ministers concerned. This practise was later abandoned after the pressure of journalists' associations<sup>14</sup>.

All in all, Spain's government response to the coronavirus has been criticised as insufficient or late by several international organisations and newspapers (Tremlett, 2020) as well as by the local opposition.

## **Polish government communication**

The anti-COVID communication strategies of the Polish authorities have been completely dominated by political priorities. For the ruling party PiS (Law and Justice) to maintain power in the long run, it was necessary to win the presidential re-election by its candidate, President A. Duda. The broad participation of the electorate of older voters could have contributed to this. The government insisted that these elections take place in May, but as a result, the deadline was postponed to June and the second round, to July 12.

To mobilize the electorate of older voters, both the President and the Prime Minister, contrary to the opinion of experts, preached that the pandemic had already been brought under control and there is nothing to fear. "The effect was easy to predict. People, encouraged by liberalism and the arrogant carelessness of government officials, went on holiday en masse, sunbathing without caution or having fun at weddings and 18th birthday parties. With this luggage, they returned to work and schools" (Woleński, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/efdadd97-aef5-47f1-91de-fe02c41a470a> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/entre-todos/participacion/sanchez-illa-y-simon-el-trio-de-la-mayor-ineptitud-incompetencia-y-negligencia-202038> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2020/03/08/5e6567c421efa045038b4689.html> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

<sup>14</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/coronavirus-spanish-government-yields-pressure-journalists-and-agrees-live-press-conferences-0> (dostęp 10.05.2020).



Hence, when the second wave of the pandemic came in the fall, it was difficult to convince citizens to disciplined compliance with sanitary regulations (masks, social distancing). The government's politically dominated communication strategy undermined the primary goal of effective communication as formulated in the WHO recommendations - to build public confidence in the rightness and effectiveness of actions taken by the government to contain the epidemic. The following quotations from the speeches of government officials illustrate the above conclusions.

**President Andrzej Duda**, when on June 24, 2020, on the occasion of his visit to the United States, stood at the podium at a press conference in Washington, he proudly emphasized that he was the first leader of another country to visit the United States "after the pandemic".

During one of the June pre-election meetings, **the Prime Minister** was convincing the gathered: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe that the epidemic situation has been brought under control because there are fewer and fewer cases. Go ahead to the polls on July 12. It is safer than going to the store, the post office, the church or anywhere else every day" (Walewski, 2020).

Also in October, when the second wave of the pandemic aroused more and more panic, the Prime Minister at the session of the Sejm, convinced MPs that Poland would go through the second phase of the pandemic with a "dry foot". Both press commentators and the Marshal of the Senate strongly undermined this unjustified optimism of the Prime Minister in a television interview; "We lose over a hundred lives a day. Talking about 'dry feet' is empty propaganda" (TVN24, October 22).

**The Minister of Health** "took over as the communicator informing the public about the progress of the epidemic in the first stage of the Pandemic. Like the President and Prime Minister, he tried to reassure public opinion about its potential scope and effects. However, when it turned out that he might be involved in a corruption scandal and nepotism, he had to step down at the end of September 2020.

Another Minister of Health has already been confronted with the second wave of the pandemic. On September 29, P. Walewski publishes an article in the "Polityka" weekly with a meaningful title: "The strategy of fighting covid has fallen. It is now new". In the October issue of this widely read weekly, J. Wolenski points to (in our opinion) the main reason for the failure of the government's communication strategy, writing: "There are many indications that the Ministry of Health manipulated the data by lowering the size of infections and deaths. Until July, it was dictated by election propaganda" (Woleński, 2020).

## National security implications of the tourism industry crisis

Tourism and security are interrelated and inseparable. The security of the tourists is the primary concern of every host government (Olsen 2016) because of it only where they feel safe that they will spend and visit again. On the other hand, however, the security of citizens of the host country comes always first, as the current economic state of most countries suffering COVID-19 pandemic shows (Cetin, 2020). It represents a problem because governments have to come up with ways of raising foreign earnings from tourism industry to raise money to service the national debt and keep the economy afloat. At the same time however, they have to protect own population from the danger of foreign tourists transmitting the deadly virus from abroad. It demands a kind of fine-tuning in the communication policy of the central and local governments (OECD, 2020).

One of the solutions has been to simplify government regulations for the tourism industry to attract more traffic. However, in the times of spread of COVID-19 global pandemic, it has raised questions of what effects lower barriers for tourists have on the national health security of the host country. These are the two important challenges for the communication policy of both analysed countries.

Tourism and travel to Spain as well to Poland is a vital part of the nation's economy. In 2018, Spain as the second most popular tourist destination worldwide earned almost EUR 180 billion from more than 80 million international tourists who visited both mainland and the Canary Islands. Tourism, directly and indirectly, supports approximately from 12% to more than 20% to the country's GDP and almost 3 million jobs, which makes it top Spain's industry.

The total share of tourism in generating the national GDP in 2018 was 4% and the total expenditure of domestic and foreign tourists in Poland amounted to PLN 62.2 billion. Each zloty generated in the tourism industry contributed to the generation of additional PLN 4.3 of added value in the entire economy. The industry is also an important element of the labour market in Poland and maintains a total of nearly 1.36 million jobs.

### Spain's tourism crisis

Economic data are shocking. According to the Spanish statistical bureau (INE), only 204 thousand foreign tourists visited Spain in June 2020. This was a drop of 97.7% from the same month in 2019. They spent 133 million EUR in June 2020, e.i. only 1.4% of the last year's amount. In the peak of the season, the number of international tourist coming to Spain in August 2020 (2,4 million) fell by 76% compared to the last year. This means the cumulative loss of 42,4 million visitors to the country in the first eight months of 2020<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/frontur/frontur0820.pdf> (dostęp 10.05.2020).

Furthermore, even though travel restrictions in the Schengen area have already been lifted, the no-enter policy for the best paying customers outside the EU remains. Out of 150 countries allowed to visit Schengen zone before the pandemic only 15 abide. Travels of the US, Middle East and Russian citizens are still limited. Noticeably, until recently (October 2020) the travel policy of EU countries has not been unified. For example, the Polish government first announced forthcoming restrictions and then restricted flights to Spain in the high touristic season, by no means adding to negative effects. This kind of uncoordinated communication within an economic union undoubtedly put pressure on its member countries and weakens it as a whole. Another issue is travel restrictions for seasonal workers, most of whom are migrants, usually living in overcrowded conditions, thus favourable for the virus spread.

An important part of the international tourism to Spain concentrates in the Spanish islands: the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands. What is interesting these regions were not equally hit by the disaster.: *Las Islas Baleares* lost 85,4% of visitors, while *Las Canarias* only 63.2% accumulative in the eight months.

## The crisis of the tourism industry in Poland

The losses of the Polish tourism industry are still (October 2020) difficult to estimate. According to the report of the Polish Economic Institute, 28 per cent general tourist traffic in Poland took place in July and August. Therefore, the actual value of the losses to be incurred by the Polish tourism industry will be known only after the summer holidays, that is at the end of this year's season (*Tygodnik Ekonomiczny PIE*). Their size will certainly differ depending on the specific region of the country. Coastal towns with the highest summer traffic may experience less severe effects of the pandemic than other voivodeships where traffic distribution is less dependent on the season.

According to preliminary estimates of the Central Statistical Office, in the first quarter of 2020, the expenses related to the travel of domestic and foreign tourists in Poland, compared to the corresponding period of the previous year, were lower by approx. 17%. In the case of one-day visitors – their expenses in Poland amounted to approx. PLN 6.6 billion and were lower by approx. 14% than a year ago<sup>16</sup>.

The actual amount of losses of the Polish tourism industry in terms of foreign tourism (outgoing and incoming) is also still unknown. Proportionally, however, they will be smaller than in the cases of Spain, Portugal or Greece, where the share of tourism in GDP is in the range of 13-20 per cent. In Poland it is about 4-5 per cent. Losses in this sector will depend primarily on when tourist traffic will be fully restored and how quickly the number of travellers will start to grow after the restrictions are lifted.

<sup>16</sup> Money.pl. *Kryzys w turystyce. GUS szacuje straty*. 28.04.2020.

Poland's tourism industry, threatened by losses in the millions and a huge number of job cuts, changed its structure as a result of the pandemic. The foreign travel segment will continue to experience a decline. However, a new tendency has emerged – an increase in interest in domestic tourism, local businesses, i.e., agro-tourism, guest houses or companies organizing trips to intimate, niche places. For this purpose, the Polish Tourist Organization has prepared the program “Rest in Poland – safely”, i. e. certification of facilities providing accommodation services for tourists.

## Conclusion

The above comparative analysis of pandemic communication strategies of two countries of the European Union, both sharing bad memories of the authoritarian rule of the past, with strong presence of the catholic church, but with differently fledged democratic systems, allows us to conclude that, in both cases, the communication policy of the central authorities was dominated by political priorities.

In Spain, they result from a strong conflict between the ruling socialist party PSOE (with its extreme left coalition partner Unidas Podemos) and the conservative party Partido Popular, which dominates in some regions (especially in Madrid). Despite the initial agreement, appears that the above conflict practically makes it impossible to conduct a coordinated and thus more effective campaign to fight the second wave of the pandemic. Not to mention that on October 28, Spain's newly emerged far-right Vox party has called out thousands of supporters to protest the government's handling of the coronavirus. Also earlier, the government's lack of decisive action was visible before massive political gatherings of the March 8.

As in the case of Spain, also in Poland the pandemic communication strategy of the government has been almost completely dominated by the political priorities of the ruling party, such as the PiS candidate winning the presidential election (May – July), saving the ruling coalition from collapsing by reconstructing the government and submitting to pressure from the catholic church over abortion – and thus retaining power. Although the ruling parties in both countries have completely different visions of the state, the mechanism of their actions in the face of the virus threat has been alike.

Such domination of political priorities meant that in the case of both countries, similar errors and omissions in the anti-epidemic policy can be observed, such as:

- downplaying the threat by prophesying that the emerging threat is not very dangerous,
- maintaining a facade of being in control,
- sending confused and contradictory messages,
- making promises that cannot be kept,
- granting insufficient coordination of activities at the central and local level.

A significant difference in communication strategies in both countries results from the differences in administrative structures and the scope of constitutional competences of local administrative authorities. In Spain's democratic system, it is an indisputable fact that the power of the regions in this regard may only be limited in favour of the central government by introducing a state of alarm, which is subject to parliamentary scrutiny and thus open discussion. Otherwise, decisions of the central government may be appealed to the independent courts and cancelled. In Poland, the scope of centralization of power is much more central government depended, which enabled and facilitated single hand decision-making binding throughout the country. The application of unconstitutional solutions and activities in Poland also seems to be easier. However, their accumulation may lead to internal tensions, compounded by communication errors, and consequently, to weakening national security.

Errors and shortcomings in the communication strategy in both countries significantly contributed to the deepening of the economic breakdown (including the tourism sector employing millions of people). They have also paralysed the health service, caused crowd gatherings and street unrests, as a result significantly lowering the level of national security.

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