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## TRAVELING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC. A SECURITY INCURSION

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**Abstract:** *THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS ONE OF THE GREATEST SECURITY THREATS FACING HUMANITY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM, BOTH THROUGH THE DIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF AFFECTING THE HEALTH OF THE POPULATION AND THE INDIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL STABILITY, AMPLIFICATION POPULISM, NATIONALISM AND EXTREMISM OR THE DETERMINATION OF UNPRECEDENTED DEVELOPMENTS IN TERMS OF UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS, SUCH AS TERRORISM OR HUMAN MIGRATION. PARTIALLY TAKING THE CONTENT OF A PREVIOUS STUDY (PEPTAN, 2020), WE DEVELOP CERTAIN IDEAS THAT HIGHLIGHT THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS ON SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NEW SECURITY CRISIS GENERATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, ALSO EXPLAINING THE MOTIVATIONAL SOURCES THAT LED TO THE BEHAVIOR OF INDIVIDUALS DURING THE PANDEMICS.*

**Keywords:** *COVID 19 PANDEMIC, THREAT, CONSPIRACY, SECURITY, POPULISM, EXTREMISM, TERRORISM, MIGRATION.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The realities of the last decades, but especially the current societal life, characterized by processes associated with the phenomenon of globalization that make their presence felt on all coordinates of the world, have shown, if necessary, that the imperative to ensure security, both individually and collectively, is more current than ever for human existence and for the evolution of the individual according to his own aspirations.

The diversity of security risks and threats facing humanity today, whether the classic ones of a military nature - which have been repowered since February 24, 2014, with the invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine - or the unconventional / asymmetric / hybrid ones - including various forms of cross-border organized crime such as drug trafficking, illegal migration, the proliferation of unconventional weapons or terrorism, coupled with environmental problems or risks or threats specific to the concept of human security, with special reference to the pandemic COVID-19 (Mărcău, Peptan



et. al., 2022a), have produced mutations and exceptional evolutions on the daily behavior of the citizen, but also in terms of individual or collective action of state entities, in order to cope with the unique challenges facing humanity.

The declaration by the World Health Organization in early March 2022 of the COVID-19 pandemic has sent the whole world into a collective hysteria that does not seem to have ended even now, in the context in which the „wave five” of the pandemic started in early 2022, and even if the number of serious illnesses or deaths caused by the new variant of coronavirus is lower than the previous waves, its rate of spread worldwide and the large number of diseases still keep the world’s population in a concern and uncertainty.

In this pandemic context, the authorial approach aims to highlight the fact that the new pandemic is at the root of generating a new global security crisis - with influences in various areas of society - to show how some of the security threats have evolved the worst for today’s society and, last but not least, to make explicit human behavior during this period, which itself generates threats that can affect the balance of the security equation, especially at the regional level.

The research hypothesis starts from the premise that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered by the Sars-Cov-2 virus is one of the most serious security threats facing humanity and an important vector that will underlie the reconfiguration of the societal parameters globally.

The proposed objective is to demonstrate that the direct or side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have spread to all areas of societal life, fundamentally reconfiguring the way of life of citizens.

The bibliography used is represented by scientific articles in various fields (medical, political science, intelligence, security studies) available at this time, but also the open source information found in the public space where the issue of interest is addressed.

The research methodology is based on multidisciplinary given the complexity of the study and the multitude of research areas addressed. Our desire was to present objectively the consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic, using descriptive analysis. Establishing the cause-effect relationship (causality method) in the study of the effects generated by the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to develop a realistic and credible picture of its global consequences, including a security perspective.

### **COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE GENERATOR OF A NEW SECURITY CRISIS**

Under the imperative of the need for security, especially in the medical field, following the adverse consequences of the current pandemic, the states of the world and regional or international institutions have adopted an instinctive behavior to limit its effects (COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020; 10 things the EU is doing, 2022), influencing human existence in all its forms of manifestation, forcibly and artificially reshaping society and imposing the need to adapt humanity to the new existential reality, which has caused the citizen to lose some of his rights and his fundamental freedoms for which he has campaigned throughout history. Although it seems unlikely and very difficult to accept, this pandemic has attacked the foundations of the most precious aspect of modern civilization, human freedom (Fundamental rights in quarantine, 2020), in a context where in most parts of the world the daily way of life has for centuries been characterised by individual and social freedoms for which humanity has known devastating wars fought at immeasurable sacrifice.

Referring to the global societal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are more and more opinion leaders and specialists in political science or security studies in the international public who believe that global society is in a state of security crisis, uncertainty and insecurity that characterize everyday life. Mankind has faced such disasters in its history, if we refer to the Spanish flu a century ago (Ivanovici, 2020) - which killed fifty million people - the famous „Hong Kong flu” of 1968. (Hong



Kong flu, a pandemic that has gone almost unnoticed, 2021) - which caused more than a million deaths - or the „Asian flu” (1968. Pandemic without blockage in the economy, 2020) - which caused more than two million deaths and more several hundred million people in Asia, Europe and America have been affected in terms of health. This time, all mankind reacted under the rule of fear, society’s life being almost paralyzed in the early stages of the pandemic, embracing the rhetoric of an invisible but very dangerous enemy, created by a large state entity seeking global hegemon status, and which would have unleashed a war on all mankind, trying to affect the basis of a citizen’s life, namely his health and his right to health. It is clear that these imperatives are guaranteed at the level of state entities in the democratic world - by their fundamental laws, the Constitution, or by the pragmatic documents that regulate their security policies and strategies - as well as at the international level - by international conventions or regulations - with the main aim of creating a legal and uniform framework for counteracting serious threats - such as pandemics - to public health.

Presenting alternative realities, by perverting the objective truth - the presence of the coronavirus - the „fake news” phenomenon manifested itself with an unprecedented virulence, by using a mixture of well-selected elements, facts and fragments of truth, which interpreted by interested entities that tend to amplify the already existing state of panic and have contributed to the manipulation of citizens. We could even consider that we have witnessed an „information war” in which the conspirators launched into the public space, through sophisticated information tools operating in the virtual space, information aimed at „destroying” the information and information tools of the „adversary”, namely those provided by authorized administrative or medical environments. (Volkoff, V., p. 210)

In this context, in the early stages of the pandemic, the great metropolises of the world, whether we refer to Paris, Munich, Rome, New York, Los Angeles or Madrid, were as empty of population as during the times of world conflagrations, and the activity of the big international companies, of the educational units, as well as almost the entire humanity, has „taken refuge” in the cyberspace, the virtual thus becoming the everyday real. It should be noted, in this context, that for all mankind the consequences of such behavior have caused incalculable damage, no matter from what perspective we relate. Beyond the economic dimension, the consequences of the education deficit are themselves generating new risks to the security of many of the world’s states. (Peptan, C. & Peptan, E., S., 2021)

At the global level, despite the design of financial instruments for rebuilding the world after the COVID-19 pandemic - as is the case with the European Commission's Recovery Plan for Europe - the necessary and much-vaunted state of security has taken on connotations other than the classic „umbrella” concept, calling into question the ability of states to „protect and maintain the rights of their citizens and provide them with an environment conducive to the satisfaction of all their needs” (Troncotă, 2008, pp. 3-4) , a fundamental issue which, moreover, legitimizes the authority of the modern state. In retrospect, we can say that the impact was profound and with major implications in all walks of life, the rules of the game being changed overnight, so that the whole society should adapt to new circumstances in order to manage an unconventional and little-known threat.

In terms of **social stability**, it is noted that in almost every region of the world, poor rural areas or large metropolises, the population has been frightened by public rhetoric about the dramatic effects of the pandemic and the images of death, loaded with emotional content unknown previously, circulated by the media in medical units unable to cope with the large number of patients infected with the new coronavirus. In these circumstances, the majority of the population has adopted a behavior of conscious self-isolation or forced isolation, under the effect of law enforcement sanctions (whose legitimacy has been intensely debated, including in our country) or the much-publicised corrective actions resulting in physical aggression, such as India or Australia, so much publicized.



Public demonstrations, which challenged the isolation measures taken by the authorities in many states, did not have a significant consistency throughout 2020, with a few exceptions, especially in France and Germany, but magically appeared since 2021, often characterized by a particular virulence, such as those held in the major cities of Italy, the Netherlands, Austria (Pavaluca, 2021), Germany (Germany: Opponents of anti-pandemic restrictions, 2021), France (Prundea, 2021) and even in faraway Australia, denouncing „fascism”, „tyranny” and „crown dictatorship” and campaigning to prevent the „division of society”.

The position of the state authorities towards such manifestations was diverse, from statements such as those of the President of France, Emmanuel Macron - who supported the compulsory vaccination of the whole population, in the situation when the new manifestations of coronavirus will not be controlled - , to those of the Austrian President Alexander van der Bellen - who warned that the division of society risks „deepening further” if such measures are imposed - or the mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb, who clarified the incidents caused by protesters as an „orgy of violence”. (Pavaluca, 2021)

The new socio-political context and the whole upheaval caused by the pandemic created the ideal justification for the development of **populism and extremism**. Against the background of fear, uncertainty and difficulties faced by the authorities in managing the pandemic, the extremist parties tried to turn this situation into an opportunity to accumulate electoral capital, reinventing their political message and repositioning themselves around the pandemic and its implications. One of the favorite tools used by extremist party representatives is the entire arsenal of conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus and its use by some states for their own interests, and later about the inefficiency or negative effects of vaccination. Wolfgang Gedeon, one of the former leaders of the extremist party Alternative for Germany (AfD), accused the United States of making the virus in the laboratory and using it as a biological weapon, citing a low rate of infection on the American continent, little in the early stages of the pandemic, compared to other countries such as Iran, Germany or China. (Eckert, 2020) On the other hand, Alain Mondino, a prominent representative of the National Assembly, the far-right party in France, launched the theory that the jews are responsible for creating and spreading the virus in order to „establish their supremacy” globally. (O.V., 2020)

Simultaneous with the evolution of the pandemic, the methods used by extremist parties to speculate and gain political advantage over this situation have diversified and, in an attempt to undermine state authority and minimize the importance and impact of the COVID-19 virus on the health of the population, extremist parties in Europe organised and coordinated a series of demonstrations and street protests in several European cities. In the most important anti-lockdown protests in Berlin, Dortmund and Dresden, representatives of AfD and other extremist groups tried to induce among the participants anti-Semitic, anti-immigration themes and theories specific to the old political agenda, but related to the current pandemic situation. (Goßner, 2020) In Spain, one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, the far-right Vox party has tried to use anti-lockdown protests as a way to oust Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, urging more and more sympathizers to join them. (Coronavirus: Anti-lockdown car protest draws thousands, 2020) In attracting participants and organizing protests, extremist parties used social media platforms Facebook or Twitter. In Germany, the European Patriots Against Islamization of the West (PEGIDA) party went even further, organizing a protest against Covid-19 restrictions online via the YouTube streaming platform. (Volk, 2020) In Italy, the combination of populism and political extremism has led to the creation of a new political movement, the Orange Vests. Inspired by the model of the Yellow Vest insurgency movement in France, it supported the non-existence of the virus, the inefficiency of wearing a mask and the resignation of the government. (Ellyatt, 2020)



Despite attempts to capitalize on the electoral aftermath of the pandemic situation, extremist parties in Europe have failed to find the optimal formula for achieving remarkable results. The lack of a message and a coherent position regarding the virus at the origins of the pandemic, corroborated with the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the authorities in Germany, France, Spain, Greece, etc. in order to combat it, have been the main barriers to maximising the electoral pool, so that in Germany the AfD has dropped from 15% of the population's confidence before the pandemic started to 9% during the course of the pandemic, while in France and Spain the far-right National Front and Vox parties have failed to advance in the polls compared to other mainstream parties. (Samaras, 2020) On the other hand, the health crisis caused by coronavirus has consolidated the position of the parties already in power, while also contributing to the strengthening of the status quo. In this regard, the studies revealed that the lockdown and the measures taken by the authorities increased by 4% the confidence in the governing parties and by 3% the level of satisfaction and the degree of confidence for democracy. (Bol et alli, 2020)

In many parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has created conditions conducive to the shift from populism and authoritarianism to overt extremism, as is the case with the actions of some terrorist groups. In the first part of 2020, terrorist groups, as if frightened by the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have substantially reduced their activity, seeming to be in a pre-hibernation of new campaigns that can be arranged at any time worldwide. The dreaded Al-Qaeda or ISIS groups viewed Europe as a risk zone for their feared fighters, and Boko Haram seemed to have become much more conciliatory with Christian communities in Nigeria, even though it is still actively present near Lake Chad. It was just a matter of appearance because cohabitation with the pandemic led the leaders of such groups, or so-called „lone wolves”, to carry out bloody terrorist acts, such as those in Vienna or Nice, from the end of 2020. In these circumstances, the number of terrorist attacks operationalized in the Member States of the European Union in 2020 is comparable to that of 2019, but slightly lower than in 2018. (European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report 2021 ) Noteworthy is the escalation of anti-Semitic terrorism in Europe and other parts of the world since 2021 (Iancu, 2022), which led the European Commission to develop the European Union's first strategy to combat anti-Semitism and promote Jewish life, which sets out guidelines for „preventing all forms of anti-Semitism and protecting and promoting Jewish life”. (The Commission presents the EU first strategy to combat anti-Semitism, 2021) Also of noteworthy in this context is the adoption in the same year by the United Nations of the „United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy:the seventh review” (The United Nations recognizes anti-Semitic terrorism and disapproves it , 2021), with the UNO considering that „terrorism driven by xenophobia, racism and intolerance is on the rise” and „terrorist organizations are exploiting the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic”, speculating on the „social constraints, political tensions and economic problems facing almost the entire globe.” (UN: Al Qaeda and State Terrorist Groups, 2022)

The flow of **illegal migration**, which terrified the old European continent in the middle of the last decade, was almost abruptly interrupted by the pandemic and was no longer a major source of divergence between states, even though the year 2020 began with aggressive rhetoric from Turkey about keeping on its territory, some 2.5 million Syrian citizens who had left their territories intending to reach western Europe. (Peptan, 2020) The massive presence of law enforcement on the streets of localities in almost all states of the continent, the special duties with which they were endowed during periods of alert or emergency, the isolation of some localities or entire regions for reasons of health security , as well as other restrictive measures adopted, were likely to discourage networks involved in illegal migration, at least temporarily. Like the public events, such activities reappeared after the relaxations adopted at the end of the third wave of the pandemic, affecting the parameters of the security equation in several regions of the world, including Romania. The border area in the west of



the country, especially the cities of Timișoara and Arad, has seen, for the first time in recent years, an increase in crime and street killings committed by migrants (Cristian, 2021), which has terrified the population and led to a decrease in its confidence in state institutions.

The crisis in Ukraine, caused by the invasion of its territories by the armed forces of the Russian Federation (Mărcău, Peptan, et. al., 2022b), has superimposed a new security issue on the one that the whole humanity is facing, the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the direct consequences of this thoughtless gesture, intensely contested and detested by the global democratic community, was the massive migration of the Ukrainian population to other destination states in Europe. At the time of writing this study (June 10, 2022), more than 6.8 million Ukrainians - mostly women and children - have been horrified by the horrors of the Russian military's „special military operation” have left their homeland, swelling the ranks of migrants to free European countries (The flow of migrants from Ukraine, 2022) and generating one of the worst humanitarian crises in the history of the continent, many of whom may be carriers and transmitters of mutations of the COVID-19 pandemic virus or other viruses that can affect the health of the population in the destination countries of Ukrainian migrants. (Angelescu-Stanciu, 2022) In this pandemic context, it is also worrying that „social services and the protection offered to migrant or displaced children” have experienced a drastic decrease, but the negative perception and hostility towards them has increased. (COVID-19 has dramatically reduced the provision of essential services, 2020) However, it should be noted that coherent measures are being taken at EU level to manage the migrant crisis, such as the European Parliament's activation for the first time since its entry into force in 2001, of the Directive on temporary protection of persons affected by the war in Ukraine. (The EU response to Ukraine's refugee crisis, 2022) Although not a novelty that originated in the COVID-19 pandemic, the migration phenomenon in Central America has reached alarming levels, with more than 200,000 illegal migrants - the highest number in twenty years - detained by the responsible United States authorities in March 2022 alone, attempting to cross the border into neighbouring Mexico. The management of this issue, in the opinion of the presidents of the two states involved, can be achieved through coherent bilateral measures, leading to the provision of opportunities for migrants in their countries of origin. (Renshabe & Spetalnick, 2020), which can also lead to the fight against the spread of the virus or its variants, which is at the origin of the pandemic.

The worsening of the living conditions of the inhabitants of some African countries, in the context of the measures adopted to combat the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in the number of migrants using the West-Mediterranean, East-Mediterranean, West-Africa and Central-Mediterranean routes to reach Europe, despite some pragmatic measures taken by European Union, initiated even before the onset of the pandemic, in order to limit this phenomenon. (Migratory flows , 2022)

Added to this is the massive influx of migrants from the Middle East and Central Asia, who, even in the context of the pandemic, continue to move to Western European countries, putting additional pressure on the economies of these countries hard hit by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **BRIEF EXPLANATIONS ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR DURING THE PANDEMIC PERIOD**

The whole planet, rich or poor, politicians or ordinary citizens, leaders of the world's great chancellors or members of communities far from the civilized world, good people or exponents of evil have accepted and „embraced” the existence of a pandemic with unprecedented effects, which can exterminate the human race, and in the name of this nefarious idea they have accepted, even conjuncturally, a degree of submission to the state authorities unprecedented in history.



What caused such behavior of mankind? It is a question that can be answered in a multiple key.

First of all, it could be the need for security, seen from a medical perspective, as an existential necessity nowadays, which acquires a complex and relative character under the impact of the unique risks induced by the pandemic. It is clear that the health of the individual is, today, one of the most valuable values for any person, and the one who can ensure his health, specialist or medical institution, is perceived as the „hand of God”, at whose request he is willing to voluntarily cede some of his civil rights.

In other words, mankind has witnessed a cyber-mediated mass transmission, not only of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, but rather of public debate about it and its medical effects on global society, the various conspiracy theories and promoted „fake news” influencing in a nefarious way both citizens’ perception of the pandemic and their behaviour. Often characterized by a coherent and logical structure that supports the veracity of the information released in the public space - an essential requirement for achieving the intended purpose - the social communication did not allow the recipient - often unfamiliar with medical issues and with a low level of knowledge of issues at societal level - to carefully analyze the source of origin and the logical-argumentative structure in order to determine the degree of truth of the information conveyed, as required by the rules of correct information ( Muntean, 2019), on which he can design his daily behavior. Moreover, the abundance of information, via the Internet, has made it impossible to discern what is valid for the consumer lacking a thorough guide to understanding the intrusion of virtual reality into real reality. Metaphorically, we could say that the planet has been subjected to a „collective blindness”, achieved by infecting the minds of its inhabitants by transmitting memes - units of information in the human mind - that have fundamentally changed the behavior of the citizen and even power relations at the global level (Dicu, 2020), the architect of this reconfiguration, unanimously and conventionally accepted, the pandemic being not yet overcome today.

Last but not least, we can say that this „servile” behavior of mankind towards the effects of the pandemic could be motivated by the desire to return and benefit from a high quality of living standard, seen as an indicator of ensuring the personal protection of citizens in compliance with international regulations, which is part of the human security dimension. It is well known that in today’s society, threats to the quality of life are considered security threats - such an approach is found in the acceptance of the National Defence College of Canada in 1991, which states that „ security is the preservation of a lifestyle acceptable to citizens” (Troncotă, 2008, p. 6.) -, a theory that must be accepted even by those who see in the imposition of extreme measures, in the name of keeping under control and removing the harmful effects of the pandemic, a last chance for humanity to reinvent itself, to start over and return to normalcy after so many unfortunate consequences - dead or persons with life-long sequelae - the media explosion of fake news, conspiracies, despair or frantic enthusiasm (depending on which side of the barricade we are on), or after the riots of those who still want free people.

As far as is known, the medieval plague (Defoe, 1985) or the more contemporary Spanish flu pandemic (Spinney, 2020) had similar stages of development to the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of medical and population response. The plague epidemic of the 14th century was more than 1000 times more aggressive than today’s pandemic, if we were to relate, strictly statistically, the number of deaths to the total population of Europe. Surprisingly, now, at the beginning of the third millennium, health institutions have not been able to successfully cope with this pandemic, which has been going on unchecked for a long time, even though they had got used to prompt and correct responses to other pandemics (IS-DA, EBOLA, SARS) which they had found a way to counter.

From the perspective presented, guaranteeing the security of the citizen, his own life, as well as his right to health, are implicit desideratums of state entities or international institutions, diminishing the degree of access to what the generic concept of health is considered by security strategies of modern



states a real security threat. The pandemic first made the world aware that life and health are the most precious human resources, that „the preservation and care of life is a fundamental duty of every human being” (Filip, 2017), and, on the other hand, demonstrated once again that the traditional concept of security associated with „defence” or „military factor” must be addressed beyond this dimension to what is essentially „human security”, even if the effects of the military clashes are devastating on it, as it is the case with the recent crisis in Ukraine.

In conclusion, we can say that the hierarchy of needs established by Abraham Maslow is, this time too, respected: the need for health and security remain the basic priorities of any individual, while individual freedoms are located at a higher level of the pyramid, that of self-esteem or respect, which will be accessed after the basal needs have been satisfied.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic, if we look at the global range and its exceptional speed of propagation, must be seen by the whole world as a serious threat to global security, amplified by the general panic caused by the news spread by traditional media and social media about the number of deaths and official data showing the effects of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

The world experienced major turmoil, not necessarily in December 2019, when severe acute respiratory syndrome was discovered in Wuhan, China, but especially, a few months later, in areas where it spread rapidly from Asia, Europe and North America, where the effects were devastating. The World Health Organization declared the global pandemic on March 11, 2020, and so far it has covered more than two hundred countries. There is no indication that the virus will end like its predecessors SARS (2002) and MERS (2012), especially since its derivatives are present in more and more regions of the world, Delta variants - much faster and easier to transmit. (Andreescu, 2022) or Omicron – „extremely contagious” and which causes „unprecedented increase in the number of infections globally” (What we know about the Omicron variant, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been / continues to be a security threat to the rest of the world, as confirmed by both medical professionals and world leaders or international bodies involved in managing its effects.

In real terms and moving away from an ideological approach to the origins of coronavirus, the current pandemic has shown the true valences and real meaning of what we call global human security. It has been shown that no land border, no great military power or economic capability have succeeded in preventing the spread of the virus to the most diverse coordinates of the world. The complexity of the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic requires, once again, paying special attention to the natural and social conditions in which mankind manifests itself. In the absence of such desirable behaviours, the indirect effects of the pandemic may leave undesirable traces in terms of social stability or the strengthening of extremist attitudes, which themselves represent the potential germs of actions that may have an impact on security parameters at national, regional or global level.

There are many assumptions about what the world will look like and what the legacies will be, in the next decade, caused by untimely and unpredictable changes that began in 2020, with the emergence of the pandemic, which are based on assumptions about its evolution, which seems to know no limits to its manifestation. Despite all the measures taken globally, to return to the state of normality so much desired by the citizens, one thing is certain, the world has changed and nothing will be the same as before the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 6.3 million people died and about 533 million people infected with coronavirus, See: Coronavirus infections (COVID-19) 87.08.2021 CNSCBT, available at <http://www.cnscbt.ro/index.php/situation-at-global-level-updated-daily/3203-situation-coronavirus-infections-covid-19-03-06-2022/files>, accessed: 05.06.2022





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