

# The Fall of Communism & Its Effect on the Environment of Eastern Europe

## Background

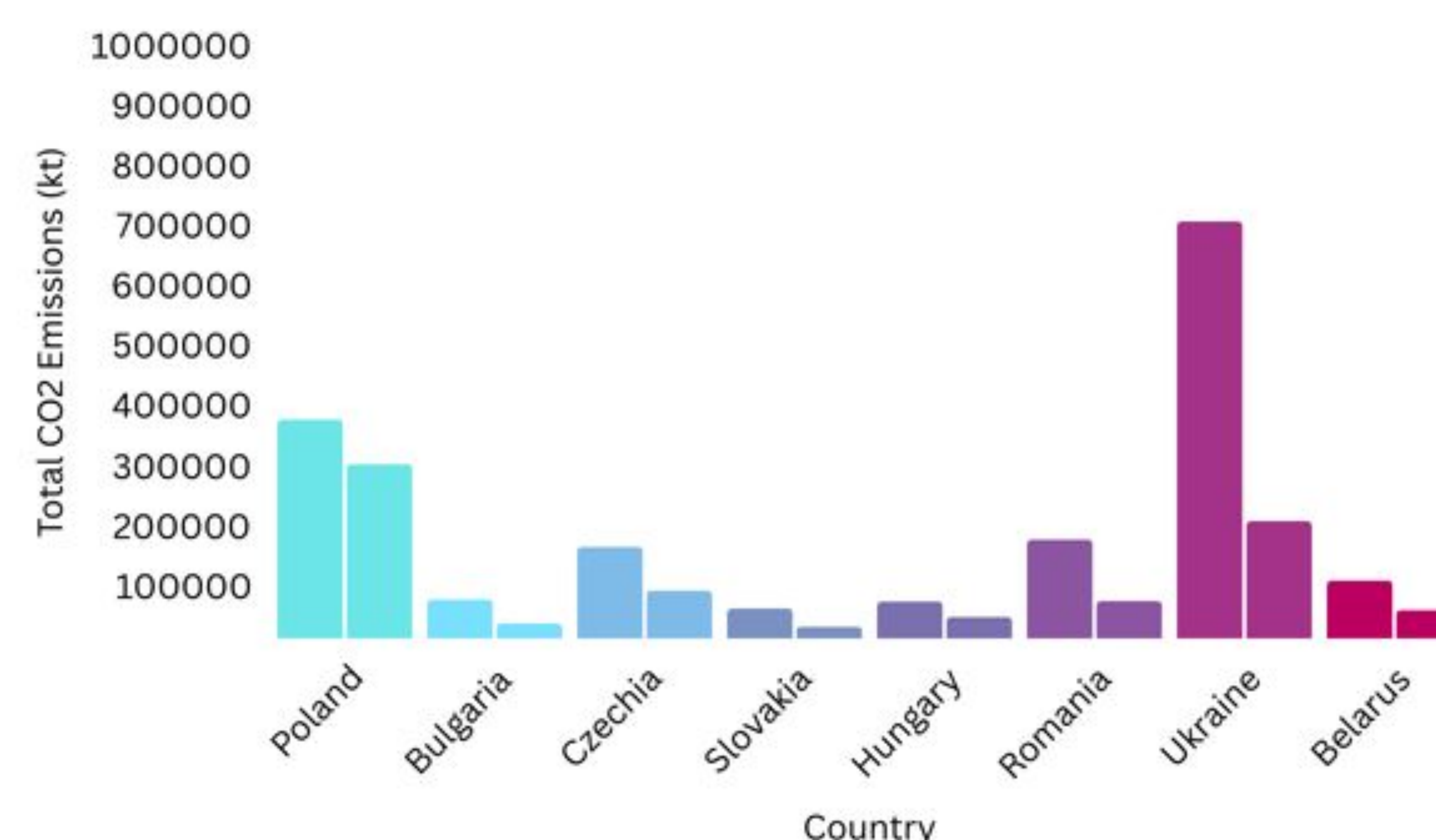
- From the end of World War 2 until the early 1990s, much of Eastern Europe (including parts of the former USSR) were heavily influenced by/under communist governments.
- Communism heavily emphasized state-controlled production, meaning all goods were produced within the country. Imports usually came from other Communist controlled countries. Imports from all other countries were heavily controlled and had high tariffs on them, so it was rare to buy international goods.
- Communist governments prioritize economic growth and increased production over anything else and used any means necessary to produce goods in the cheapest and fastest way. These cheap methods were usually the most harmful to the environment, leading to significant pollution and ecological damage
- Since the disbandment of the USSR and the collapse of communism in (most of) Eastern Europe, many of these countries have joined the European Union and/or the United Nations. These organizations have stricter environmental regulations and standards.

## Methodology

- UNFCCC data of CO2 emissions from 1990 and 2021 from 8 Eastern Bloc/Warsaw Pact countries: Poland, Bulgaria, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, and Belarus.
- Peer-reviewed articles that discuss differences and observations of the area under different policies.
- Comparing policies from Communist regimes and European Union/UN Environmental policies

## Findings

Graph depicting CO2 emissions in 1990 and 2020 (in Kilotons)



- By 1949, Eastern Europe was under communist control. Governments adhered to the Marxist principle of natural resources. Marx stated that natural resources had no real value, their only purpose was to serve humans. Humans could use the resources as they wished, according to their own needs.
- Additionally, the Cold War was in full swing by this time. Communist governments were focused on military excellence in addition to industrial/agricultural excellence. This further contributed to heavy air and water pollution.
- Citizens living in the Communist bloc did not like the ecological damages their countries were enduring, and protested against the rapid depletion of natural resources and excessive emission of greenhouse gases.
- In contrast, the EU has prioritized a common environmental policy since 1972.
  - Some of their key initiatives include the European Green Deal and the European Climate Law.
  - Their four general principles include Precaution, Prevention, Rectifying at the source, and “Polluter Pays”
- The EU hopes to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

## Discussion

- As it can be seen in the graph, the 8 countries have all significantly reduced their CO2 emissions in the past 30 years.
- The most impressive emission reduction was in Ukraine, where their emissions were reduced by almost 75%.

## Conclusion

The combination of citizen initiatives to protect their country’s ecology and environmental along with reformative EU policies have clearly helped achieve these lower emission levels. If this pattern continues, the EU will be on track to becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

## References

All references can be found at the QR code below:

