



**FWF** Austrian  
Science Fund

**Care, Control, and Biopolitics:  
Reckoning with Covid Governance**

**University of Graz, 28-30 April 2026**

This conference is organized in the frame of the FWF Elise Richter project *Reckoning with Dictatorship: History, Memory, and Justice in the Czech Republic after 1989*. While that project examines how Czech society confronts its authoritarian past, the historiography of communism in which it is embedded supplies useful analytic tools for understanding the biopolitics of the Covid crisis governance. Indeed, reading official sources against the grain; reconstructing social and political practices of surveillance and self-surveillance, censorship and self-censorship; tracing the construction of legitimacy under fear; mapping compliance and dissent; analyzing the subordination of the judiciary to executive power; and studying the role of intellectual elites and the media in legitimizing state narratives helps illuminate how certain domination practices operated under the Covid regime. An opening keynote by Toby Green will set the broader horizon for this intellectual endeavor.

Drawing on research methods anchored in the study of authoritarianism, memory politics, and the biopolitics of modern governance, the conference will discuss how decisions were made and implemented, how they were presented to the public and experienced by ordinary citizens in everyday life, and how they are now rationalized or contested. It will examine what the gaps or continuities between then and now reveal about legitimacy, accountability, and the resilience—or fragility—of the rule of law. By foregrounding the biopolitical logic that translates care into control, it will also allow us to draw lessons for democratic crisis governance on how to balance the protection of public health with the preservation of pluralism and civil liberties. Taken together, these discussions will probe the mechanisms by which the Covid regime enacted care as a technology of power, and reflect on the institutional and intellectual designs required to sustain open debate in future emergencies.

**Tuesday, 28 April**

16:15–16:25: Welcome & Practicalities

16:25–17:45: Toby Green: Covid-19, or The World-Historical Crisis in Humanity – Keynote and discussion

17:45–18:30: Reception

19:30: Dinner for the participants

### **Wednesday, 29 April**

09:30–09:40: Muriel Blaive: Care as Control, or the Biopolitics of Crisis Governance: Why This Conference?

#### **09:40–11:20 Panel 1 — From Communism to Covid: Authoritarian Repertoires**

Chair: Ana Kladnik

Milan Hanyš: Cultural Memory, Nationalism, and Pandemic Governance in Early Covid-Era Czech Republic

Victoria Shmidt: The Covid Measures in Visegrád Countries: Re-Establishing a Global Colonial Order?

Marián Lóži: Back to Scientific Governance? Public Epidemiologists in Czechia and Slovakia during Covid: Echoes of the Communist Past

Discussion

11:20–11:40: Coffee

#### **11:40–13:20 Panel 2 — Science, Models, and Authority**

Chair: Zorica-Iva Sirocic

Maximilien Lacour: In Defense of Public Health Scientists as Advocates: Early Covid-19 Decision-Making in the UK

Laurent Muchielli: The Covid Doxa: Scientific Utopia, Commercial Interests, and Antidemocratic Drift in Western Countries (via Zoom)

Michael Casey: A Shroud for Covid: The Medicalization of Politics

Juliette Rouchier: Political Opposition “Based on Science” During the Covid-19 Pandemic (via Zoom)

Discussion

13:30–14:45: Lunch for the participants

#### **14:45–16:45 Panel 3 — Architecture of Control: Law, Exception, Authority**

Chair: Jovana Cveticanin

Marina Aksenova: The Biopolitics of Covid and the Rule of Law

András Bozóki: The Normalization of Crisis Governance: Permanent State of Exception in Autocratic Regimes

Klaus Kraemer: How Do State Authorities Act under Existential Uncertainty? Hypotheses on the Social Logic of Political Decision-Making Processes during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Jenin Younes: From Public Health to Information Control: The Legal Battle Over Covid-19  
Speech (via Zoom)

16:45–17:05: Coffee

**17:05–18:45 Panel 4 — Lived Experiences of Language, Memory, and Propaganda**

Chair: Simone De Angelis

Muriel Blaive: Covid as a World of Meaning: An Oral History of the Conference Participants

Nadine Buchmann: The Novel Language of Covid

Vladan Jovanović: Pandemic Propaganda, Corruption, and Political Convergence in Serbia

Discussion

19:30: Dinner for the participants

**Thursday, 30 April**

**09:30–11:10 Panel 5 — Information as Policy: The Public Response and the Issue of Legitimacy**

Chair: Toby Green

Caitjan Gainty: Refusal, Risk, and Trust: Health Skepticism in Marginalized Communities

David G. Robertson: Science Studies and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Tad Tietze: Crisis, Authority, and Social Retreat? Political Legitimacy and the Covid-19 Response

Discussion

11:10–11:30: Coffee

**11:30–12:30 Closing session: Has Precautionary Authoritarianism Become Our Unsurpassable Horizon?**

Chair: Albin Sybera

General Discussion:

12:30–13:30: Lunch for the participants (buffet)