



**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

- Juliette Rouchier: Political Opposition “Based on Science” During the Covid-19 Pandemic (via Zoom)
- Maximilien Lacour: In Defense of Public Health Scientists as Advocates: Early Covid-19 Decision-Making in the UK
- Laurent Mucchielli: The Covid Doxa: Scientistic Utopia, Commercial Interests, and Antidemocratic Drift in Western Countries (via Zoom)
- Michael Casey: A Shroud for Covid: The Medicalization of Politics

Discussion

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

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

Chair: Jovana Cvetičanin

- Marina Aksenova: The Biopolitics of Covid and the Rule of Law
- Klaus Kraemer: Communities of Apprehension: The Intransigence of Indivisible Conflicts and their Epistemic Closure during the COVID-19 Crisis
- 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

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