

Summary Report of the International Conference on “Risks in the Risk Society: Old and new vulnerabilities in the age of Covid-19”

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Abstract

The present report summarizes the proceedings of the International Conference “Risks in the Risk Society: Old and new vulnerabilities in the age of Covid-19”, that was held virtually on February 23, 2021. The one-day conference had been co-organized by the Social Research Centre for Religion and Culture (SRCRC), Dept. of Ethics and Sociology, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece and the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The hosting contributions examined the economic, social, psychological and ethical-anthropological effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic, with a special focus on the emergent social reality of the most vulnerable population groups, along with the way the concept of ‘vulnerability’ is renegotiated in an era of global risk and uncertainty.

Keywords: Ulrich Beck, Second Modernity, World Risk Society, Manufactured Uncertainty, Global Risks, Covid-19 pandemic, Vulnerability

Living in a World Risk Society: Global Risks, Local Vulnerabilities

Ulrich Beck chose the conceptual framework of ‘Second Modernity’ to sociologically approach the ambivalences and risks of a world that is becoming dense and extremely complex. His analysis marks an attempt to map the transition from the early stages of modernity to the contemporary and still emerging socio-cultural manifestations that

compose “world risk societies” in times of ambiguity (Beck 1992; 1994; 1999; 2000; 2014; Beck and Lau 2005; Sørensen and Christiansen 2013; Tsironis 2018). In his own words, this theoretical background describes “our present historical phase, in which modernity has become reflexive and is now modernizing its own foundations” (Beck 2004a, 430; see also Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003).

The German sociologist emphasized the need of a paradigm shift in social sciences so that the analysis would go beyond the territorial reference of early modernity and encompass the continuous interchange between the global and local perspective; the ‘glocal’ interactions of an interconnected, multimodal world (Beck 2009a; Beck and Grande 2010; Tsironis and Almpani 2020, 6). He rather suggested “a cosmopolitan turn”, the development of a new methodological cosmopolitanism as a way of deepening the sociological analysis, by opening up and redrawing boundaries, by transcending old dualisms and the polarity of the relations between ‘us’ and ‘the others’, and not least by rewriting in cosmopolitan terms the relationship between state, politics, and nation (see Beck 2003; 2009b; 2010; 2011a; 2012; Beck et al. 2013). The cosmopolitan perspective of Beck’s theory identifies the transition from a politics centered upon national states and international security to a *risk politics* that is *post-international* and denationalized (Beck 2004b, 143-46; Beck and Sznaider 2006; Beck and Levy 2013).

Beck argues that what differentiates the social reality in Second Modernity is that our political and social systems are being reconfigured by global risks which derive from human activity and the techno-industrial development itself: nuclear and ecological risks, technological risks, economic risks resulted from radicalized modernity and insufficiently regulated financial markets, and so on (Beck 2011b). In other words, these risks are no longer conceived as inevitable external realities, but as (unintended) side-effects of human intervention (Tsironis 2018, 226). Modern societies are therefore confronted with a “manufactured uncertainty” that implies not just the fear of particular hazards, but also the realization of living in a “world at risk” and being constantly exposed to the unpredictable and the uncontrollable (Beck 1994; 1996; Giddens 2003, 26; Possamai-Inesedy 2002). According to Beck, the everyday experience of cosmopolitan interdependence consists of the awareness of the “hard-to-evaluate risks and inescapable uncertainties” (Beck 2004b,

144) that have become irrevocably apparent and generate reflexivity or 'self-confrontation' (Beck 1994, 5) at societal and individual level.

As a global crisis of unexpected size and consequences, the situation in light of the coronavirus showed very clear how truly interconnected our world is, transforming the image of a 'global neighborhood' from a metaphor to a reality. The Covid-19 pandemic bears all the characteristic features of a global risk. First, it is *delocalized*, as its consequences are not constrained by geographical boundaries, but they have deeply shaken societies and human lives all around the world. Second, the overall consequences of a pandemic (social, economic and political) are in principle *incalculable*. And third, it is distinguished by an element of *non-compensatability* compared to the risks of early modernity, as the destructive impact of the virus – translated into loss of human lives – is irreversible (Beck 2009b, 52; Holley 2020). This global risk is subsequently turned to a 'cosmopolitan moment', being presented by mass media at a global scale as a traumatic experience, a "real-life thriller in everyone's living room that tears down the walls of national indifference, overcomes the greatest geographical distances and creates a kind of cosmopolitan solidarity (for this moment of time)" (Beck 2009a, 12; Holley 2020).

Social research has shown that the Covid-19 pandemic does not only constitute a global sanitary crisis, but a crisis with universal social and political implications which should be treated as a moment of rupture that will 'metamorphose' (Beck 2016) our lives, our societies and our world. According to Pleyers (2020), the emerging challenges and debates in the field of sociological analysis are the following: i) reflecting upon the social dimensions of the pandemic, ii) monitoring and analyzing the ways different political systems and national governments have responded to the crisis, along with the strengths and limitations that their political handling reveals, iii) understanding the way the lockdown measures have affected individuals and societies, and analyzing how social relations are being renegotiated and new forms of solidarity are being forged in this peculiar context, iv) and reassessing the alternative futures and pathways of 'being in the world' that may come out of this global crisis. The pandemic has unveiled another ambiguity of a "world at risk": while exacerbating the existing inequalities and vulnerabilities (as the burden of its consequences is unbearable for the

socio-economically disadvantaged), it is precisely the holisticity of its consequences from which no human being can be exempt that eradicates those inequalities and fosters a cosmopolitan approach to “a reality that is at the same time local, national, regional and global” (Pleyers 2020, 2; see also Brown and Galantino 2020).

Summary of the Conference Proceedings and Panel Discussions

The International Conference “*Risks in the Risk Society: Old and new vulnerabilities in the age of Covid-19*” was held on February 23, 2021 with a view to provide a forum of dialogue for scholars and researchers from diverse backgrounds (social scientists, economists, theologians, philosophers, psychologists, educational researchers, etc.) to reflect upon the broad effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, paying special attention to the emergent social reality of the most vulnerable. The interpretative approach to the concept of ‘vulnerability’ in times of crisis and global uncertainty was at the core of the panel discussions. The one-day Conference was co-organized by the Social Research Centre for Religion and Culture (SRCRC) and the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The SRCRC, founded in 2016, is an institute embedded at the Department of Ethics and Sociology, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Its members are conducting research at national and international level on issues related to religion, society and culture. Co-Chairs of the International Conference were Dr. Viera Zozuláková (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia) and Prof. Christos N. Tsironis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece). Due to the pandemic restrictions, the event took place online via the Zoom webinar platform.

The interdisciplinary e-Conference hosted contributions from Greece, Slovakia, Switzerland, Ireland, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Romania and Lithuania. The contributing papers examined the social transformations that the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fields of family life, education, child well-being and social care of the elderly, along with the urge for a ‘Culture of Care’ in post-pandemic societies. The social and political parameters of the pandemic’s consequences on the refugee population and human trafficking, the risk of de-humanization of humanity amidst a biopolitical rhetoric and

strategy towards the transition of old and new value systems, and the challenge to guarantee human and ecological well-being through sustainable economic degrowth, were also among the themes addressed. The present report lays the ground for some of the subsequent expert chapters in this issue.

Professor Christos N. Tsironis (Assoc. Prof. of Social Theory: modernity and Christianity & Director of SRCRC, Faculty of Theology, Dept. of Ethics and Sociology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) initiated the discussion on the concepts of *risk* and *vulnerability*, in times where both individuals and socio-economic organizations find themselves in an “existential jet lag” (Tsironis 2020a). Risk societies are running through a radical social transformation, a ‘metamorphosis’ toward a liquid nexus of interrelations, leading to “a new kind of society and personal life” (Beck 2000; 2016). According to him, we are already living in a post-pandemic society, in the sense that it is unlikely for our societies to go back to what they were, therefore we need to reflect on how the pandemic reshaped the world and what kind of society we really want. He presented and analyzed 4+1 theses on risk and vulnerability in post-pandemic societies: i) the macro-social perspective: *Living, suffering and healing in an interconnected world*, ii) the progress and development perspective: *Doing a stressful puzzle*, iii) the political perspective: *On physical distancing and civility*, iv) the welfare perspective: *The future at risk – the vulnerable children*, and iv+i) the microsocial perspective: *Will we ever blow the candles in our birthdays again?*

Prof. Tsironis highlighted that every pandemic is associated to a social paradox; it proves to be as old as humanity, yet so novel. Although people were persuaded that they could control all civilization’s parameters through technology and advanced sciences, the virus still caught them by surprise, making them feel vulnerable and defenseless towards the invisible enemy. The (social) vulnerability in this context denotes the difficulty of persons or communities to face a crisis, a risk or the ontological insecurity (Giddens) caused by internal and/or external factors. Our social experience in world risk societies is defined by the fact that “we are not just beings affected by risks, but mainly we are risk-takers facing the risks; we are agents, writers, actors, victims and aggressors in the stage of history”. The challenge that lies ahead is to combine long and short-term measures (financial, healthcare, welfare

policies, recovery funds), with a focus on ensuring a balance between systemic integrity and people’s dignity of life, while a new perception on the acceptable balance between economic and social risks is equally necessary. The interlinkage of economies is the one side of the coin, while the other is the interweaving between ethics, finance, economics and social reflection.

Dr. Viera Zozul’áková (Dept. of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia) indicated the economic impact of the on-going pandemic and the subsequent consequences at a psychological level for the individuals. She talked about the inefficiency of the adopted lockdown measures, presenting findings from the Stanford University research “Assessing mandatory stay-at-home and business closure effects on the spread of Covid-19” (see Bendavid et al. 2021) and cross-comparing the policy responses to the coronavirus among Slovakia, Norway, Finland and Denmark (countries with nearly the same number of inhabitants that present significant differences in Covid-19 case rates and case fatality rates). Dr. Zozul’áková highlighted that the way the pandemic is experienced by the most vulnerable is deeply unequal and unfair. She also presented data from the Oxfam research *The Inequality Virus*, demonstrating that the Covid-19 crisis is widening the existing gap between wealthy and poor, and noting that it could take more than a decade for the world’s poorest to recover from the economic downturns of the pandemic.

Prof. Paul Dembinski (Director of L’ Observatoire de la Finance in Geneva, founded in 1996, and Chair of International Strategy and Competition at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences in University of Fribourg, Switzerland) stressed the fundamental difference between *risk* and *radical uncertainty* in economic sciences. He clarified that while the sociological approach of ‘risk’ encompasses uncertainty, the two terms are opposing for economists and finance people, as risks can be quantified using probability theory. ‘Radical uncertainty’ is used, on the contrary, to define something that cannot be probabilized. Prof. Dembinski pointed out that purely transactional societies cannot cope with vulnerabilities and uncertainties, they can only manage risks through mutualization. The single answer to (radical) uncertainty is solidarity, which serves as “a blank cheque in a world where insurance is the contract”. He noted, in that regard, that the pandemic

constraints have smashed the spectrum of our social relations and networks. In his own words, “we are living on the stock of what we had before”, as we are moving to an increasingly polarized way of interaction. Referring to recent data regarding the living conditions and resilience strategies in Geneva, in light of Covid-19, he argued finally that the pandemic has changed, to some extent, our perception of the surrounding world, making us open our eyes to the reality of the most vulnerable that was already there.

Prof. Thierry Collaud (Chair of Moral Theology and Christian Social Ethics, and Deputy Director of the Interdisciplinary Institute of Ethics and Human Rights at Faculty of Theology, University of Fribourg) agreed on the fact that Covid-19 brought to the fore structural injustices and the lack of solidarity. He discussed the pandemic consequences to the older population, analyzing the case of seniors in nursing homes, in times where a new balance between the societal, institutional and personal risks needs to be found. Nursing homes face the risk of collapse, the burnout of the caregivers, the de-personalization of care and a series of other challenges (internal rules, procedures and quality assessment, professionalization of the interaction, regulation of the interactions with the outside world, regulation of the way seniors interact with each other). Therefore, in their effort to reduce the structural risks, institutions end up diminishing the liberty of the people they take care of. Prof. Collaud concludes that nursing homes should instead embrace another kind of risk: *the risk of play*, the risk of what D. Winnicott calls ‘potential space’ – the risk of finding more space for liberty/freedom to interact.

In the second panel, Prof. Michel Veuthey (Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Prof. at International Relations Department, Webster University, Geneva and Prof. of International Humanitarian Law at University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis) illuminated the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the victims of human trafficking. The Ambassador remarked that the pandemic crisis increased vulnerability in all its forms while, at the same time, it raised the difficulty for trafficking victims’ identification, protection and rehabilitation, along with the prosecution of traffickers. His proposal is that all stakeholders need to be mobilized (including the survivors) through an integral approach, in terms of a legal,

humanitarian, social, security and religious perspective. Prof. Veuthey underlined that exclusive approaches to combat both trafficking in human beings and Covid-19 are bound to fail. Inclusive prevention and protection measures (where no one is excluded from the right to life and human dignity), strategic partnerships among national governments, civil society, academia and the private sector, creating platforms of dialogue on judicial and law enforcement cooperation, developing and sharing best practices, engaging with religious leaders and communities, they are all pivotal elements in the fight against human trafficking “in this vulnerable time”.

Prof. Niki Papageorgiou (Professor of Sociology of Religion and Ethics, SRCRC, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) and Mr. Manolis Dabarakis (Staff Member of the International Catholic Migration Commission in Geneva, currently deployed at UNHCR Greece, and PhD Candidate in Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), presented the key political and social parameters of the Covid-19 effects on the refugee population in Greece – one of the most vulnerable social groups that are confronted with further discrimination and inequalities regarding their living and housing conditions, the access to appropriate medical care and education, and in safeguarding their rights more broadly. The authors analyzed the recurring conditions of refugees’ vulnerability and how these are reflected in the greater risks they have to address during the pandemic, as this multifaceted crisis is unfolded. The imposition of border restrictions, the EU ‘hotspot’ approach, the EU-Turkey statement, the government strategy and the Covid-19 lockdown were the parameters they further discussed.

Prof. Lidia Guzy (MA Anthropology Programme Director and Lecturer of South Asian and Indigenous Religions at the University College Cork, National University of Ireland) indicated the risk of de-humanization of humanity vis-à-vis a continuous state of global and local restrictions and fears. As founder and Director of the Marginalized and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre (MEWSC), established in 2013, she referred to humanism as an endangered worldview in the times of Covid-19 pandemic. Her contribution discussed the current geopolitical restrictions “as emerging colonial strategy of a new, mainstream, and dominant discursive regime, raising the risk to marginalize

humanistic values and thus, to endanger humanity as a whole". As she particularly noted, within the political Covid-19 emergency, European humanistic values and cultural practices risk to be marginalized, criminalized, eroded and endangered by the technocratic, transhuman and corporate-industrial powers of global health politics. Based on an existential psychology approach, prof. Gabriel Roşeanu (PhD Lecturer of Psychology at the Department of Psychology, University of Oradea, Romania) presented the results of his study on the impact of interpersonal distancing and social isolation on subjective well-being and mental health. Prof. Roşeanu concluded that life satisfaction has decreased during the Covid-19 period, while the psychological disturbances (anxiety, perceived stress, and depression) have considerably increased. His findings also showed that people's perception of the governmental policy control is not statistically significant in alleviating interpersonal distancing, limiting psychological disturbances or increasing their well-being.

The hosting contributions of the third panel paid special attention to the way the pandemic consequences are mirrored in the fields of family life, child well-being and education. Prof. Brigita Kairienė (Professor at the Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania) initiated the discussion on the challenges families are facing during Covid-19, presenting comparative data from five countries (Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain and Turkey) on the changes in parenting behavior and daily family life. The presented data are part of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project "Digitized Education of Parents for Children Protection" (DepCip Project's research) that took place in the spring of 2020, aiming to identify challenges and possibilities for parenting in the Covid-19 framework. The analysis of research findings reveals culturally related parenting responses to uncertain situation(s), and various coping strategies in overcoming unexpected difficulties. The reconciliation of work and family, ensuring distance learning of the children, has been one of the great challenges of the pandemic reality.

Prof. Mar Cabezas (Assist. Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Salamanca), analyzing the case of Spain, emphasized on how the age bias, along with a specific collective imaginary on childhood, end up generating measures and messages that normalize the

discrimination and invisibilization of children's needs and rights (or 'the specific goods of childhood') in favor of the adults' ones. She also talked about the increasing risk of child domestic abuse and the negligence of children's mental health and their educational needs as results of the early and tight lockdown policies. Prof. Wojciech Świątkiewicz (Professor of Sociology at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland and the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra) and Prof. Maria Świątkiewicz-Mosny (Assist. Professor at the Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland) shared some sociological reflections on distance learning in the Covid-19 era, through the case study of Poland. They indicated the cultural patterns of renegotiating the relationship between school and family during a pandemic, in times when "school leaves school" and goes on the educational platform, focusing on the threats and opportunities that arise from the new educational and parenting practices. Is the (pandemic) school turning to a new family member? The competences of teachers, the students' involvement, the parental presence, the adopted practices of indirect communication, the 'deinstitutionalization of the school' and the parallel 'deprivatization of home', were among their stressed points.

At the last panel discussions, Prof. Pieter Lievens (Assoc. Prof. at the Department of Social Work, Karel de Grote-Hogeschool in Antwerp, Belgium) talked about sustainable development and 'degrowth', underlying the emerging question on how solidarity, social justice, human dignity, welfare and social care in general, will be guaranteed in a post-growth future, where human and ecological well-being is prioritized over GDP-growth. Prof. Lievens noted that there can be no merely technological fix to address systemic challenges (including the Covid-19 pandemic), and he analyzed the three pillars on the basis of which social work could be an agent of embracing degrowth, so as social equity and ecological sustainability to be achieved: i) Social work as an agent in collective therapy – *therapeutic working* (harm reduction and crisis resolution), ii) Social work as an agent in the maintenance of social order, and iii) Social work as an agent in achieving a new, just, and sustainable future – *transformational working* (envisioning new models of welfare). Through a Triage Ethics perspective, prof. Manfred Spieker (Professor of Christian Social Sciences, Department of Catholic Theology, Osnabrück University, Germany) examined the thesis of the inevitability of human

culpability, analyzing the decisive criteria for allocating survival chances and mortality risks in the Covid-19 turbulent times, when ICU beds and ventilators are not sufficient for all patients who need them. According to him, discrimination based on the age bias and the quantification of expected life-spans, are among the most common mistakes on this area.

Prof. Petros Panagiopoulos (Assist. Prof.: Pastoral Ethics in scientific applications, SRCRC, Faculty of Theology, Dept. of Ethics and Sociology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) referred to *risk ethics* and the ethical challenges raised by the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasizing the moral hazard of withdrawing from our responsibilities to the contemporary weak ones. He remarked that although the pandemic underscored our fragility and our interconnectedness in the most emphatic way, the structures of injustice and inequality seem unfortunately to remain in place. Referring to the widening of global inequalities, he particularly mentioned that “we are not all together in what we are going through, and the bitterness of abandonment is experienced mainly by those who remain invisible by the morality and egoism of “capable-ism”, ignored by those who are considered capable members of society”. He clarified though that this is not a purely new pathogenesis, but the result of timeless negligence towards those who do not meet the standards of societal acceptance.

Prof. Panagiopoulos added that the pandemic tested the strength of our most powerful system(s), it pushed the boundaries of science to shake the illusion of our overoptimism and revealed the magnitude of our weaknesses and complacency. However, it should not be the realization of our inherent precariousness that reminds us of the moral obligation “to recognize the co-stars in our life as our fellow human beings”. The commitment to mutual assistance strands not only from the vulnerability of our common nature, but also from the duty of synergy; the duty of building a more humane society. Concluding this panel’s discussion, Dr. Martina Vuk (Postdoctoral Researcher at Interdisciplinary Institute for Ethics and Human Rights, University of Fribourg, Switzerland) addressed the question of how to live a flourishing life in times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and how to reconceptualize vulnerability – and more broadly idea of ‘the other’, reflecting upon the intersection of *flourishing* and *vulnerability* not as mutually excluded but as related concepts that they are both integral to the human existence.

Concluding Remarks: Revisiting Social Reality in Post-Pandemic Societies

Reality is becoming cosmopolitan in its core, making us confronted with risks that show no consideration for national boundaries or time-bound constraints. As Ul. Beck points out, “it is this interdependence of dangers and insecurities produced by civilization – together with the resulting dominance of publicly staged risk perception in the mass media – that constitute the crucial difference from the previous epoch. Thus, all levels of world risk society display a *compulsive feigning of control over the uncontrollable*” (Beck 2004b, 137). Manufactured uncertainties and “the combination of knowledge and non-knowing of global risks” (Beck 2009b, 53) make society more reliant than ever on security and control. The sociologist notes that although it may sound ironic, it is precisely *the unknown unknowns* which generate the major disputes over the definition and construction of political rules and responsibilities, with the aim of preventing the worst. Therefore, modern societies focus their interest on mapping their future course, undertaking themselves the re-assessment and elaboration of the terms of their action – “the Not-Yet-Event as Stimulus to Action” (see Tsironis 2018, 227).

The Covid-19 pandemic made clear that fragility, vulnerability and liquidity became constituting elements in our inescapably interconnected world. The coronavirus crosses the roads – highways and small alleys – we have made so as to produce, to exchange, to make profit, to relax (Tsironis 2020a). Nevertheless, the “Covid-19 (pandemic) is a disease not only of globalization, but also of anthropocene” (Hanafi 2020). In other words, the “*Coronapocalypse* becomes a looking glass mirror through which we see ourselves, our societies, our institutions and structures, in the cold light of a crisis that reveals the failings we have learned to ignore under the façade of cozy convenience” (Roudometof 2020). At the same time, the pandemic has opened new horizons of possibilities, it gave us new orientations and may be seized as an opportunity to reshape our societies in a different way. Ul. Beck has written about the “hidden emancipatory side effects of global risk” – the thesis of emancipatory catastrophism, emphasizing that beyond their destructive consequences at national level, global risks may create opportunities for cosmopolitan communities, in the sense of ‘new normative horizons’ and the emergence of unwritten but imperative norms (Beck 2015;

see also Beck 2016, 162). With his own words, “despite all the national moats and boundaries, the construction and acceptance of a dimension of global danger creates a common space of responsibility and action” (Beck 2004b, 138).

Considering the Covid-19 crisis in light of reflexive modernization, we realize that while no one is exempt from the pandemic consequences, the results are not distributed evenly. Geoffrey Pleyers (2020) notes in that regard: “Social scientists have come up with facts that are as hard and as unquestionable: while the virus itself is a biological agent that may infect any of us, we are deeply unequal when confronted with it. Public health policies and social inequalities matter at least as much as the way our bodies react to it when it comes to the virus’ deadly consequences.” Professor Tsironis adds that, under these terms, “we should not lose sight of the poorest among the poor, the excluded among the excluded, the most vulnerable individuals and groups within our communities”. According to him, the recovery after the pandemic does not only constitute an economic issue. It is deeply political and implies the democracy’s ethical perspective as inequalities across and within countries are rising. He specifically refers that the question ‘how we are going to get sustainably out of the recession spiral’ complements the question on how we are going to share the cost of the restart both *within* and *between* the states (see Tsironis 2020b). Besides, the close interlinkage of world economic systems and local economies sketches a dynamic world map “where no state, no economy, no man is an island” (Tsironis 2021).

Some scholars and academics argued that the pandemic has generated a cycle of de-globalization, echoing the strong comeback of nation states as the key players in controlling the response to Covid-19 outbreak (see Pleyers 2020). The International Conference “Risks in the Risk Society: Old and new vulnerabilities in the age of Covid-19” highlighted (global) *synergy* and the development of multilateral international collaboration as crucial preconditions to overcome the pandemic challenges. The openness to ‘the other’, the recognition of the common good as balancing rule between socio-political autonomy and interdependence, the non-negotiability of human dignity, the advocacy against structural injustices, the advancement of solidarity at the institutional level and the cultivation of a culture of care among people, were among the Conference’s concluding remarks. Referring to the social

experience in post-pandemic societies, Sari Hanafi (2020) stressed the need to generate more global solidarity and a more humanistic globalization. Prof. Hanafi underlined that “we will not be able to simply revert to ‘business as usual’ after we get through this crisis, and the social sciences should work to both analyze and actively engage in addressing these new realities”. As Prof. Christos N. Tsironis eloquently put it in his contribution: “Often, during a war, people unite against a common and visible enemy in a strange way, despite the divisive tendencies. Survival becomes a collective vision. Today, the danger is mutating into something different: the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic could be routinized, normalized and categorized *as an individual fate*. In this case, the most vulnerable and the weakest members of our society will face the most severe consequences at the greatest possible cost. In this case, society as a whole will risk the disintegration of the foundations of its own social contract.”

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