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## **COVID-19 PANDEMIC – SECURITY CHALLENGES, RISKS, AND THREATS**

**Summary:** COVID-19 pandemic exposed all the shortcomings of global and national societies. The world was taken by insecurity, isolation, and confusion, which consequentially carry certain security challenges, in a combination the world has not previously seen. Some of these challenges are a consequence of the pandemic itself, but another part of challenges arose from the reaction of countries to the pandemic and changes in the everyday lives of individuals. COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected every segment of society. Because of closures and isolation, there are vestiges of a large economic crisis which would be a problem for itself, but it may come while the health crisis is still yet to pass. On the other side, we saw dysfunctions in media, in a sense that we had a flood of false information, controversies, and confusion, which combined with too few true and relevant information caused individuals to poorly get by in an otherwise complicated situation, as well as the crisis of authority and credibility in public discourse. The fact that we are facing an event with a magnitude hardly comparable to any precedent can in a certain measure justify poor pandemic management, but it remains questionable why society, global and local ones, in a time of such development and achievements of every kind couldn't react better, at least in a sense to prevent that changed everyday life from becoming a changed reality and the way of living. If that happens, it will bring new challenges, risks, and threats, some of which we probably cannot predict yet, because this is an unprecedented event which is still underway.

**Key words:** COVID-19, pandemic, security, global society, economy, media, security culture

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic, its prevalence, far-reach, and effects were both shocking and sobering for humanity and its systems. Since the H1N1 influenza pandemic almost 100 years ago, the world has not encountered such an ambiguously devastating pandemic, but while the pandemic of the "Spanish flu" hit the world

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after the catastrophe that was the First World War, it only further devastated the already destroyed countries, societies, and economies, although the mortality from that disease was frightening. The current pandemic came as a bigger shock to both global and local social systems and in a way exposed the shortcomings of those societies. Practically on the first serious test, the globalized modern society has fallen spectacularly, and the full spectrum and scope of consequences still cannot be seen in its entirety because we are talking about an event that is not over yet.

Before COVID-19 took off, everything seemed good and stable. With the exception of a few local wars, the world was in relative peace. In the ideological sense, too, because nominal ideological differences have been overcome due to economic interests. The economy was stable, and, apart from financial crises and recessions, which are a natural phenomenon and a phase of economic growth, its overall global scope grew, and with it the standard of living of its citizens. The development of information and communication technologies has changed the face of everyday life and provided people with comfort and access to a large number of contents. This migration to digital has brought information of every kind to literally every individual who owns a mobile phone, and it seemed that humanity was so informed, networked and advanced that it was able to respond to every challenge, from local to global, with relative ease. And then, eight months after the first cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology recorded in Wuhan, China, today we have a situation where over 18 million people are infected with the coronavirus in the world, while over 689 thousand people have died, economies have almost stopped, as well as all other aspects of human life involving the gathering of people in the same place, and people are in accordance with their social nature, as a rule, built social systems and their elements on the principle of collectivism and gathering. With the exception of digital and ICT, almost every other aspect is either frozen or altered, and such a threat to many different elements of human security leaves severe consequences on people's mental health. And the COVID-19 pandemic has taken away the sense of security of almost every individual in the world, and its end is still not in sight.

Despite the fact that the virus causing COVID-19 is not the most virulent nor the most lethal virus the humankind has faced, a question why this pandemic paralyzed and transformed the world as we know it in such measure arises. The goal of this paper is to research various social aspects, correlations, and causalities that, combined with biological and medicinal properties and attributes of the virus and disease created the situation we are facing, and which will potentially define the way of life, work, education, socialization, gathering, movement, travel and many other elements in the future. On the other side, in addition to endangered individual security of citizens, reactions and measures introduced in nearly all countries and which are restrictive by their nature have negatively affected the level of human rights and freedoms, which multiplied the diverse sense of insecurity. The result is an extremely unfavorable psychological state of individuals, which is the subject of numerous studies in the world, which focus on the physical aspects related to COVID-19, but equally or more on psychological aspects, which is logical, because the pandemic will pass, but the consequences, some of which are long-lasting, will remain. Therefore, it is important for future research to identify the whole specter of conse-

quences of the pandemic, as at this moment it is certain that we are not able to identify many of them yet.

### **COVID-19 as a paradigm of (un)controlled chaos**

In the first information about the new coronavirus and the disease COVID-19, there was nothing to indicate that it would be a factor that would push the whole world into unprecedented chaos. In the beginning, Chinese doctors in the city of Wuhan noticed unusual pneumonia in a certain number of patients, whose origin they could not determine at the time. When Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, shared a suspicion with his colleagues in a closed chat group that the cause of the pneumonia was a virus very similar to the SARS virus, he was taken to a police station a few days later for questioning about "making false comments on the Internet", and he was reprimanded and censored<sup>1</sup>. After that, he returned to work, but several days later he contracted the virus, but unfortunately, with lethal consequences. Li died more than a month after he raised the alarm about the virus similar to SARS. He was among eight physicians punished by the Wuhan police for "spreading rumors"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it seems that China has strictly controlled information on the virus and the disease from the very beginning, which is one of the factors that contributed to the slow and inadequate reaction of the rest of the world. China reacted by placing the entire province of Hubei, which also includes the city of Wuhan, in the *cordon sanitaire* starting from January 23, 2020. However, almost a month passed from the appearance of the first cases of the new disease to the closure of this province, and during that time the disease spread unhindered. According to a study that used air traffic data from January to March 2020 from Wuhan to other destinations with a goal to determine the disease spread model, the conclusion was that the largest number of passengers from Wuhan travelled to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Taipei, Phuket and Seoul. The volume of travel was from 41,080 passengers from Wuhan to Bangkok to 13,727 passengers from Wuhan to Seoul<sup>3</sup>. The researchers stressed that at that moment, there were no restrictions on travel to or from Wuhan, and the research was published before Wuhan was put into quarantine (the paper was published online on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020). The fact that the first recorded COVID-19 case outside of China was in Thailand on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in passenger from Wuhan coincides with the conclusions of this research, and the World Health Organization shared this information in a statement from January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020<sup>4</sup>. The aggravating factor was the Chinese New Year, which began on January

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<sup>1</sup> Željko Bjelajac, Aleksandar Filipović (2020): "Lack of Security Culture in Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic", *The Culture of Polis*, Year XVII (2020), No. 42, 383-399

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Isaac I Bogoch et al. (2020): "Pneumonia of unknown aetiology in Wuhan, China: potential for international spread via commercial air travel", *Journal of Travel Medicine*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa008>

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization (2020): "WHO statement on novel coronavirus in Thailand", January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/13-01-2020-who-statement-on-novel-coronavirus-in-thailand>, 25/07/20

25, and which is the reason for the largest number of trips and celebrations in the most populous country in the world, so although restrictive measures were introduced in China relatively quickly, a large number of its citizens managed to travel outside the borders of China in the time between the onset of the disease and the ban on traffic, which helped cases of new coronavirus infection to appear in other countries, and eventually the disease spread across the planet. Hiding information, unconfirmed information, a lot of misinformation, the impossibility of identifying the "zero patient" and conflicting theories about the origin of the virus and the initial transmission to humans, as well as about the characteristics of the disease caused by the virus, contributed to the destruction of social systems, or in other words, helped to create chaos.

The World Health Organization (WHO), as an umbrella organization for global health care, is an ultimate line of defense from chaos in the domain of public health. Still, it seems that the WHO did not perform that function in the best possible way, and that it hasn't done enough to prevent or mitigate the chaos that followed, even if it did not help create it. The problem with the novel virus occurred when it was clear that the WHO does not have not only the best or the final solution, but no solution whatsoever, and therefore it did not justify its existence and its primary function. Without an own verified doctrine that would respect economic, cultural, social, and civilization attributes of many different countries that are or could be hit with the disease, the WHO accepted unverified Chinese procedures, although there were different opinions and even resistance to drastic measures dictated by the Chinese procedures<sup>5</sup>. The WHO was inconsistent in the recommended model of measures and in their opinion about the measures certain countries apply. The WHO first criticized Sweden for its relaxed approach, only to praise it later. Still, we should bear in mind that this is an unprecedented situation that found the whole planet unprepared, and so the WHO had to react "on the fly" and that created inconsistencies and contradictions. Additionally, it is a separate and much more important question of whether states or supranational organization can allow themselves to be unprepared for any situation, no matter how low the probability is for it to happen?

Measures imposed by different countries varied greatly. Also, the moment when the measures were introduced had a defining effect on efficacy of one country's combat with the COVID-19 epidemic. China reacted with extremely strict measures. In addition to quarantine, other restrictive measures were imposed, such as electronic surveillance, and even welding the doors so the citizens would be physically prevented from leaving, which opened many questions regarding human rights. Nonetheless, when the pandemic began to spread quickly, other countries followed the Chinese model, including Serbia, which introduced very strict preventative measures in coordination with the Chinese experts. On the other side, South Korea, which was one of the first countries hit by the epidemic after China, did not introduce isolation except for infected and their immediate contacts, and with mass testing, they were able to identify the carriers and prevent uncontrolled spread, so

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<sup>5</sup> Željko Bjelajac, Aleksandar Filipović (2020): "Lack of Security Culture in Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic", *The Culture of Polis*, Year XVII (2020), No. 42, 383-399

the example of South Korea is given as one of the most successful in the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>6</sup>. Sweden took a unique approach in not implementing strict closures, but appealing to personal responsibility. The Swedish COVID-19 strategy has thus far yielded a striking result: mild mandates overlaid with voluntary measures can achieve results highly similar to late-onset stringent mandates. However, this policy causes more healthcare demand and more deaths than early stringent control and depends on continued public will<sup>7</sup>. On the other side, Swedish economy continued to work, albeit in a somewhat decreased volume and certainly not without losses. On the other side, we have countries where after the restrictive measures introduced in the early days of the pandemic were relaxed or abolished there was a drastic leap in the number of infected, that even surpassed the worst days during the time when restrictive measures were in place.

Prolonged restrictive measures and the presence of an infectious disease have a negative impact on the condition of individuals, families, smaller and larger social communities. If we could isolate one fact and measure its effect, we would come to the conclusion that it is probably enough that every day, through almost all media, people get information about how many people died yesterday. This type of reporting is characteristic of war situations - in peacetime, the number of deaths is generally never reported. However, in the current situation, the number of deaths from COVID-19 is not only reported on a daily basis, but it has become very important for people to know the number of new cases and deaths from COVID-19. The public certainly must be informed about that since it is an information of public importance, but only its reporting makes the everyday lives of individuals changed. COVID-19 is a dominant topic both in the public and many private discourses, while various medical experts dominate the redistributed media space. Many people work from home, which leads to changed daily routine in functioning of both individuals and their families. In addition to adults, the children are also at home, as the complete education system is moved to television and Internet. Socialization as a part of daily life is stopped, with disease containment measures and with fear from other human beings as potential disease carriers. And when the suspension of basic human rights through disease containment measures, such as freedom of movement, is added to that overall feeling of changed reality, we get extremely complex and fragile psychological state in many individuals, and consequently in their families and further social communities. With the undoubted and justified fear and concern for the health and well-being of their loved ones caused by it, the COVID-19 pandemic is a prolonged traumatic event, the consequences of which we will fully see only when the event ends.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to end until an effective vaccine is discovered, along with effective pharmacological therapy for those who do become ill. About 140 different vaccines are currently in the early stages of development, while

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<sup>6</sup> Željko Bjelajac, Aleksandar Filipović (2020): "Lack of Security Culture in Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic", *The Culture of Polis*, Year XVII (2020), No. 42, 383-399

<sup>7</sup> Shina C L Kamerlin, Peter M Kasson, (2020): "Managing COVID-19 spread with voluntary public-health measures: Sweden as a case study for pandemic control", *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, ciaa864, published online July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa864>

about 20 are in the human testing phase of clinical trials. The vaccine is estimated to be widely available by mid-2021<sup>8</sup>. That would be a fantastic scientific achievement, but that speed brings numerous questions. They are mostly related to safety and efficacy of the vaccine, as well as to whether all the standard procedures in development of a vaccine were followed. The specificity of COVID-19 in relation to other pandemics is that it equally affects all strata of society, all continents and countries, and also has a disabling effect on the economy due to the mode of transmission that is most effective when a large number of people are indoors or anywhere elsewhere where it is not possible to maintain a distance of two meters. The enormous losses countries and companies have, and consequently the citizens, creates a pressure to put COVID-19 under control, and although that pressure is felt by everyone in a certain measure, some have more important role in combatting the disease than others, so the pharmaceutical industry and laboratories are under extreme pressure of various factors, from states, economies and competition, to internal psychological pressure factors that are a consisting part of a process in which you try to be first in the world to arrive at scientific discovery the whole world is interested in. The development of a vaccine would undoubtedly make the world start spinning at the full speed again, but the acceleration of that process must not reflect on the quality and the safety of the final product as a result of hastened declaration of the discovery.

An old saying tells that truth is the first victim of any war. In a situation where the majority of the human population owns a device that can enable them to communicate *en masse* through online software platforms, there has never been more information, but their credibility has never been more questionable. It seems as if everyone believes in everything and doubts everything equally, and this information paradox leads to great confusion, and allows those who are interested in it to manipulate and shape the perception and attitude towards any phenomenon with the frequency and content of informative messages they broadcast. In this regard, improved communication, which is *raison d'être* of the existence and importance of information and communication technologies, did not enable timely, truthful and comprehensive information to citizens so that they would be able to consciously and rationally prepare and adapt to the new crisis situation. One of the factors that influenced it was the novelty of the virus and corresponding lack of knowledge, and in interest of quick information, the first analyses and predictions were made by making analogies with other, known strains of coronaviruses, as well as with corresponding diseases, such as bacterial pneumonia or severe forms of influenza. Given the hypersaturation with a wide variety of information disseminated through social media, even the later scientifically verified conclusions of the researchers failed to overcome the noise that this information hypersaturation has created. The scientific community itself has not come to a single answer to numerous questions about the new coronavirus, while some eminent scientists have expressed sensationalist views on the origin and attributes of the virus in the media. All of that brought a great pub-

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<sup>8</sup> James Gallagher (2020): "Coronavirus vaccine: When will we have one?", *BBC News*, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51665497>, 01/08/20

lic discourse credibility crisis, which can have multiple negative consequences. If an individual loses trust in the system, in this case the information system which is one of the pillars of society, he turns to himself, and searches and consumes informative content in accordance to their own tendencies, value system and existing beliefs and inclinations towards a particular view of the world. That leads to further confusion and misinformation, whose harmfulness is self-evident. On the other level, the public discourse credibility crisis on global level creates the authority vacuum, which will not be possible to reestablish before the criteria for trust in public communications are not redefined. Until then, people will either accept the information they are bombarded with on a daily basis without mental processing, or they will doubt any information until they personally verify it. This opens up space for security risks in terms of manipulating information in order to pursue national or commercial interests that would be specifically tailored to reach each type of consumer, which is not unprecedented, but would have far-reaching consequences in this situation.

COVID-19 stopped a large number of highly profitable industries, which resulted in mass layoffs. Countries that earn most of their GDP from tourism face huge losses and endangered livelihoods. Too many different branches of the economy have ceased to operate, or operate on a significantly reduced scale, from tourism, interstate passenger traffic, catering, but also sports, concert activities, performing and dramatic arts. As a consequence of limited movement of people and epidemiological measures, the demand for fossil fuels has fallen, which has led to a drop in oil prices, and reduced traffic will affect both the automotive and aviation industries. Those whose nature of job allows them to work from home are doing so for several months, which helped achieved the corporate tendency for employees to work from home instead of offices. That decreases the costs on one side, and extends working hours on the other, because it is a widespread practice for employees working from home to be available to their superiors for much longer time than the usual 40 hours per week. Many countries provided financial aid to their citizens and fiscal relief and aid to the economy, but such mechanisms are generally either one-off or time-limited, because not even the richest countries in the world can support their economies for more than a few months. The pandemic already lasts a long time, the fiscal year started with the pandemic, and it is possible that the next fiscal year will start before COVID-19 is contained, which is an unprecedented situation for global economy organized in a way it is now. That creates a possibility for genesis of endangering of the most elementary category of personal security – security of existence.

### **Contextualizing coronavirus as a biological weapon**

Human security is a relatively new paradigm for approaching the security problem. Compared to traditional concepts of security based on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state, human security is based on the fact that the security of each individual is essential for the creation of peaceful and stable societies. The security of an individual has multiple causes and is dependable on interconnectedness of many different phenomena. The basic intent of initiatives or movements

around the topic of human security is to protect individuals and groups from a number of gross deep violations that affect their capability to lead a life of acceptable quality. Thus, human security is focused on identifying and preventing the risks that threaten individuals and groups both in the physical, material sense and the psychological sense<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a fundamental threat to this basic and irreplaceable category of security. Generally speaking, the idea of human security refers to the broadest framework for the protection of human life from all potential forms of its radical endangerment. This idea predicts that all social actors fulfill their social roles, in such a way that when planning their activities, they take care that the fundamental components of human security are not endangered in any way<sup>10</sup>. However, these components of human security are endangered, both by the very nature of the pandemic and by the manner in which the social actors exercise social functions, which violated these tenets by restricting the freedoms and rights of citizens, which are a result of introducing restrictive measures to combat the infectious disease epidemic.

Review of the existing literature on endangering human security points that some of the main threats to it are poverty, unemployment, economic uncertainty, food and water shortages, lethal infectious diseases, lack of access to basic health protection, environmental degradation, natural disasters, violence, crime, terrorism, interethnic, religious and other tensions, political repression, human rights breaches, etc.<sup>11</sup> At this moment, several threats from this short are present and combined, while others, like environmental degradation are present even without the pandemic. But in addition to the pandemic of a deadly disease, we have economic uncertainty, unemployment, potential poverty, human rights breaches, and because of the scope of the spread of the infectious disease there is a threat of lack of access to health care, as nearly all capacities of health care systems are dedicated to combatting the pandemic.

While before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the focus was clearly on threats related to nuclear and environmental security, as well as security from terrorist and cyber attacks, this contagious disease brings biosafety to the forefront. Although this term has several meanings, biological safety is considered as a state of protection of people, animals, plants, and the surrounding natural environment from the danger caused by emergencies, and is aimed at monitoring sanitary-hygienic and sanitary-epidemiological diseases<sup>12</sup>. Biosafety also includes the prevention of misuse (theft) of biological materials (dangerous pathogens and toxins) from research laboratories and their use for terrorist purposes<sup>13</sup>. From the moment the new coronavirus

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<sup>9</sup> Željko Bjelajac (2017) „Ljudska bezbednost sagledana kroz prizmu ljudskih prava i savremenih pretnji“, *Kultura Polisa*, god. XIV (2017), br. 33, 139-154

<sup>10</sup> Željko Bjelajac (2017) „Ljudska bezbednost sagledana kroz prizmu ljudskih prava i savremenih pretnji“, *Kultura Polisa*, god. XIV (2017), br. 33, 139-154

<sup>11</sup> Željko Bjelajac, (2018): „Fenomenološki i etiološki aspekti ugrožavanja bezbednosti“, *Kultura polisa*, god. XV (2018), br. 36, 387-404

<sup>12</sup> Željko Bjelajac (2017): *Bezbednosna kultura – umeće življenja*, Pravni fakultet za privredu i pravosuđe, Novi Sad, str. 155

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 156

appeared, various theories about its origin started. And while there is a scientific consensus that this virus is zoonotic, that is, that there has been no human intervention on it, there is a legitimate concern that another virus, perhaps much more virulent and lethal, could be either created or adapted to be a biological weapon. The danger of using such weapons is not exclusively related to terrorist organizations, but also to countries that would develop such biological weapons. Biological weapons are toxic materials produced from pathogenic organisms, living microorganisms itself or genetically engineered microorganisms used to intentionally interfere with the biological process of a host. It has the potentiality to create a level of mass destruction which is far in excess than any conventional weapon<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, human society is organized so that there are appropriate social organizations relating to the functions that society should perform. In response to threats, we have appropriate protection systems in the form of organized security systems, such as a security intelligence system, which take appropriate measures to eliminate them.<sup>15</sup> However, unlike most other threats, it is realistic that only aggressors would be ready for sudden biological aggression by an unknown pathogen, which in itself implies disastrous consequences for everyone else. Such bleak projection becomes even bleaker with the experience of inability of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and the chaos it caused, so the question arises, is there anything that protects us from such scenario? Still, this tragic event has a strong learning dimension. If we assume that the poor reaction to COVID-10 pandemic is a consequence of lessons not learned from events of lesser intensity, then the magnitude and far-reaching nature of this pandemic should teach individuals and relevant social systems and states alike valuable lessons in protection of security of every kind – from human to global.

### **The COVID-19 pandemic and dehumanization of the contemporary society**

Conceptually, the contemporary society should be solidary and humane. All the processes that took place in previous decades had a goal of removing borders, differences and distance between the people, and when such barriers are removed, people are in better position to help each other and to build a better society. If not, one could ask what did the integration, networking and globalization bring? On the one hand, the answer is clear, and we do not have to analyze and enumerate the benefits offered by the global society. But, if all of those benefits do not have a better and more humane society in their sum, then the society in itself and its elements and processes become exposed in events of great crises. The dehumanization in itself, which is masked by various contents and distractions that occupy the attention in regular situations, becomes clearly visible in irregular situations. Yet, the contemporary society was not dehumanized by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an an-

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<sup>14</sup> K.M.K. Masthan et al. (2012): "Virus as a biological weapon", *International Research Journal of Microbiology*, vol. 2(6), 237-239

<sup>15</sup> Željko Bjelajac (2017): „Prevenција pojave ugrožavanja bezbednosti sa osvrtom na obaveštajne i bezbednosne službe kao nosioce funkcija bezbednosti“, *Kultura polisa*, posebno izdanje, 9-20

cient saying *homo homini lupus est*, which tells us that since the dawn of the civilization people treat other people inhumanely. Simply, a part of the reasons for that lies in the human nature. On the other side, society transformations throughout history had the progress as their goal, and vice versa. The progress, unfortunately, did not bring a significantly better society in a sense of relation to the people, not even in its latest phase. That is a bit paradoxical, as the world advanced so much that the main social topics are increasing the level of human rights and rights of endangered group, and it seemed that exploitation of every kind will become history, or that it will be treated as something extremely bad, and that if in the regular conditions is not such, it will certainly be in a situation when the world is collectively facing a large problem that cannot be solved individually, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, modern society entered the process of degradation, which takes place in parallel with the process of overall progress. The correlation between the degradation of modern society and the dehumanization brought to the front by the pandemic is reflected in the nature of that degradation. The degradation of society is the decline of a system of moral norms that are respected, that is, better said, that should be respected in a society. A social community that does not have in its focus the imperative to respect the family, culture, education, art, sports and other, generally accepted values suffers constant degradation<sup>16</sup>. As the question of the degradation of society is directly tied with morals and ethics, which are human creations, then it shall be added that the imperative of respect must be widened to respecting every individual as an initial factor of a society, without whom there is no family, culture or any other widely accepted social value. Modern scientific and technological progress has made impressive, one might say revolutionary achievements of technical progress. Electronic media, general computerization, mobile phones, music, traffic, and many other technical benefits, created "allegedly" to make life and work easier for modern man, not only classify the alienation as a specific category, nurtured in the "new age" man, but also point and force them not to treat other people as personalities<sup>17</sup>. Such a relationship came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when solidarity among people had to be at its highest level ever, because this contagious disease affected us all equally, and in the same way. However, from the first day and the appearance of mild panic, we had a situation of panicky shopping and stockpiling, which is a direct expression of carelessness for another person and the absolute priority of meeting only our own needs. This example is illustrative because it results in a paradox - if one person buys all disinfectants and leaves nothing for others, it directly increases the risk of being infected because no one around them will be able to disinfect, so the virus concentration increases exponentially literally everywhere around these persons. There are many similar examples and analogies, but they all have in common either only caring for themselves, or a desire to profit from a crisis situation. And to repeat, it was

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<sup>16</sup> Željko Bjelajac, Aleksandar Filipović (2018): „Uticaj masovnih medija na degradaciju savremenog društva”, u: Uticaj masovnih medija na degradaciju savremenog društva, ur. Željko Bjelajac i Aleksandar Filipović, posebno izdanje, *Kultura polisa*, 9-21

<sup>17</sup> Željko Bjelajac (2014): „Alijenacija čoveka u eri naučnotehnološkog razvoja i globalizacije kao uzrok porasta i raznolikosti organizovanog kriminala“, *Kultura polisa*, god. XI (2014), br. 25, 385-396

the same since the existence of civilization, but what is the point of progress if after several thousand years of continuous development, we still do not advance enough in human and moral terms from people from those ancient communities and civilizations? This gives extremely unoptimistic forecasts of human solidarity in the event of an even greater challenge than COVID-19, and we can almost certainly assume that there will be a greater challenge, just as various experts have warned about a possible pandemic for years.

## **Discussion**

COVID-19 exposed all the weaknesses and shortcomings of global society, and its inhumane character. Before the disease spread and threatened almost all countries and all walks of life, the research focus in terms of security and safety culture was on other risks and potential threats. Suddenly, the fear of the nuclear holocaust as the most devastating form of potential global war disappeared, as did the fear of war, because all potential parties in such a conflict are faced with an invisible adversary who knows no borders, no ideology, cannot be destroyed by weapons, and which exists with only one goal - to reproduce and find new host organisms. However, even in such a situation, humanity has neither united nor taken a single stand in response to this challenge. It turned out that the global society, which had never been so developed and specialized before, was terribly unprepared to deal with it. The World Health Organization is just one in a series of organizations that have failed, but as it is the umbrella organization for global public health care, its shortcomings are more visible. The source of these omissions is the fact that the WHO did not use all the possibilities it had at its disposal, mostly in terms of measures to combat infectious diseases and adjusting individual states to act in the same way, which at the same time had to be optimal for this particular disease. Without binding recommendations, individual states applied different measures, with constant bidding on which state acted best, even though there were diametrically opposed approaches. The WHO itself was inconsistent in its views, which is the most illustrative on the example of Sweden, which was initially harshly criticized for its relaxed measures by the WHO, only to be praised after some time, while recommending the same model it has previously criticized.

China has faced the virus first and applied extremely restrictive measures. Following their example, other countries began to impose stringent measures, that first brought gross violations of human rights, and even discrimination which is strictly prohibited by the highest legal acts. Certain states, whose political leaders show autocratic tendencies, used the situation surrounding the pandemic to consolidate their power. Millions of people lost their jobs, and those who managed to keep their jobs started doing it from home, which is a specific psychological challenge. A similar thing happened in education. The Latin word "universitas" itself means "association" or "community", and "universitas magistrorum et scholarium", roughly translated, means "community of teachers and students". That community ceases to exist with moving of the whole education process to television and Internet, and that

again negatively affects the psyche of the children and their parents, particularly the children at educational milestones (first grade of elementary school, fifth grade of elementary school, first year of high school, first year of college). Economy suffered a major blow, and despite of the fact that many countries have granted aid packages to the economy, these are all short-term solutions, and the pandemic has been going on for a long time and its end is not in sight, so we should expect additional social and economic problems as the pandemic continues. The additional economic burden came as a result of people's desire to profit from the disaster, so the prices of products that were not in demand or in widespread use before the pandemic, after the initial shortages, were increased significantly.

Table 1. *Average prices of protective equipment and disinfectants in Serbia before and after March 2020*

<b>Article</b>	<b>Price before March 2020, in RSD</b>	<b>Price after March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in RSD</b>
<b>Protective mask</b>	15,00	75,00
<b>Protective gloves</b>	7,00	15,00
<b>Ethanol 70%, 1l</b>	250,00	350,00

Source: *Authors' estimations*

The table shows the average prices, and in absolute terms they ranged from 7.00 to 25.00 RSD per protective mask, depending on the type of mask and the seller, while gloves were sold at a price of 7.00 RSD per piece before March 2020, while after March 15 and the declaration of a state of emergency, their price jumped to 20 RSD per piece. At the beginning of the state of emergency, there was a shortage of protective equipment, and after the masks reappeared on the market, they were sold for 120 RSD per piece, and there was a case when one protective mask was sold for as much as 430 RSD. As for respirators, no verified data on their prices can be found, mainly because the details of the purchase of such devices are considered business or state secrets. However, the prevailing view is that the manufacturers of these devices did not raise their prices, but that resellers appeared on the market who would sell respirators purchased directly from the manufacturers at multiplied prices to the best bidder practically in the auction process. However, most countries and health care institutions buy devices and equipment directly from manufacturers, so the space for different business behavior is significantly reduced. The prices of essential equipment and devices in emergency situations must not be subject to fluctuations in supply and demand, because it is logical that the demand for them is higher, but countries must intervene in the otherwise free market and limit the maximum price of these products because it is in the best interest of the citizens and society. In doing so, this price should not be determined arbitrarily but should be the product of the price of production costs and the minimum trade margin. Because if it paid off for everyone in the chain to sell the mask in retail for an average of 15 RSD in February, then it would pay off to sell it for the same amount in April of the same year, if not for human greed and inhumane treatment of their fellow citizens.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is both a challenge and a test for this generation of global society. Experiences from the first phase of the pandemic have shown all the vulnerability and fragility of social structures that are the foundations of our everyday life. The deficiency of accurate and too much false information, combined with the incompetence of local, national and global authorities, has created enormous confusion among citizens and thus hampered efforts to tackle the pandemic more quickly. The unevenness of measures in different countries had led to the fact that in the era of erased borders, they are re-established and turned into barricades when it was already late and when the disease spread around the world. Despite the fact that everyday life has changed in a multifaceted sense, it is logical to assume that this is just the beginning, and that the changed everyday life will grow into a changed reality. Events of this magnitude are rare, but not unprecedented, in the sense that, say, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York changed the way we travel, but the COVID-19 pandemic has changed, and will change, the way we live – work, travel, entertainment – to the way we meet other people and develop closer relationships with them, and it takes a special effort to get closer to someone with the mandatory social distance. The totality and far-reaching consequences of this pandemic will also affect many aspects of safety and security culture. This gives special importance to raising its level, because the success of the response to the pandemic, no matter how collective the task, is based on the personal responsibility of each individual. In order for an individual to react properly and in a timely manner, he must have all the relevant information at his disposal in order to be able to make the right conclusion and the right decisions. This should also be the preferred model, because in its absence, states may be forced to adopt draconian restrictive measures, and by doing so, restrict human rights and freedoms. That would endanger the social system and its constructions even further, which clearly showed their fragility during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## ПАНДЕМИЈА ЦОВИД-19 – БЕЗБЕДНОСНИ ИЗАЗОВИ, РИЗИЦИ И ПРЕТЊЕ

**Сажетак:** Пандемија ЦОВИД-19 је разобличила све недостатке глобалног, али и националних друштава. Светом је завладала несигурност, изолованост и конфузија, које последично носе специфичне безбедносне изазове, са каквом комбинацијом свет се раније није сусретао. Неки од тих изазова су последица саме пандемије, али други део изазова настао је као последица реакција држава и измена у начину свакодневног функционисања појединца. Пандемија ЦОВИД-19 негативно се одразила на сваки сегмент друштва. Због затварања и изолације постоје наговештаји велике економске кризе која би и сама по себи била проблем, а може се догодити да до ње дође а да здравствена криза још увек не прође. Са друге стране, дошло је и до медијске дисфункције, у смислу да је наступила поплава нетачних информација, контроверзи и конфузије, што уз премало тачних и релевантних информација доводи како до несналажења појединца у ионако компликованој ситуацији, тако и до кризе ауторитета и кредибилитета у јавној комуникацији. Чињеница да се сусрећемо са догађајем магнитуде тешко поредиве са било којим преседаном из прошлости може да оправда одређени степен несналажења у пандемији, али остаје упитно због чега друштво, глобално и локално, у доба оваквог развитка и сваковрсних достигнућа није могло да реагује боље, макар у смислу да спречи да измењена свакодневица не прерасте у измењену реалност и начин живота. Уколико се то догоди, то ће донети нове изазове, ризике и претње, од којих

неке вероватно још увек не можемо предвидети, јер се ради о догађају без преседана, али и о догађају који још увек није окончан.

**Кључне речи:** ЦОВИД-19, пандемија, безбедност, глобално друштво, економија, медији, безбедносна култура

