

## POLITICS AND CLIMATE CHANGE<sup>138</sup>

English theoretician Anthony Giddens is famous for many books which are very relevant because they address many contemporary and relevant issues.<sup>139</sup>

One of these issues relates to climate change that do not carry with them only environmental, but also numerous other risks and dangers to humanity. Actually, Giddens deals with these problems in his book *The Politics of Climate Change*.<sup>140</sup>

Before we look at the basic thesis on climate change as environmental issues, we will first point out that Giddens's views were derived from the analysis of *globalization*.

When it comes to attitude towards globalization, Giddens points out that globalization is associated with the statement by which we live in one world, but it's not easy to answer how exactly we live and whether the idea is generally valid. He points out those early thinkers had almost completely opposite views on globalization.

Giddens calls those theoreticians who question the phenomenon of globalization - skeptics. In their view, the story of globalization is just – a story. For whatever benefits it brings and whatever challenges and problems it comes upon, global economy is not much different from those of earlier periods, and things in the world develop, just like they did in previous years. Most countries gain only a small portion of their revenue from foreign trade, much of economic exchange is performed between regions and it is not really spread all over the world. So, for example, EU countries mostly trade with each other, and this goes for other major trading blocs, such as the Asia-Pacific and North American. Skeptics are usually leftists, especially the old ones. Namely, if all this is just a myth, the government still cannot control economic life, and the welfare state remains intact. The concept of globalization, according to skeptics, represents an ideology advocated by free-market supporters who want

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<sup>138</sup> Critical review of the book: Giddens, E., *The Politics of Climate Change*, Clio, Belgrade, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> For a more complete view of Giddens's work, and biographical sketch, see: Ritzer, G., *Contemporary Sociological Theory and its classical roots*, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2009, pp. 204-214, 270-277; Ritzer, G., *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Nakladni zavod Globus, Zagreb, 1997, pp. 387-393, 396-399.

<sup>140</sup> Giddens had previously written about the phenomenon of global warming and climate change, and their possible consequences. See: Giddens, E., *Sociology*, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, 2005, pp. 636-641, Giddens, E., *Runaway world: how globalization is reshaping our lives*, Stubovi kulture, Belgrade, 2005, pp. 55.

to abolish the system of welfare and reduce state expenditures. In fact, the world came to be as it was a century ago. By the end of the nineteenth century there was already an open global economy which implied wholesale trade, including trade in currencies.

There are different views, those that Giddens calls - *radicals*. In their view, globalization is not only very real but its consequences are felt everywhere. They point out that global markets are more developed compared to the sixties and seventies in the last century, and that it does not give importance to national borders. States have lost most of their former sovereignty due to globalization of economy, and politicians have lost most of their ability to influence events. This is why it is no surprise that no one respects political leaders anymore, nor is interested in what you have to say, because the era of nation-state is ended. States have become mere "fiction" (Omae).

Finally, Giddens raises the question of *who is right in this debate*, and he thinks that *radicals* are right. Because, the level of world trade today is actually much higher than ever before, and the volume of goods and services is much wider, but the biggest difference lies in the level and flow of financial capital.<sup>141</sup>

The processes of globalization affected economy, politics, technology and culture, for they were influenced by the development of communication system, which started in late sixties in the twentieth century. In the mid nineteenth century, when Samuel Morse used an electric telegraph to send a first message, a new phase of world history began. Until then it was not possible to send a message, without having someone bring it there. The invention of satellite communications marks a no less dramatic break with tradition and history. The first commercial satellite was launched in 1969 and today there are more than 200 satellites in orbit, and each carries an enormous amount of information. Now, for the first time in history simultaneous communication is possible from one to the other side of the world. Other forms of electronic communication, based on satellite transmission, have also been rapidly developing in recent years. By the end of the fifties in the last century there were no transatlantic or transpacific undersea cables for special purposes, and the first to be laid transmitted only less than 100 voice lines, the current transmit more than one million. One hundred and fifty years later, Morse's dots and dashes system (1999) disappeared from the world scene and was abolished as means of maritime communication; it was replaced by a system that relies on satellite technology, which provides for any ship to be precisely located in distress. Current electronic communication is not only a way to transmit news or information in a quicker way - its existence is life changing, both for the rich and the poor. Globalization does not affect only large systems but it also affects

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<sup>141</sup> Giddens, E., *Runaway world: how globalization is reshaping our lives*, Stubovi kulture, Belgrade, 2005, pp. 34-35.

intimate and personal aspects of our lives. So, for example, discussions on family values that take place in many countries only seem to operate outside the influence of globalization, but it is not so. Before our very own eyes, traditional family systems change and transform, and are in crisis, primarily due to increased demands of women for greater equality. It is not known in history that there was a society in which women were about equal to men. This is exactly what a true global revolution represents in everyday life, whose effects are felt everywhere in the world and in all areas of our lives.<sup>142</sup>

Globalization affects all areas of individual and social life. It also involves global climate change, whose influence on biosphere is so evident that it represents the biggest risk caused by human activity and anthropogenic influences. Ecological problems were recognized when the nature, as a result of to its own inability to regenerate from the consequence of human activity, negatively affected the entire life of country, flora and fauna. Therefore, today relationship between man and nature is compromised and this attitude has to change. "Human societies depend on many resources from the natural world – such as water, forest, animal and plant life. They are often referred to as *resources that can be renewed*, because in an intact ecosystem they eventually replace themselves automatically. However, if the balance in the use of these resources is disturbed, there is danger of their complete used up. There is some evidence that this might happen. Many environmentalists are concerned with the difficult situation on renewable resources."<sup>143</sup>

Giddens explicitly notes that the possibility of environmental disaster is still not as immediate as are the risks of a major war, but that it is "equally troubling" because "long, hard, irreparable destruction of the natural environment may have already happened" and we are not "fully aware of such phenomena."<sup>144</sup>

The book *The Politics of Climate Change* (which is the "outcome" of the author's participation in the project "the study of global governance") is divided into nine chapters and, in addition to the introductory section, contains sections relating to the afterword, bibliography and index. It should be noted that the book not only deals with the problem of climate change, but other problems associated with climate change (politics, state and states, civil society, social movements, economy, technology). As the author himself says: "This is not a book about climate change, but a book about politics related to climate change."<sup>145</sup>

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change UN (*IPCC*) gives the assessment of climate change till the end of this century in six scenarios. Even

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 37-39.

<sup>143</sup> Giddens, E., *Sociology*, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, 2005, p. 632.

<sup>144</sup> Giddens, E., *The consequences of modernity*, Filip Visnjic, Belgrade, 1998, p. 164.

<sup>145</sup> Giddens, E., *the Politics of Climate Change*, Clio, Beograd, 2010, p. 25.

the most favorable scenario is not good. According to the scenario the anticipated warming would rise from 1.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius. This would mean that by the end of this century, the water level in the oceans would rise from 18 to 38 centimeters. But if the current trend of oil, coal and gas consumption continues (which leads to a high level of economic growth) – the temperature will be higher by 6 degrees Celsius. Then the water level in the ocean would rise between 26 and 50 centimeters. However, "most likely" scenario, with the current use of fossil fuels and energy sources, and with a controlled population growth, is also worrying because it shows an increase in temperature to 4 degrees Celsius, and increase in the level of water in the oceans to 48 centimeters. Increase in global temperatures would lead to increase in the number and size of glacial lakes, faster melting of the "eternal" snow and ice, and significant changes in the Arctic and Antarctic ecosystems, bigger and faster breaking of glaciers, swelling of rivers and the movement of some plant and animal species towards the poles. Also, higher levels of ocean water would lead to flooding of coastal cities, which would result in great poverty and migrations, and potential conflicts and wars.<sup>146</sup>

In second place, Giddens points out that studies have shown a rising line in increase in the surface temperature of the planet since the end of the nineteenth century. He also points out that out of ten warmest years, seven were in the 90s in 20<sup>th</sup> century and 1998 was the warmest year. Possible *effects of global warming* will be devastating, and possible harmful effects are enormous.

One such harmful effect is related to *rising of sea levels*. Global warming will lead to the melting of polar glaciers and warming and expansion of the ocean. The sea level would rise while cities in the vicinity of the sea coast would be flooded. If the sea level rose by 1 meter, Bangladesh would lose 17%, Egypt 12%, and the Netherlands 6% of its territory.

The second possible harmful effect is related to *conversion of fertile land into the desert*: global warming would turn many of the fertile soil into the desert.

The third harmful effect is related to *spreading of infectious diseases*. Global warming would allow some organisms, especially mosquitoes, to carry and spread infectious diseases (malaria, yellow fever) in the countries where they were not present before. If the temperature increased to 3-5 degrees Celsius, then the number of people with malaria would rise up to 80 million per year.

The fourth possible harmful effect is related to *poor harvests*: global warming would lead to a decline in agricultural crops and existential threat in most poor countries (South-East Asia, Africa, Latin America).

The fifth potential harmful impact is related to *changes in climate patterns*.

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

Although relatively stable for thousands of years, climate patterns could be distorted under the influence of drought, storms, hurricanes, floods.<sup>147</sup>

Considering the problems that climate change scenarios carry with them, Giddens points out that there are two ways or approaches: optimistic and skeptical.

The minority are *skeptics*. They believe that global warming is not a consequence of anthropogenic effects of human activities and that temperature rise is nothing new. Geologists claim that in the last 1500 years, climate change have been the result of the impact of changing of the position of sun spots, and that right now we are in the middle of the heating phase. But, after this phase comes the ice age, i.e. after a relatively mild climate in which we now live comes the ice age, and this is, according to skeptics, what should concern us.

Skeptics argue that the current climate change, seen as a *risk*, are given too much of unnecessary attention in relation to more important issues which represent greater risks, such as poverty, AIDS and nuclear weapons. Discussing the risks and rejecting the story of global warming, skeptics point out that we live in the "age of fear" among which are the risks of climate change. In fact, we live in "a new era of prejudice" which strongly reminds us of "mass panic in the past", such as that related to a witch hunt. Fears and terrors are part of our daily lives in which we are dreaded by "the mysterious and deadly" viruses and bacteria that are found everywhere, toxic substances that are found in our homes, workplaces and in the nature, and the culmination of these fears is the fear of global warming. Regardless of the fact that after global warming comes the ice age, this global warming and melting, as actions of human activities, is not the only danger of human origin. Other dangers come from nuclear weapons, AIDS, food crisis and poverty, so there are opinions that the XXI century is "our last century" and that as human beings we will not survive the XXI century due to great dangers that the man has created by excessive interference into "nature matters."<sup>148</sup>

The other way of thinking is advocated by - *optimists*. They reject the "story" about the "doomsday", arguing that we are too obsessed with safety and, therefore, we see threats in everything, which leads to worries and fears, anxiety and helplessness. It is the view of climate change that is the reason for our irrational pessimism and fear which is pointless because "there has never been a better time for life" (Gardner).

Citing the two approaches on climate change Giddens is more likely to accept the view of optimists in that respect he published this book. "Political risk management goes down a dangerous path between creating panic and peace. I think that stories about the doomsday should not be taken literally. You

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<sup>147</sup> Giddens, E., *Sociology*, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, 2005, pp. 637-638.

<sup>148</sup> Giddens, E., *The Politics of Climate Change*, Clio, Belgrade, 2010, p. 40.

should look at them as a warning. They talk about what could go downhill if you do not pay attention and take appropriate actions."<sup>149</sup>

What are the measures and what are the institutions that need to take such measures so things would not go "downhill"?

What is typical for the vast majority of the planet's population is the lack of environmental consciousness on climate change and other environmental problems. Only a few understand what these threats and risks are with regard to the consequences that occur as a result of industrial production, which releases gases that create the greenhouse effect, and which in return leads to increased temperatures on Earth. In the future this problem may create even greater problems which a vast majority is not even aware of and therefore does nothing to change their daily habits and reduce the risks that climate change bring with them.

Today, politicians are becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues and issues related to climate change. So the United Nations has organized talks on limiting global warming (1992 in Rio, 1997 in Kyoto, 2007 in Bali, 2010).

Giddens points out that politics takes over primary responsibility for controlling emissions of gases that cause climate change. In addition to politicians and politics this relates to parliamentary democratic institutions, such as *the civil society* and *the state* which will have to cooperate with other institutions and bodies, but also with "other countries and international organizations."<sup>150</sup>

Certainly, we should mention *the environmental movement*, which deserves all merits for the problem of climate change is now part political thinking and decision making. Beside it, an important role in reviewing and addressing the issue of climate change has: public opinion, political parties, companies, NGOs and citizens. In an effort to find new forms of cooperation and new technology, bilateral and multilateral cooperation is necessary, for "the Judgment Day is no longer a religious term, rendering of spiritual accounts, but something which our society and economy will have to face." Therefore, if not brought under control, climate change can cause tremendous human suffering.<sup>151</sup>

The book *The Politics of Climate Change* is encouraging because it offers through many elemental processes of globalization a rational solution to environmental problems that threaten life on Earth. In that respect, the author ends the book in the following way: "A lot can be done to reduce emissions of gases at no extra cost. But the field of technology is most important field whose principle of rapid quantitative increase in power, which has caused the dangers we are exposed to, can help us to cope with them. A new dark age, a new age of

<sup>149</sup> Giddens, E., *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p. 271.

enlightenment, or perhaps a confusing mixture of both - what is ahead of us? This third possibility is most likely the only probable. In that case, we have to hope that the era of enlightenment will prevail."<sup>152</sup>

Although, due to environmental risks, some environmental theorists have developed a strange aversion to science, without rational and scientific thinking real solutions to environmental problems cannot be found. In that sense, Giddens wrote this book and in a broader context he considers the phenomenon of climate change.

Industrial civilization is different from earlier civilizations. Earlier civilizations (e.g. the ancient civilizations of China, Rome) were *regional* and the scope of their influence was limited to one part of the world. These civilizations used non-organic energy sources (water, wind) and they mostly influenced the appearance of the land.

Our, industrial civilization is global. It also uses non-organic sources of energy which have enabled and given to modern industry the power that earlier technologies did not have.

Enlightenment philosophers thought that the possession of power was safe and Marx, in that sense, said that "human beings create only those problems that can take care of." However, there are those theoreticians who believe that with industry comes new power that is totally destructive.

The debate between *optimists* and *pessimists* is still ongoing. Indeed, technological innovations are constantly being developed in humans' desire to free themselves from fossil fuels in order to reduce environmental problems. What will happen: a new dark age or a new age of enlightenment? Or a mixture of both? This third possibility is most likely the only probable. In that case, we have to hope that the era of enlightenment will prevail.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p. 273.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 270, 273.