Human civilization in the phase of the late Anthropocene has been nurtured by the growing tension between the increasing complexity of social, political, technical and communication structures, tending to entangled connectivities and entering hypercomplex technological spaces, and the need to manage the widespread anxiety and fear of a systemic failure in the simplest and most effective way.

Security dilemmas and challenges have accompanied people since the dawn of civilization and have given rise to the need for clear directions of action and simple formulas for coping with difficulties and threats. Humanity needs an "instruction manual for the reality" to live safely, operate effectively, and develop sustainably. In our view, the protocol is just such a "user manual", which underpins an increasingly complex reality, shaped more and more strongly by technologies and network systems.

We point to protocol as a hitherto underestimated concept which is loaded with significant explanatory power and has considerable potential for inquiries into security ontology and epistemology. Based on the ambitious and stimulating works of Alexander R. Galloway we argue that protocol is an overarching concept suitable as an analytical tool for tackling complex processes and phenomena through its simple formula, foundational status, sharp analytical parameters and interdisciplinary reach. It is helpful in tackling the present challenges of technological hypertrophy, knowledge gaps, post-factual trends in the discrediting of scientific achievements and the backlash against modernity.

Based on the concept of the protocol we aspire to build a theory of protocolarization. Our aim is to make a novel contribution to the social sciences by constructing and refining the concept of protocol as a formula which frames ontology and epistemology of social phenomena as empirical generalizations. We assume that protocol will help overcome cognitive barriers in social sciences and will make a significant contribution to the perspectives on security and safety. Therefore, we aspire to bring about a complete outline of an alternative view of the management of uncertainty being a characteristics of social life and security in particular.

The motivation behind this undertaking results from a growing dissatisfaction with the way in which the social sciences, and security studies in particular, have conceptualized the systemic response to ever-increasing structural complexity. So, we want to establish a cognitive frame of protocolarization which allows us to draw a subtle relationship between protocol and security. Protocol refers to security as a process of managing uncertainty in conditions of limited cognitive abilities and an imperfect knowledge of reality; it lays down common basic rules and normative frameworks which aim at coping effectively with the risks and turbulence provoked by the complexity of networks. Protocols are enacted in the event of a suddenly emerging problem or a prolonged crisis questioning the efficiency of a network and its components and capability to ensure stable and secure performance.

We share the view that contemporary security agenda-setting, policy-making and communication are critically determined by crises, failures or disruptions. The enactment of a protocol and its continuous reproduction enable the management of uncertainty (anxiety, perplexity, terror, and the like) and legitimize the means and methods employed in order to master the security imbroglio. However, we extend protocols beyond crises and emergencies. Protocols are also foundational acts (enactments), omnipresent, universalistic in essence and constitutive. As such, they are a key to ensuring continuity in security environments and to greatly facilitate security governance and resilience in complex contemporary social and political systems.

We need a comprehensive and fine-tuned cognitive framework in order to make insights in the nature of contemporary security and its relation to dynamic political, technological and social phenomena. This is why a comprehensive model of a protocol will be formulated, subject to verification and testing in further stages of the research process. A theory of protocolarization will be built on a critical reassessment of concurrent theories and on the exploration of protocol as a founding concept. The theoretical frame of protocolarization will be verified in four case studies: (1) autonomous weapon systems and their extensive use in warfare. Protocol refers to the principles of the use of force and codes governing the security environment and the maintenance of measures limiting military activities in an ongoing conflict; (2) the global war on terror and its domestic and international consequences. Protocol is examined as a heuristic tool and a practice-oriented formative message supporting the management of a high-risk security environment; (3) advanced telecommunication technologies and repercussions of their large-scale implementation for global security. It refers specifically to 5G technologies and their potential vulnerabilities affecting technical protocols and official security protocols; (4) the current COVID-19 pandemic and feasibility of the epidemiological protocol recommended by the World Health Organization and implemented by states with varied effects.