

## DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE FORMER COMMUNIST STATES: IMPOSITION OR NECESSITY?

Flavius-Cristian MĂRCĂU<sup>1</sup>

---

### ABSTRACT:

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TRANSITION, MUST BE CONSIDERED THE REASON FOR THIS. WE CAN NOT SAY THAT A TRANSITION TO A DESIRED STATE, IF ALL GOES WELL, BUT CERTAINLY WE CAN SAY THAT THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN COMMUNIST STATES WAS WANTED. FOR THE TRANSITION TO WORK, THE COMMUNISM HAD TO DISAPPEAR.

WERE LAUNCHED VARIOUS THEORIES ABOUT THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM, THE FALL WAS DUE TO OVERVALUATION OF POWER BY THE WEST; GORBACHEV'S BAD GOVERNANCE; THE STATE'S ECONOMIC IMPLOSION. THIS LAST HYPOTHESIS BELIEVE THAT THE STATE - DO NOT UNDERSTAND THAT THE ONLY FACTOR THAT LED TO THE FALL OF THE TOTALITARIAN - ON THE BASIS OF COMMUNISM AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOVIET UNION.

---

**KEY WORDS:** POST COMMUNISM, DEMOCRACY, EAST EUROPE, DEMOCRATIZATION, FREEDOM

In the mid-80s, in terms of global politics, we talk about a third wave of democratization, which was noticed by those concerned with the study of world politics. Calling on recent history, we see that the third wave followed after two periods of expansion of democracy: the first is to be found in the nineteenth century, and that the second in the first years after the Second World War. Until 1990, different governments have been invested in construction in a stable democracy in various countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Poland, Philippines, Argentina and South Korea. If we set as a starting point 1989, we notice how the collapse of communism and pro-democracy demonstrations in China have led to the belief that liberal democracy becomes the only legitimate political ideology (see Grugel, 2008, 16).

The collapse of the Soviet Empire marked the beginning of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe and was perceived as a political and economic triumph of the West. One famous interpretation of this event was attributed by Francis Fukuyama, as representing *an end of history*. Going forward, we can sustain that democratization represented a *new chapter of history*, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, and not an end,

---

<sup>1</sup> Research Assist, Research Institute of Development, University "Constantin Brancuși" of Târgu-Jiu, Romania; Phd. C., Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, flaviusmarcau@yahoo.com

as has argued Fukuyama. A *chapter* in the possibility of a viable alternative to capitalism affirmation or democracy was virtually nonexistent.

To continue our scientific approach, it is necessary to define the term democratization. What is it? First, above all, the term refers to construction of a democratic state but must have in mind that democracy means more than simply introducing elections. We make these statements based on the description given by Robert Dahl of the concept of democracy. The American theorist made a treating of this process by which the Western countries have passed (in terms of socio-historical), considering two coordinates: the right of citizens to participate in political life and its possibility to contest government decisions. Starting from these two coordinates, Dahl describes four possible forms of political regime: 1) *closed hegemony* when there is no possibility of participation and contestation; 2) *comprehensive hegemony* when there is opportunity to participate but missing the possibility of opposition (the opposition); 3) *competitive oligarchy* when there is the right to participate but there is the possibility of contesting and 4) *polyarchy* when citizens enjoy both rights: challenging government decisions and political participation<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, we can say that full democratization of the state is a combination of institutional change (form of the state), change representativeness (who influence policy and towards to who is responsible the state) and functional transformation (what does the state or which is the area of responsibility)<sup>3</sup>.

World history was dominated from the nineteenth-century material and the ideological conflict between capitalism and democracy, on the one hand, and the socialism and the communism on the other. The defeat of communism means long lasting end of the competition, and with it, the answer to the big questions on the best form of human society. (Grugel, 2008, 16).

The questions that we ask, in connection with the replacement of the totalitarian communist system by a democratic regime, is: democracy was a necessity or just imposition? Certainly both variants were found in the year 1989, but it should be pointed out that democracy is the worst form of government except all forms tested over time (W. Churchill). According as democracy has evolved,

It has become increasingly evident that some countries had a smooth successful transition, to a democratic system, while others were enrolled in category of problematic democracies. Theories that helped the democratization of states were mostly inspired by Western European experience, this sharing their key hypotheses. Many of these were subsequently contested going as a simple premise but mostly true: the application of these presumptions to emerging world seem to fail due to the lack of a democratic mentality. Post-communist experience, offering a comprehensive set of key of challenges and revealed constraints that shaped the state edification<sup>4</sup>. Former communist countries have been in a difficult situation: citizens must bring to power through free and fair elections, leaders able to accomplish democracy and capitalism, and in more than 24 years, easily it is noted the difference between countries led by leaders who have the will and political science to lead the country towards to the state of law and economic prosperity and those who had no part of it<sup>5</sup>.

The states in transition have been a laboratory for the investigation of relationship between politics and economy reform. Indeed, they have gone through, and in some cases

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*, (Iasi: Publisher European Institute, 2000), 32-33

<sup>3</sup> Jean Grugel, *Democratization*, (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 77-78

<sup>4</sup> Marceau Flavius Cristian, *Post-Communism Democratization: difficulties and crisis*, in *Annals of the "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu-Jiu, Letter and Social Science Series*, Issue 3/2013, p. 101

<sup>5</sup> See : Paul Blokker and Robert Brier, *Democracy after 1989 : Reexamining the History, Impact, and Legacy of Dissidence*, 195 in *East European Politics and Societies* 2011 25: 195, <http://eep.sagepub.com/content/25/2/195>

still going through a process of radical political change and profound economic reforms<sup>6</sup>. In view of this, the question I ask and at the same time we are trying to answer: why in some former communist countries, the democratization process lasted less? Surely this was due to the crisis of legitimacy that has occulted a while the task of rebuilding the state. All post-communist disturbance resulted from the feeling of having obtained a victory too easy, to some undeserved measure. It is also the result of the collapse of shared delusions in both the East and the West: it was thought that from the moment that Communist Party will be removed from the scene, democracy and market economy will be establish in a natural way, bringing with them the abundance. Everyone underestimates the damage caused by the communist - materials, especially psychological and moral<sup>7</sup>.

With the entry states in the democratization process, we were (and we are) witness of a new and important development in the history of democracy: politics and administration moved into the forefront of the democratization project. Viewed superficially, this development came as a kind of surprise for those who have seen democracy as a class assignment of the agents and social movements as a matter of establishing and reforming of the electoral process and the state of law<sup>8</sup>.

C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* was talking about the fact that a mistake was made when it was believed that the masses were within on the road to victory, showing that the influence of autonomous collectivity in the first place, is increasingly reduced, and in the second row is a guide.

It is worth mentioning that the masses should not be regarded as an audience that act autonomously, but as a manipulated mass in crucial moments to become crowds of demonstrators, so we can say that the public is becoming a popular mass which sometimes are becoming crowd<sup>9</sup>.

We observe that in those reported by Mills found a fear concerning the fact that democracy tends to be minimal. A founded fear but contradicted by Georges Burdeau in his writings about the *democracy governing* in which supports the idea that democracies began by being governed but they made the step to *governesses* - popular will is one that impose about the state and its decisions. Considering these aspects, we can say, without committing an error, the idea of *popular government*, launched by Bourdeau, can be classified as ideal, a fact signaled by Giovanni Sartori in his book *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. This disassemble the idea of *governesses democracy*, showing that *less* power to those who govern does not involve, necessarily, *more* power to those who are governed. The game should not have zero sum; it can be a negative-sum game in which both sides lose in which the power lost by those who govern is won by the governed. This is the evolution that is gaining much attention and has been described as a state of *overload and an inability of government*<sup>10</sup>.

Arriving at time 0 which we define as at the start of democratization, which marked the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, it must need an answer to the question: *why now and not before?* To give a balanced response, scientific and academic, to this question we will consider two important factors: *knowledge and persecution*. Starting from the first important factor we emphasize that this is one of the main reasons behind the *delay*

<sup>6</sup> See: Fabrizio Coricelli. Democracy in the Post-Communist World: Unfinished Business in *East European Politics and Societies* 2007 21: 82, <http://eep.sagepub.com/content/21/1/82>

<sup>7</sup> Marcu Flavius Cristian, *Post-Communism Democratization: difficulties and crisis*, in Annals of the "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu-Jiu, Letter and Social Science Series, Issue 3/2013, 102

<sup>8</sup> See Mark E. Warren (2009) *Governance-driven democratization*, Critical Policy Studies, 3:1, 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/19460170903158040

<sup>9</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, (Iasi: Polirom, 1999) 127

<sup>10</sup> Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, 128

time 0, namely *lack of knowledge* (information). This *lack* of informing can be described as a lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of democracy. When we say that we consider that in the former communist ideology played an important role, accompanied by those responsible for the propaganda within the single party and the total control of the media so that information is filtered, communist ideology was the one who came to the citizens. Information was obtained only from several sources: (Radio Free Europe played the most important role), various books, but the most important knowledge was obtained by comparison to what others have such as desire for freedom was present in the mind of many. But why the need for freedom did not produce need to change in a much shorter time? Why was needed for a long period of time until this turned into desire and need has been transposed into reality? The answer is very simple if we consider the way totalitarian system to reduce to silence any tendency to change: fear. This played an important role in maintaining communism and giving up desire.

The second essential factor refers to the maximum limit which the people can bear. Elias Canetti in *Crowds and Power*, identify *persecution* as a determining factor for a people (crowd) act to resist the enemy (Communist Party). Once the limit has been reached, and the crowd turned against the enemy, the latter was considered once and for all as such. They could to undertake anything they could proceed rough or kindly, may be united or uncaring, harsh or gentle - everything would be interpreted as springing from an indestructible evil, a bad attitude towards people, a preconceived intent to destroy, overtly or covertly<sup>11</sup>. The intention was not, however, to destroy, when they wanted to remove the regime, but to maintain power. Thus, one aspect has not been considered but namely the fact that *any crowd which demonstrates cannot be destroyed from outside* by the simple reason that any action by force does nothing to dispel protesters, who later felt more attracted to reunite<sup>12</sup>.

Once the communist regimes disappeared, democratic principles were those who have imposed (*or been imposed?*) as a replacement regime was forget an essential aspect: *the lack of knowledge* I was talking about above. Based on this statement, we can detect that the West played a paternal role in the democratization process, this is the only viable model for an open society, but not everything worked as expected. It was tried an import of democratic regime from the West to the states in fresh ex-communist, not exactly the expected result, because it has been overlooked an aspect denoting the quintessence of our interpretation: *the former communist states did not enjoy a democratic tradition*. To strengthen these statements we bring to the forefront an illustrative example in the issue of building a democratic state such the substantiation should have made the implementation of democratic values from the base to the top and not vice versa.

Considering the above context, we conclude that democracy, for states in Central and Eastern Europe, it was necessary and in some extent imposed.

---

<sup>11</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, (Bucharest: Nemira, 2009), 17

<sup>12</sup> View Carnetti, *Crowds and Power*, 18

## REFERENCES

1. **Aron, Raymond**; *Democrație și Totalitarism*, București: All, 2001;
2. **Bobbio, Norberto**; *Liberalism și democrație*, București: Nemira, 2006;
3. **Dahl, Robert**; *Democrația și criticii ei*, București: Institutul European, 2002;
4. **Dahl, Robert**; *Despre Democrație, Iași: institutul europea, 2003*;
5. **Diamond, Larry; Chu, Yun-han; Plattner, Marc F.; Tien, Hung-mao**; *Cum se consolidează Democrația*, Iași: Polirom, 2004, p. 42
6. **Duplan, Christian; Ginet, Vincent**, *Viața în Roșu*, București: Nemira, 2000, p. 307
7. **Ekiert, Grzegorz; Hanson, Stephen**; *Capitalism și democrație în Europa Centrală și de Est. Evaluarea moștenirii regimurilor comuniste*, Iași: Polirom, 2010;
8. **Gorun, Adrian**; *Gândirea politică și ideea de libertate*, Târgoviște: Ed. Bibliotheca, 2006 ;
9. **Gorun, Adrian**; *Introducere în știința politică*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2003;
10. **Gorun, Adrian**; *Dezvoltare Socială și Globalizare*, Targu-Jiu: Academica Brâncuși, 2012;
11. **Grugel, Jean**, *Democratizarea*, Iași: Polirom, 2008, p. 77-78
12. **Judt, Tony**; *Epoca Postbelică. O istorie a Europei după 1945*, Iași: Polirom, 2008, p. 546
13. **Karnoouh, Claude**; *Comunism, postcomunism și modernitate târzie*, Iași: Polirom, 2000;
14. **Leslie, Holmes**; *Postcomunismul, București: Institutul European, 2004*;
15. **Munck G, L. Leff**, *Modes of Transition and Democratization în South America and Europe în Comparative Perspective*, Comparative Politics, nr. 29, vol. 3, p. 347
16. **Sartori, Giovanni**; *Teoria democrației reinterpretată*, Iași: Polirom, 1999;
17. **Tismăneanu, Vladimir; Howard, Marc Morje (ed.)**, *Ordinea mondială după Leninism*, București: Curtea Veche, 2009
18. **Tismăneanu, Vladimir**; *Democrație și memorie*, București: Curtea Veche, 2006;