

THE LIMITS AND DISTORSIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN A MULTI-POLAR WORLD¹

Anda TAROPA-IACOB²

Andreea TRANDFIR³

ABSTRACT

THIS STUDY AIMS TO EXPOSE THE PRESENT LIMITS AND DISTORSIONS OF DEMOCRACY BY ANALYSING SEVERAL MAJOR POINTS RELATED TO THE CURRENT SITUATION OF STATES UNDER STRESS. FOR THE NONE, THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT RELIES HEAVILY UPON THE VIOLATION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS WHICH HAVE OCCURED IN THE CONTEXT OF FINANCIAL CRISIS. ON THE OTHER HAND, ONE HAS APPROACHED THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS DIFFICULTY IN ADAPTING ITSELF WITHIN NEO-DICTATORSHIP STATES, BY EXPLAINING THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE LATTER CAN EASILY OVERPOWER THE FORMER. THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH HAS REQUIRED BOTH THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION. THE RESULTS SUGGEST THAT DEMOCRACY MEETS SEVERAL LIMITS IN THE EU NATIONS STATES, DUE TO THE ONSET OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE FLAWED NEOLIBERALISM AND IT ALSO DEALS WITH SEVERAL PARADOXICAL SITUATIONS IN THE ATTEMPT OF APPLYING IT IN DICTATORIAL STATES.

KEY WORDS: DEMOCRACY, EU STATES, LIMITS, NEODICTATORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical expansion of democracy and its conceptual valences have indirectly created several ambiguities regarding its practical implications. From Ancient Greece to the present, democracy as a doctrine and as a term, has been representing a development model of the moral, political and economic condition of the state, but it has been at the same time, subjected to several metamorphoses that have determined it to dilute its comprehensive features from antiquity. For this reason, one has considered as being appropriate to approach democracy through analytical perspectives, using as elements of

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² PhD. Candidate and Teaching Associate at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, anda.taropa@gmail.com.

³ PhD. Candidate and Teaching Associate at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, tandreea@gmail.com.

reference, some ideologies and phenomena which are embraced by states from different parts of the world.

In the first part of this study, one has disclosed the limits of democracy, which are visible primarily in the context of neoliberalism and financial crisis. In the European Union, democracy is immanent for the nation states, but the flawed neoliberalism fed by the current financial crisis has been changing the configuration of nation states. The present condition of the iconic nation state is likely to change in the face of the new challenges, because on the one hand, the state must emphasize its position as a political actor towards the international community and on the other hand, the idea of the nation and by implication, nationality is identified beyond the performance of a state as a political actor and it has directly affected the society, the citizens and the social cohesion. Therefore, the failure in anticipating and preventing has affected the nation states, and the latter have chosen an unpopular manner of implementing the austerity measures which have contributed in decreasing the value of economic and social rights. All these issues are, in reality, barriers in consolidating the democracy.

In the European states, democracy is long permeated, but it meets several limits. At the same time, in the Muslim countries, democracy finds itself to an early stage of development. The second part of this study examines the status of democracy in states where the law is incompatible with this doctrine. A significant number of countries from Africa, Middle East and Latin America do not allow the consolidation of democracy, this process being blocked by both religious principles and a poor security system which wrecks the entire state structure. Following these issues, one has explained the paradoxical presence of democratic principles in the Constitutions of neodictatorial states, the confusing position of neodictatorship in several states and by implication the distortions of democracy under these circumstances.

EUROPEAN STATES VS. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Everywhere we turn we hear that we live in an era in which most of our social life is subordinated to global processes, an era in which cultures, economies and national borders are about to dissolve. The meaning of globalization in itself represents a controversial subject of global discussions: it may refer to a real process or only to an easy manner of representing the world. Legitimate by the objective need of development and democracy but also by the need of justifying “*the changes desired at political and economic level*”, “*of putting on stage political transformations*”⁴, globalization systematizes a process in which interdependence leads to enormous implications, forces states to cooperate for achieving their goals and serve their interests⁵. It is difficult to clearly state the consequences of globalization. This because there is no segment of social life untouched by the manifestations, most of the time uncontrollable, of globalization. The effects influence the economic, political, military, cultural, religious, demographic and/or environmental sectors. The comprehension of these issues is important – the interaction between them being either constructive or destructive precisely due to the acceleration of the rhythm and the complexity of the transformation at global level.

European nation states are experiencing, no doubt, a wide process of adjustment to the conditions of the present context. The manner in which they manage to adapt to these

⁴ Ernst-Otto Czempiel, *Regionalisierung und Globalisierung – Herausforderungen der deutschen Außenpolitik*, article available on-line at: www.dadalos.org/globalisierungrom/grundkurs-2/regionalisierung.htm [6 June 2011]

⁵ Robert Gilpin, *Economia mondială în secolul XXI. Provocarea capitalismului global*, (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 24.

challenges is, in fact, in the opinion of many, the most important proof for the viability of this particular type of organization of social life and political authority. They do not disappear nor do they become useless, they simply experience a certain degree of erosion. This “erosion” appears extremely advanced in EU Europe. Here, the states have transferred to the new supranational organization from central competences up to monetary sovereignty.

Global multi-polarity and national interests are two phenomena which have proved, so far, that the reactions to political – social challenges will never be enough to stop the new waves of state vulnerabilization. The present challenges are multiple, confuse and difficult to overcome. First of all, at conceptual level, European states define themselves in relation to their position within the EU, although, in reality, the feature of European makes no reference to this Union, but to the entire cosmopolite continent. Most often, EU states are associated to the Occident nonetheless, at the same time there are a significant number of states in Eastern Europe. Apart from these aspects, their privilege derives from a set of interdependent values: democracy, rule of law, respecting human rights and liberties, etc., all with the purpose of coagulating the political systems of a number of states. Their aim is to maintain social, economic and political harmony, one of the 21st century’s challenges consisting precisely in sabotaging this harmony through seismic actions on the societies of these 27 states.

EU’s economic importance determines its political influence as well. Under these circumstances, the Union is summoned to play a unique role: it is the only group of countries which gets close to putting their sovereignty in common, necessary for dealing with world class problems.⁶ At the political level, the Union confronts itself with a wide range of challenges, determined either by the global economic and financial crisis or by the context previous to this phenomenon. The way out of this situation can prove to be, for EU, even a greater challenge than the challenge of the crisis itself⁷. The latter issue might occur due to the differences between the member states’ levels of economic development, the level of economic growth after the sequence of economic events generated by the collapse of the American real estate market, and the states’ debt level. Moreover, these differences tend to be amplified by the contemporary economic disorders. Hence, the identification, at European level, of a political solution which can be applied to all member states, is difficult to reach, if not even utopian, precisely because of these great discrepancies. The problem is even more acute as most states put their national interest above the European interest, which makes the solidarity level within the Union decrease, and obtaining a consensus in this sense becomes difficult to achieve.

Neoliberalism is associated with the development of capitalism, where the exploitation of the working class is put forward as one of its premises. Have austerity measures been created to reduce the consequences of the financial crisis or to make unequal incomes even more unequal? A visible aspect consists in the fact that these measures have affected both the working class with low incomes and the fiscal system. Increasing the taxes has limited the working class capacity to amass liquidities. Each member of the society (capitalist or not) is bound to pay taxes proportional with his incomes, but this principle is excluded when it enters in conflict with stimulating doctrines⁸. Secular improvements have not been doubted, especially after the communist era (Romania is, in this case, a good example) and according to Joseph Schumpeter, this

⁶ Hean Teo Chee, „Interdépendance et conduite des relations internationales”, in *Politique étrangère*, 4/99

⁷ Stefano Micossi, Gian Luigi Tosato (ed.), *The European Union in the 21st Century. Perspectives from the Lisbon Treaty*, (Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2009), 8.

⁸ James O’Connor, *The fiscal crisis of the state*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 234-237

aspect along with the increasing lack of individual security have led to “the best receipt for growing social tensions”⁹.

It appears that the entire political project of the EU brings into question by the economic crisis, an event which tests the efficiency of the single currency system. Between the advantages of economic integration and a viable political integration project there is a close relationship, of the functionality of which depends today the future of the entire European construction. Although 16 of the 27 member states have a single currency, at the level of the Union there is not a common fiscal policy or tax integrated policy. Practically, the political leaders of each country must decide on the best measures they can adopt, and, given the present context, no state seems to be powerful enough to support the others as well. Consequently, the crisis affects the economic union of which depends the future of the “euro area”, and of the Union as a whole. Overcoming the crisis is conditioned by the solidarity the member states manifest in relation to each others, and this can only be reached at the political level.

The austerity measures have damaged two functions of the state: accumulating capital and investing in human resources. Given the present circumstances, many European states have adopted fiscal reforms which have diminished the labour sector. When the unemployment rate is too high, the resistance to the reforms decreases which leads to a decrease of the accumulation of capital¹⁰. Investing in human resources leads to economic growth, social mobility and it is a prerogative of social rights, more precisely of the right to education. The consequences of unfulfilling this function leads to high inequality levels, social immobility and the creation of a society pauperisation system. Not having access to education, the existence of the middle class becomes improbable, not having in the end any impact on development¹¹. All these aspects related to the economic and social rights and their dissolution in the economic crisis are invoked as legitimacy also implies the consolidation of liberty and equality. These two independent qualities reflect the legitimacy in one state even if, at the time being, postmodern state relies on individual principles which cannot reach the value of solidarity through equality or liberty. The value of equality does not refer to the idea of being a social copy of the fellow citizen, but to the equal reference of each person to his own financial conditions.

EU has many of the features of world policy at the beginning of this millennium, confronting itself with tensions between the benefices of “civil power” and the new social, political, economic and security requirements in the multidimensional political area. A major political challenge consists in terrorism. After the events of September 11th, 2001, terrorism has started being seen as the main threat to security by both state actors and non-state actors of the international system. Terrorism is generally seen as highly related to religious extremism. In this case, it is difficult to make a clear separation between terrorism as an external threat to European security and terrorism as an internal threat. Some European countries have been the target of these attacks (the attacks in Madrid and London) but also a base for terrorist networks. EU also confronts itself with a certain internal terrorism. It is the one determined by separatist and nationalist reasons (for example ETA).

Another major challenge for European countries refers to national identity as a fundamental feature of the nation – state. Nation is “*a clear idea in appearance but which*

⁹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 145

¹⁰ Halvor Mehlum, “Capital accumulation, unemployment, and self-fulfilling failure of economic reform”, in *Journal of Development Economics* 65 (2001): 291-306

¹¹ Ashraf Ghani, Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 252.

*can become dangerous if misunderstood*¹², shows Ernest Renan. The types of human existence have varied greatly during history being impossible to mistake one for another without creating serious inconveniences in understanding both past and present. The nuances of the concept of the nation depend on various factors: tradition and customs from a certain religious orientation, context and economic evolution which allows the expansion of intellectual and political interests, the administrative and institutional context and so on. Hence resides the rich diversity. Neither the East nor the West of Europe shares the same point of view on the concept of national identity. Ontological approaches mention a series of attributes: common history and territory, common culture a certain degree of development and economic integration, a constitution and a coherent political – administrative system. Not all nations find themselves in these attributes. What can be noticed, at least as far as the western half of the continent is concerned in the last decades, is that the concept of the nation has developed new valences compared to the period before the war. For example, racism and anti-Semite vocabulary was replaced by one where the focus falls on tolerance – tolerance of differences, of ideas and cultures – laws on minority protection (either ethnic, cultural or religious) have been drawn up and adopted, and instead of territorial frustrations the policies at the level of the Union have decided the cancellation of borders¹³.

The EU construction and evolution has often given birth to debates related to culture, seen as an ensemble of attitudes, beliefs, values and practices common to a certain group of individuals. The meaning of culture is closely related to the perception of nationality, being defined in terms of religion, ethnicity, geography, language. In a new millennium highly characterized by globalization, the notion of “Europe” defines a complex which reunites the widest diversities without mixing them. Europe materializes itself into a crossroads of so many histories with political, cultural, economic, social, religious and/or anti-religious features. The interactions experienced over the years by these people, cultures and classes have given birth to a diverse and contradictory European “unity”¹⁴. Not randomly, E. Morin stated that “*Europe dissolves when you want to see it clearly and distinctly, it comes to pieces when one wants to grasp its unity*”¹⁵. Europe is equivalent to the concept of multiplicity. The interactions between people, cultures and social statuses have often shaped a contradictory unity. This notion represents in fact the unique from the multiple or the multiple within the unique, just as Morin noticed, it is a “*unitas multiplex*”.

Nowadays, the religious monopole over society no longer exists. For start, as a delayed reaction to the offensive of Christian missionaryism, the emigrations from the former colonial empires have brought to Occidental Europe communities quite important from other religious cultures, mainly Muslim. From 1960 the interest in oriental spirituality increases. This visible presence of such an appealing religious mosaic to the Europeans has also made possible the explosion of some “new religions” whose interest in syncretism makes the options of faith and spiritualism vary infinitely. A mentality problem is also insinuated. The attitude change towards religious diversity is also important. It rapidly increases the number of those willing to recognize the legitimacy and consistency of other religious types and beliefs than the one they belong to.

¹² Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation? et autres écrits politiques*, (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale Editions, 1996)

¹³ Reinhart Koselleck „A Response to Comments”

¹⁴ Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza; *Istoria Europei, vol. I, Moștenirea Antichității*, traducere de Ionuț Bița, (Iași: Institutul European, 1998)

¹⁵ Edgar Morin, *Gândind Europa*, (București: Trei, 2002), 23.

THE UNDERMINING OF DEMOCRACY AND THE ASSIMILATION OF NEODICTATORSHIP

The distortion through the undermining of democracy is allowed, due to the lack of a consensus regarding the way of measuring, defining or contesting democracy, and the debates around these topics are always in progress¹⁶. The paradox that is intended to be mentioned and analysed in this context is the existence of democracy in countries that actually survive under dictatorship privilege. In order to validate this argument, several empirical points of reference are required, in particular, states from Africa, Middle East and Latin America. One finds difficult to establish which is the real doctrine embraced by these states, because, according to their constitutions, all the states in the world promote democracy, but its values are expressed only at a declarative level. Following a content analysis of reports and articles on political and social status of the countries in the areas mentioned above, one has extracted two circumstances of undermining democracy: the “state within a state” system and the normative institutional irrelevance.

States from the first category keep one or more (para)military groups on their territories. In some of them, these groups are supported by the government in attacking and dominating the local populations, for material gain (Janjaweed in Sudan), while in other states military groups provide resources to the population in deprived areas, such as water, electricity etc. (Ansar Al Sharia in Yemen). In Sudan, the president Omar al Bashir supports the military group Janjaweed, in Guatemala, the armed forces have acted with impunity when attacking the Tocapian region, the Islamist group Boko Haram expresses through cruel violence its visions over the Christians in Nigeria, and the list is unfortunately far from being closed. The information from the above is just examples that contribute to the perception of the functioning of the security apparatus as 'state within a state'. In reality, there is a larger number of states of this kind, a number too large in a world considered to be multi-polar and with an acute will of stabilizing the conflict regions. All details mentioned so far in this section confirm the degradation of democracy and the powers of state, accompanied by a brutalization of society. The states mentioned above are inherently and structurally incompatible for democracy assimilation, because this ailing system called “state within a state” is too deeply embedded to be removed through diplomatic channels. Both Yemen and Sudan are fundamentalist Islamic states promoting different values from those of states that do not have that form of leadership principles of religion, and these values are at variance with the democratic principles. The atrocities committed by paramilitary groups have expressed a high level of human rights violations, the consensus is replaced by coercion, freedom of expression is limited to non-existent, and the criminal justice system is not of pain to prevent arbitrary or incommunicado detentions. Democracy is fragile in Muslim country areas, but no other ideology emerges, the religious fundamentalism being kept, which in the eyes of Islamic leaders, it is not as harmful as ideologies born in the West. According to the former leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei “Western liberalism, communism, socialism and all other ‘isms ‘ have been tested and proved to be weak”. At present, the Middle East states are also dealing with an 'ism', i.e. the “fundamentalist neototalitarianism”, which is strong and standing, but its strength weakens the societies in which it manifests itself.

States that accept the “state within a state” system, undermine democracy primarily through lack legitimacy and abuse of power. Hanna Arendt makes a remarkable distinction between the use of power as a form of persuasion, specific to democracy and as a coercion through force specific to dictatorship. The “state within a state” system cancels all

¹⁶ Irvyng Horowitz, The Struggle for Democracy, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-struggle-for-democracy-880>, [2 Mai 2012].

democratic principles through punitive actions against civilians. Moreover, the internal security, law and order are dissolved, forming a fatal combination of anarchy and dictatorship. Another aspect that undermines democracy in these circumstances is the assimilation of political violence. In the case of Sudan and Nigeria, political violence is applied in order to prevent certain policy changes and to maintain paramilitary dominance. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2005 to 2012, in Sudan it has been registered 2487 cases of violence, of which 996 are cases of political violence. The victims of such violence are not part of a specific class, being ordinary civilians, and the attacks are based on the desire of intimidation and domination by government forces. In Nigeria, the violence has escalated in early 2010, but this does not indicate a stable condition in a previous period. ACLED experts have identified a significant number of cases of violence between 2010 and 2012, namely 1813, of which 752 are cases of political violence.

A situation drawn from previous circumstances is the irrelevance of the institutional regulatory framework. This situation occurs when political power is not exercised according to the law and the rules are not justified according to socially accepted conceptions related to the legal sources of authority, and the authority positions are not confirmed by the express agreement of a subordinated party or through the recognition of legitimate authorities. Institutions are designed to distribute values in society, one of which is democracy. Under these aspects, institutions are the providers of democracy and are generally defined as being sets of norms, rules and principles that fulfill two functions: regulating behavior and establishing social agents. State institutions do not lose their value only during a violent conflict, the latter becoming an overused benchmark for cases of major instability. It is true that one of the most visible signs of the irrelevance of institutions is the uncontrolled violence, mostly interethnic, but violence is actually the result of government inertia. The populations of these countries such as Sudan, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and so on, have acquired a cult of belonging to a group in order to gain protection, but this type of unification has led to tribal rivalries which eventually have been approached through violence. In most cases, there have been formed paramilitary groups and the authority of a state security apparatus has been ignored. The lack of democracy from most African states is not the result of Islamic religion, the colonialism being also a part of the "blame-game". Each state carries a burden anchored in the 20 century, whether it is the Balkanization, communism, revolution, coup d' etat and so on, but colonialism was the toughest period, affecting the populations of that time, by creating some frustrations too difficult for being removed. Postcolonial states have failed in strengthening democracy, because a developed state is a democratic one, and the circumstances of postcolonialism have forecasted a chance of development only under a one-party system created to guarantee the economic progress and national unity. Ultimately, African societies have not consolidated the democracy and they have not achieved the welfare, as many Western powers have laid down. Thus and so, there has not been formed a political identity, many members of the political class migrating to the majority parties just to get more power. Thus, the elections have begun to be rigged and state leaders have turned their offices into opportunities for private capital accumulation. The worthless constitutions, corrupt politicians, fraudulent elections and the economic declines have led eventually to civil wars and coups.

Other situations in which institutions become irrelevant are: illegal economies (Burma, Sierra Leone, El Salvador), self-proclaimed independent territories (Somaliland in Somalia, Transnistria in Moldova Republica etc.) and lack of human security (Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua). Even though the circumstances differ, the common denominator is given by the institutions that become an unnecessary extension of the administrative

apparatus, or the entire administrative apparatus of the state is a stretch futile of the state as a political and administrative entity. States facing this problem are considered by John Forrest as "countries that are becoming increasingly irrelevant, culminating at its worst levels in the disintegration of central government". A fresh example of institutional irrelevance is Eritrea, which has gradually dissolved the institutional balance for about ten years, reaching in 2012 a level of breakthrough. The legal code is ignored, presidential decrees have undermined the rule of law and judges are not independent in their activities, being monitored by the presidential office. Currently, the core of the judiciary is the Special Court, an institution without legal codes. Eritrea is one of the most visible cases of illegitimacy expressed through the absolute violation of the rule of law, and the method of infiltrating the dictatorial regime is classical: the priority is to eliminate the opposition and its supporters (organizations, trade unions, civil etc.) in order to consolidate the path to absolute control of the government.

The distortions of democracy may be considered when it is promoted by the legal text of the constitution. The constitution is the result of the traditional law of a state and its validity is diluted along with each violated article by the institutions of a given state. This error is not committed only in dictatorial states which claim the existence of democratic laws in their structures, since cases of violations of the constitution have been identified also in democratic European states. Details that make the difference between these two types of states is the number of articles violated and the frequency of violation thereof, in democratic states have been recorded fewer cases. The constitution expresses the moral order of a state which in turn represents the core of a regulatory condition, providing the basic evidences for the sovereignty, and dominating the norm of procedural justice¹⁷. Beyond the technical analysis of the role of the constitution in relation to state institutions and vice versa, its irrelevance also results from the lack of perception of the constitution's role in the society. Dictatorial states are lacking themselves in unified societies with the capacity of assimilating the meaning of the law, being educated outside a regulatory framework. It is difficult to perceive a shared sense of democracy, human rights and legitimacy in an austere and violent climate. In states whose institutions and constitutions become irrelevant, two major qualities are absent: representativeness and professionalism. Thus, in many cases, institutions are dominated by one or more political factions acting unprofessionally in terms of their performance.

The stipulation of some constitutional articles supporting the democracy and the simultaneous violations of them, represents an anomaly fuelled by the existence of a dictatorial leader. Democracy suffers a number of distortions in these circumstances, and the purpose of pure dictatorship is also ambiguous, therefore one has considered appropriate the use of the term "neodictatorship" in this context. One cannot consider neodictatorship as a military regime, nor hereditary or constitutional, but it keeps the political value of them, being a new form of dictatorship with old practice, but far from being obsolete.

CONCLUSION

The internal and external challenges whereby the European states must cope with, manifest themselves as a complex, dynamic and open system. They are complex, constantly expanding and interrelated. Their favourable or unfavourable effects are basically cumulative and they bring various consequences. On the other hand, European states are differently affected by the consequences of these effects, either positively or

¹⁷ Christian Reus-Smit, *The moral purpose of the state*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 31.

negatively. Therefore, their efforts shall have distinct intensities, directions and natures. Performing an analysis and synthesis of the social life components, one notices that the historical process in its complexity, sometimes contradictory, present itself not as an irrational and chaotic flow of phenomena and events, but with a logic of its own, showing a continuity and a connection between phenomena and events, presenting itself as a complex and multidimensional unity and proving the existence of certain universal laws which are functional from ancient times and manifesting themselves in all the parts of a social life as both functional and development laws, or as both dynamic and static laws.

In Europe, states are historically related to the laws of democracy, but when it comes to a large number of states in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, the latter find themselves in an early stage of development and the task of finding the possibilities to create the social policies that enable the consolidation of democracy, seems hard to meet, and the assumption of not wanting to find solutions seems also available. The distortion through undermining of democracy easily insinuate itself, especially under the lack of a consensus on its measurement indicators, the criteria for defining or contesting the debates around these topics being endless.

Some talks more about the post-democracy, trying to rename the reduced ability of intervention of the freely chosen politicians and the increasing dissatisfaction of citizens towards their performance. Hereby, the crisis of democracy is circumscribed by the difficulty and also the need to implement democratic concepts and practices that have been developed at national level, to a global or supra-national reality, in which the actors and events prevail without subscribing to the democratic norms.

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