

BOOK REVIEW

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Sorin Bocancea, *Je suis Charlie? Regândirea libertății în Europa multiculturală [Je suis Charlie? Rethinking freedom in a multicultural Europe]*, Iași, Adenium, 2015, 358 pages

Are we Charlie ? There was hardly anything more controversial this year in Europe and North-America than the Charlie Hebdo massacre on January 7 and its subsequent intellectual. A mass extermination of a French editorial team by French-Muslim fanatics was followed by world-wide arguments, pros and cons, related to the freedom of speech and the social transformations of the Western societies in the last 30-40 years, especially in France and Britain, under the impact of Muslim immigrants.

For Romania, this is foremost an intellectual exercise not a daily reality. But it does not mean that Western Europe's dramas should be distantly regarded; we cannot afford to ignore the vehemence of such events reshaping Europe's perception of Islam (altered after 9/11) and the idea of immigration (whose protective and welcoming grounds are disrupted by suspicion and increasing cynicism).

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Romania joins the international debate through Sorin Bocancea's book *Je suis Charlie? Regândirea libertății în Europa multiculturală*, an achievement that deserves full attention. With a foreword by Thierry de Montbrial – a prestigious choice –, the book reunites the opinions of some finest Romanian commentators and analysts, debating in separate parts the freedom of speech (fundamental value of the West), the problems of nowadays Europe (especially Liberalism and the lack of social integration), the problems of the Muslim world (with its extremist penchant and difficult modernization), the clash of civilizations, ending with a depiction of the *Charlie Hebdo* case in the aftermath of the January 7 tragedy.

For Alina Mungiu-Pippidi the freedom of speech is quintessential to the civilization developed by the Europeans. She is followed by Sabin Drăgulin, for whom the attack was a denial of 800 years evolution of the West, directed against one of the fundamental values of the modern State, while for Arthur Suciuc the massacre can be regarded, ultimately, as an expression of a profound disenchantment with the effects of globalization.

Constantin Ilaș sees it not only as an attack of higher symbolical value than 9/11, but a moment of shock that should teach Europeans to appreciate more the virtues of their society ; in this, Putin's vehemently anti-Liberal views and Muslim radicalism can only strengthen Europe's convictions. Radu Magdin argues that Europeans are able to defend their values, especially if a better targeted education is revived by Europe's societies. The freedom of speech should not be limited (consider Laure Hinckel, Grigore Cartianu, Doru Pop, Vitalie Ciobanu) : what matters is the intrinsic value of it, not necessarily the way it is interpreted. By no mean the West should ever renounce at or diminish the significance of the freedom of speech. The book also moves towards a different touch: Raluca Mureșan and Minodora Sălcudean bring nuances, needed to enlighten France's specificity, while Radu Carp detaches himself from a *je-suis-Charlie* absolute stance, invoking ethical reasons justified by another fundamental right of the Western patrimony: religious liberty. Nicu Gavriluță insists on the responsibility that comes with expressing oneself, warning against the fetish surrounding the 'freedom of speech'. He is joined by theologian Constantin Sturzu.

The specter of terror that comes with such events is shrewdly analyzed by Sandra Pralong and Mungiu-Pippidi, who warn against the excessive involvement of the State in our lives for 'safety' reasons. Additionally, aspects pertaining to the Muslim radicalization, the European reaction and the profound cultural differences are carefully shaped and discussed by Angelo Chielli, Bogdan Ghiu, Dan Pavel, Angelo Mitchievici, Alexandru Ojica and Dan Tomozei. With frankness, Iulia Badea-Guérítée asks if the sympathies addressed to the victims weren't excessively Eurocentric; her thoughts are backed by Preda Mihăilescu, himself irritated by the political exploitation of the CH tragedy, and by Daniela Rațiu, who doubts the honesty underlying the freedom of speech.

As for Islam, Sorin Ioniță displays well-crafted arguments in demonstrating that its radicalization is limited and related to a certain type of political elites, while Ioan Stanomir portrays an accurate political image of a multifaceted religion lost in the turmoil of the past 50 years. Vasile Ostaciuc emphasizes the shift of Islam towards anti-Occidentalism and violent rhetoric, compatible to the desire of undermining the West from the inside, as Cristian Unteanu puts it. To this, Ovidiu Nahoi adds his remarks on the volatility of our enemy today, impossible to seize when outside and shockingly 'one-of-us' when inside. Because of it, Petre Iancu states, Islam and the West are in a cultural conflict that could end only through a liberal, flexible evolution of the first, whereas the West needs to remember that it has to fight for its values, not just state them. This is why *je-suis-worried* is the formula Cristian Pătrășconiu suggests, almost conclusively, troubled by the growing tension between Europe and Islam.

In his worries, he seems to be right: in the CH massacre Raymond Clarinard sees the eternal evil of plots and assassinations, with biblical roots, a never-changing human feature; Vasile Ernu calls it almost a facet of the human condition that never fails to dreadfully renew itself.

How was it all perceived? If Sergiu Mișcoiu focuses on the public discourse generated by the event (based on political interests, social agendas and actors whose interests are mainly converging, yet involve relevant differences), Doru Tompea analyzes the transformations occurring immediately afterwards in the public perception of the Other: apparently less than expected, but sensible...

Thirty-four articles build a book which is dense, vivid, pondered, rational and undeniably sophisticated. It is a text that brings information, encourages new critical views and demonstrates that – when willing – Romania can be a pertinent actor in the crucial debates of Europe today; and not only an actor, but an attuned, well-suited and discerning one.