

**SERGIU MIȘCOIU (ED.), *DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND EUROPEANIZATION IN ROMANIA*, LONDON: CAMBRIDGE SCHOLAR PUBLISHING, 2021, PP. 169.**

**Diana Cristina Cosma\***

**Abstract**

*The book reviewed is a proof of the complexities of the actual political context. The result of its cross-sectoral analyses are in line with the Eastern European rhetoric, lacking a democratic system. The book swirls through its five chapters around most of the essential elements of a country in transition. It provides an analysis following a horizontal time axis, a vertical developmental axis, and occasionally deplores the future. The first, introductory chapter anchors the books from a theoretical and factual point of view of a transitory process, while the second analyses the installation of democracy in Romania. The third and the fourth chapter deepen the optic, zooming firstly into the regionalization process, and then in the minority regimes in Romania. The last chapter bounce up, offering the image of limited space of maneuver of Romania in what regards its Foreign Policy, caught up in the almost natural, rationally explainable, conditionality of a small country.*

**Keywords:** Eastern European democracy, transition to democracy, democratization process, regionalization of Romania, minority regimes in Romania, bandwagoning Foreign Policy of Romania.

The process of democratization in Romania remains an unaccomplished plan. In the light of the recent global events, democracy has been under attack from several sides. Slowly, the mirage of democracy as a solution to end all evil and erase a memory traumatized by communism in all the ways, fades. In the last years, vicissitudes of all five continents have resurfaced: failed states, ethnic movements, corruption and violent riots in Latin America, the overlapping state and presidency, clientelism, authoritarianism and violent ethnic claims and delineation in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rise of populism in the more experienced democracies such as North America or Western Europe, the crisis of the civil

---

\* Diana Cristina Cosma is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of European Studies at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: [cosmadianacristina@gmail.com](mailto:cosmadianacristina@gmail.com)

society in a postmodern, post truth era and many others. Countries under the third wave of democratization, lying on a fragile foundation as recalled in the content of the book, cannot obviously be resilient enough when pulled by global forces. "The history of Central and Eastern Europe is largely that of the defeated, of victims, and of outsiders."<sup>1</sup> says Roman Krakovsky.

It is now even more pertinent to reflect on the state of democracy in Romania, since, national and international contexts are becoming more and more complex. Multiple times, in recent years, elements pertaining to what Hungarian President calls *illiberal democracy*, have occurred in Romania, ringing an alarm.

Internally, Romania seems to have moments of progress, rather than a continuous state of progress. Nevertheless, progress in one direction always hands a bill to another. The lack of tandem movement is only one of the causes of the impossible real stable, long-term reform in almost any domain. For example, we could rightfully assert that civil society is recently well organized, with sound names of NGOs having a professional output. Unfortunately, their work is often overlooked, having little impact on final legislation, maintaining a formal, consultative role. Or, Romanian Democracy Index shows turnout in elections rose in the context of the civil protests of 2017-2019, but it was immediately affected and dropped by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, this might be considered a false indicator of a successful democracy, since protests took place as a citizenship manifestation exercised as a form of bursting tensioned society vis-à-vis government abuse of the judicial system.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, President Iohannis appointed as Prime Minister a retired army general<sup>4</sup>, which sends a message of rather a rigid dialogue with the citizens, mirroring elements of an autocracy. Examples of guided or rather hampered, distorted

---

<sup>1</sup>Roman Krakovsky, *Illiberal democracies in Central Europe*, Études (4), 2019, URL: [https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_ETU\\_4259\\_0009--illiberal-democracies-in-central-europe.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ETU_4259_0009--illiberal-democracies-in-central-europe.htm), accessed on: May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The State of Democracy in Europe, Overcoming the Impact of the Pandemic*, URL: <https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/state-of-democracy-in-europe-2021.pdf>, accessed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Politico, *Democracy 'in retreat' globally, report warns*, URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/democracy-in-retreat-globally-report-warns/>, accessed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Deutsche Welle, *Nicolae Ciucă, desemnat premier al Guvernului PNL-PSD-UDMR*, URL: <https://www.dw.com/ro/nicolae-ciuc%C4%83-desemnat-premier-al-guvernului-pnl-psd-udmr/a-59900257>, accessed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

communication between the state and the press by the former happened constantly during the picks of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The so called “strategic communication” took the form of the ones specific to autocracies.

In what regards external pressure, Romania finds itself among the group of countries which can hardly compete economically in a capitalist market and sometimes encounters difficulties in asserting itself even at European level. This shortage reflects internally, being instrumentalised as an argument serving a Eurosceptic discourse blaming the economic inequality, and the democratic deficit.<sup>6</sup>

Having in mind all the arguments in favor of the active supervision of democracy in Romania, this book come to reveal, reinterpret and re-contextualize the state of democracy, more precisely to analyze and justify the blockages of this country’s steps forward.

### **Introduction-The Never Ending Story of Romanian Transition, by Sergiu Mișcoiu and Ciprian Bogdan**

The first chapter serves as an introductory, comprehensive substratum establishing the regional context of emerging Central-Eastern democracies. It refers to the important pillars in transition, namely the economy, the political scene and the culture. It seems that the only unvarying, predictable vector over time, was the state of indecision and conditionality. Professor Mișcoiu and Professor Bogdan draw on the potentially genealogical background of the countries ‘setback, as the book’s preoccupation is the third wave of democratization, which seemingly doomed Romania to a Sisyphean drudge work in its timid emancipatory attempts. The abusive seizure of power by the closest inheritors to communism, unhinged the healthy development of pluralism, the creation and the consolidation of yielding political parties. No actual bargaining took place for the first office tenure. Only since 1996, political alternance was exerted and a sort of political competitiveness glimpsed when Emil Constantinescu, the national liberal runner became President. The liberty of

---

<sup>5</sup> International Press Institute, *Right to information suffers further in Romania during pandemic*, URL: <https://ipi.media/right-to-information-suffers-further-in-romania-during-pandemic/>, accessed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Europa Liberă România, *PSD se înscrie între populații suveraniști europeni. De la vorbele din discurs la faptele transpuse în legi*, URL: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/psd-se-inscrie-in-randul-populistilor-europeni-de-la-vorbele-din-discurs-la-faptele-transpuse-in-legi/29941786.html>, accessed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

the political competition soon became exploited, fought by all means (control of judiciary system, of media, of public institutions etc.) by the increasingly louder politicians seeking power and visibility instead of legitimacy. The same brutal manner of conducting politics persists today. This, and the poor political output lay the basis for the highly insufficient trust of citizenship. There was and still is a hard evolutionary road from the lack of a conscious political organizational culture to the need of handling the demanding, provocative in many ways democratic regime, both for the political class and for the citizens.

The Romanian cultural identity stems from its seemingly rural authentic self. In the face of the diversity allowed by democracy, the outline of the cultural patterns turn fluid and so the progressive urban emancipation slowly creates an identity void. After the long standing communist nationalist discourse, adhering to the saving Western alliances seemed to be our only positive horizon. However, socialist-democrat Liviu Dragnea was not keen on too much openness in 2016, starting to dismiss EU's good intentions towards our country.

In terms of economy, its history of neo-feudal serf and landowners cohabitating with the capitalist industrial production is a perfect example of the high internal contradictions of Romania. The work exploited and hunger subject population sought liberty by all means. Stroke by the newly gained form of independence, perhaps overwhelmed by the responsibility of their liberty, the shock therapy transition was unbearable for the common citizen as it implied hard economical falls for which apparently the citizens were not prepared even if that meant neglected IMF recommendations. The first liberal mandate between was not the most convincing governance. The tangible European horizon forces it to advance in neoliberalism, creating a welcoming environment for the international money and investments influx, and surpassing even the recommendations. The mirage was however paid on the occasion of 2008 financial crisis, reminding once again its status of "dependent variable" on foreign money. This form of slow transition embodies what is called the *new-developmentalism*. Judging by the inequalities existing in Romania at the moment, the efficiency remains debatable.

### **Romania and its Difficult Road to Democracy, by Ovidiu Vaida**

The second chapter of the book offers a thorough analysis of the installation of democracy in Romania. As analysis criteria, the author choses the most relevant three indicators in the Merkel's framework of a democracy

evaluation. The chapter firstly provides a chronology of the politicization process of Romania, since the Unification in 1859, until now, setting forth the emancipatory political initiatives and detailing on how Romania was run out of its rails in its way towards democracy by the communists.

After the immediate change of regime, the horizon was very soon darkened by what the author called *second level communists* of Frontul Salvării Naționale, reluctant to civic participation or political negotiation, de-aligning Romania from the surge of the other CEE countries, who are now one step further. Ion Iliescu seemed to have used all his channels in order to gain the presidential and parliamentary elections, installing at local and county levels mostly his sympathizers. He set the initial norms and pace of any political competitiveness, dictating the entire dynamic. He proved a great capacity to capitalize and to instrumentalize even the human resource, reminding the story of Mineraiada, obviously rejected lustration and severely punished "suspicious" openness. The later PSD, extract of FSN, maintained extensively the same practices.

The author points out to the so-called presidentialisation of Romania. Although a semi-presidential country, Traian Băsescu's tenure was, as well, power oriented, undertaking more prerogatives than normally, speculating unclear legislation, extorting advantages. Moreover, the President leads more or less directly the party, manifesting influence wherever possible, finding it hard to separate from the "team". In fact, power is exploited in any situations, starting with the local feuds of very hard to topple mayors.

Vaida's expertise in political science helps identifying specific political cleavages to Romania: the social democrat rural area versus the liberal urban one and the liberal Transylvania versus the rather social-democrat southern area.

The last indicator is the political culture of Romania. As inferred from the high fragmentation of political parties, dysfunctional cohabitation, the ephemeral coalitions, hate discourse, low political turn, low civic participation and poor legitimacy of the political class, the political culture is lethargic.

From an institutional point of view, the transition is done. However, occasionally they become means of abuses of power of their heads, their authority is constrained or led in such a way that it maximizes the space of maneuver as much as possible.

Vaida concludes that democracy remains feeble, stagnant at the moment.

**The Incomplete Regionalization Process in Romania and the Unfulfilled Potential for Enhanced Growth Catalyst Structures-A Critical Analysis, by Mircea Maniu and Horațiu Dan**

The third chapter deals with the regionalization in Romania, deriving as rather a constraint from the Europeanization process. *Europe of Regions* itself represents, an adaptation of the EU to the driving force of globalization and competitiveness of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Horațiu Dan and Mircea Maniu analyze the developmental structure of regionalization, assessing how the process correlates with European goals and expectations, according to three indicators: the institutions-setting the space of maneuver, the identity-setting the governance convergence point and lastly the local economy- mirroring its success.

One of their main assumptions is that the regionalization process is acts as a softer form of deepening integration following the single market and the monetary unification, comes from above, and it is strategically inserted in the national politics. Romania does not appear as a fertile soil to easily, organically embrace change. Most of the time, steps are taken further only if incited by external factors, and most often have to overcome obstructions by internal factors such as low efficient administration at all levels. This obviously makes the chances of a good regional governance drop. Bringing into discussion *regional identity* may revive ethnic delineation and may touch sensitive historical tensions. Besides, elements as what Francis Fukuyama calls “megalothymia”, specific to historically feudal societies represent dangers of deepening disintegration.

In Romania, the wager for regionalization were the European funding for regional territorial units, hit, not surprisingly by difficulties in absorption and management. Romanian authorities do not seem inclined towards more decentralization, elaborating elusive documents, being reluctant to forms of reformation that can risk their electoral stakes. In another optic, decentralization should ideally foster competition between the regions, pushing for higher quality output.

Nevertheless, the authors bring to readers` attention the example of development of Cluj metropolitan area, which has made considerable advancements both in traditional domains such as health or education, becoming one of the most relevant IT cluster in Romania. Another exception from the daunting “rule” mentioned above is the AVE alliance, initiated by for most thriving western cities of the country: Arad, Timisoara, Cluj-Napoca and Oradea.

The authors conclude that regionalization is insufficient while ignoring the process is highly counterproductive.

#### **The fourth The Romanian Model of Diversity Management-Prospects and Achievements, by Levente Salat**

The author tries to provide an analysis of the Romanian model of managing diversity, more precisely national minorities in Romania, assessing them separately in three different groups: the Hungarian minority, the Roma community and the other national minorities grouped collectively. The author raises questions linked to the inconsistency of the actual minority regime used by Romania, referring to the well-conceived and all-encompassing legislation, and its low efficiency as evoked in the minorities' discourse.

An extensive theoretical base on minority regimes is provided, explaining its temporal, gradual, development, equipped with *normative* and *instrumental* elements. These are generally the result of cooperation among experts, gathered in "epistemic communities", benefiting from a "consensual knowledge", situationally mediating the interest between the state and the minority interest.

Highly important when deciphering the minority approach, with the aim of *reading* the minority regimes, are the minority policy paradigms, which could go three ways: integrationist, political accommodationist, constitutional accommodationist.

The author indicates three points of analysis: the success of ethnic mobilization, the linguistic dimension of the Romanian Model of diversity management, and the strategies of minorities claim-making, respectively the majority response.

The interaction takes place in both formal and informal dimensions. When specifically talking about the relations between Romania and the Hungarian minority, it seems that they are quite coherent in action and discourse, both culturally and politically. They are well surveilled by the Hungarian administration. However, occasionally, more "intrusive" identity claims (heraldic or linguistic in nature) are solved at the Court level. In terms of discourse and claim-making capacity, the Hungarian minority plays its card well, strategically formulating demands, scaling accordingly. They allusively made requests of constitutional accommodation, in order to eliminate fears of insecurities. So does Romanian political parties, which allows for what the author calls, rather ethnic parallelism.

The Roma community claims the impact of the Romanian approach remains insufficient to break “vicious circle”, while the NGOs do not trust the pure manner projects implementation. In the absence of a parent state, the “Roma problem” is, just as in the case of Hungarian minority, another socially constructed issue which already lays the premises of a faulty intervention.

The group of smaller communities is treated as a whole. Their main issue concerns representation in Parliament, under the present electoral law. Besides only one seat allocated for minority representation on behalf of all the others, sometimes the numbers of people pertaining to a minority claimed to be represented during the elections surpasses the number of people recorded in the last census. The stakes for this position are high, and conflicts of interests, “ethno business”, occurs frequently.

The strongest contradiction identified resides in the fact that the Romanian approach seems to have undeclared intentions, hindering the real effectiveness of the policies they conceived and of the number of documents and institutions that operate the policies.

### **Translatio imperii: Romanian Foreign Policy in Transition, by Ruxandra Ivan**

This final chapter pertains to Ruxandra Ivan, and looks into a possible impact of transition to democracy over the Romanian Foreign Policy, in terms of content and structure.

The theoretical approaches chosen to examine the desired elements evokes that the transition studies were actually never preoccupied with studying the impact of conversion to democracy on Foreign Policy. Such an endeavor fell upon the Foreign Policy Analysis schools, influenced by the behaviorists. Bridging the International Relations and the Political Science domains, Foreign Policy schools searches for the factors that influence decision-making, leaning its study on the political system, as defined by Easton. The International Relations approaches are split between the liberal institutionalist approach claiming that Foreign policy might be changed as a result of the international arrangements and, on the other hand, the realists always contending the national interest.

The author splits the space of maneuver in an operational space and a psychological space. While the operational area refers to rather the political color or conditionality by external, international areas, the psychological dimension resides in the historical legacies. Apparently, that the Romanians have had this

sort of “Dinicu Golescu complex”, a historical complex of inferiority related to the West, since long time ago. Starting with the cultural aspirations to the Western model in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the US as the free world, was the main source of suffering of the oppressed community during communism. While obsessively referring to “Euro-Atlantic integration” as having a firm common identity, it has been proven wrong multiple times. The EU condemned parallel accords between Romania and the US or NATO, for example, influencing decision-making in its Foreign Policy.

In more pragmatic, operational terms, the domestic factors do have an impact, as well. For example, the demonic portrayal of Russia after the fall of communism weighted considerably in turning towards the West. At the same time, the external factors, in the case of Romania, do not fall much apart from the Central Eastern European stereotype countries, as suggested by the realists in IR. Always depending on alliances with stronger actors, these emerging democracies see no other direction but aligning with the strongest. Since Romania got rid of the Soviet Union in 1989, its Foreign Policy was guided by the principles of NATO and the EU. After the official integration, no long-term, coherent, national strategy can be noticed, since the country is highly dependent on the already established route. Even though Romania sought independence, its peripheral condition forces it to stay under the umbrella of one or another. One notable, final remark made by the author, is that, hopefully, this protracted state of unaccomplished democracy is not the actual “end of history” of Francis Fukuyama.

In conclusion, a metaphoric pertinent answer to the question in the title of the book is that Romanian`s democratic consolidation and Europeanization was a one-way journey to an undecided destination, set off on an unknown road.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

1. Deutsche Welle, *Nicolae Ciucă, desemnat premier al Guvernului PNL-PSD-UDMR*, URL: <https://www.dw.com/ro/nicolae-ciuc%C4%83-desemnat-premier-al-guvernului-pnl-psd-udmr/a-59900257>.
2. Europa Liberă România, *PSD se înscrie între populiștii suveraniști europeni. De la vorbele din discurs la faptele transpuse în legi*, URL: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/psd-se-inscrie-in-randul-populistilor-europeni-de-la-vorbele-din-discurs-la-faptele-transpuse-in-legi/29941786.html>.

3. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *The State of Democracy in Europe, Overcoming the Impact of the Pandemic*, URL: <https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/state-of-democracy-in-europe-2021.pdf>.
4. International Press Institute, *Right to information suffers further in Romania during pandemic*, URL: <https://ipi.media/right-to-information-suffers-further-in-romania-during-pandemic/>.
5. Krakovsky, Roman, *Illiberal democracies in Central Europe*, *Études* (4), 2019, URL: [https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_ETU\\_4259\\_0009--illiberal-democracies-in-central-europe.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_ETU_4259_0009--illiberal-democracies-in-central-europe.htm).
6. Politico, *Democracy 'in retreat' globally, report warns*, URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/democracy-in-retreat-globally-report-warns/>.