

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Radu Carp, *A light in the darkness. Democracy, the rule of law and human rights in a changing world [O lumină în întuneric. Democrație, stat de drept și drepturile omului într-o lume în schimbare]*, Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, 2020, ISBN-13: 978-606-537-499-7, 297 pages**

*Review by Cristina MATIUTA*

In the early 1990s, with the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern European countries, history seemed to have come to an end (paraphrasing Francis Fukuyama's famous syntagm) by the victory of liberal democracy as an internal political regime and global order, with no serious competitors. What happened next proved quite quickly that things were far from looking like that and the wave of democratization that followed the fall of communist regimes did not necessarily lead to the consolidation of democracies but could also lead to new forms of authoritarianism. Moreover, we have witnessed to a relativization of democracy, rule of law and human rights, some political regimes claiming that they are democracies that can function without the liberal model that underlies these values.

This is the argument of the book briefly reviewed here- *A light in the darkness. Democracy, the rule of law and human rights in a changing world-*, namely the need to debate these issues without which we would not have a clear horizon, but a darkness in which we would no longer distinguish who are the opponents of democracy. The theses and antitheses on these topics, says Professor Radu Carp, ensure the synthesis, the way out of the darkness. "A single debate or a series of isolated debates cannot ensure such a result. That's why I titled this book *A Light in the Darkness*. We cannot claim to shed light where it is completely missing, but at least a lighthouse can be lit to guide those who want to understand why democracy, especially in the liberal version, has multiple advantages and that is why it benefits from such diverse appeals" (p. 8).

The book is organized into nine chapters, grouping articles written by the author over almost three years and makes references to a rich bibliography. It applies the conceptual grids of political science to a diverse reality, to rapidly succeeding events, the author descending into the arena and providing a coherent explanatory model. The chapters discuss topics such as the current state of democracy and the danger of populism; the rule of law; human rights and the protection of national minorities; Romanian democracy between internal practices and external challenges; political developments in the Republic of Moldova; religion in public space; European governance and the Europeanization of national policy; democracy, authoritarianism and human rights in international relations.

From the first chapter, analyzing the distrust in the fundamental institutions of democracy and politicians, highlighted by numerous surveys in the European countries and the United States (in parallel with the growing confidence in anti-system and anti-democratic parties), the author summarizes several remedies to reduce mistrust in democracy. One would be a more responsible behavior of politicians, who would believe themselves more in the virtues of democracy. A politician who claims that all politicians lie or steal, except him, who has a magical solution to all problems, inevitably erodes trust in democracy. Another remedy is an impartial mass media, outside the political game, because a partisan press induces distrust in democracy. Another solution would be to understand better the difference between political disagreement/honest competition and the desire to annihilate the opponent. Political competition should be kept within reasonable limits so that permanent attacks and baseless accusations do not take up all the space. Finally, a very important remedy is to defend the independence of the judiciary. Attacks by political leaders on the judiciary have sparked widespread protests in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. All these remedies, valid everywhere because they increase the legitimacy of democracy, should be applied consistently in Romania as well. The book chapter entitled *Romanian democracy - internal practices, external challenges*, draws attention, among others, to the functioning of judiciary - a stage assessment at over a decade after EU integration and the establishment of the cooperation and verification mechanism. The author concludes that, despite the obvious progress, there are still important problems to be solved in order to be able to speak of a good functioning of judiciary (recovery of damages created by corruption and a reasonable time in solving cases are only two of them).

A consistent chapter of the book examines the rise of populism, Eurosceptic discourses and attacks on the rule of law in several EU countries (Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Italy, France, Slovakia, Malta). The author urges caution in issuing Manichaean judgments - we are with the EU or against it-, a way of approaching that only harms. Rather, we should understand that "the current European architecture, including supra- or sub-national constructions, is the effect of long-term negotiations and sometimes extremely fragile compromises" (p. 51). European governance is the subject of another chapter of the book (chapter eight), which discusses issues such as defense/military cooperation (Permanent Structured Cooperation -PESCO), the issue of migration and the cleavage it generates within the EU, the debates on the EU budget and structural funds conditioning on the observance of rule of law principles. Several sections of this chapter are dedicated to the European Parliament elections in May 2019, seen, especially in the context of the rise of populist parties across the EU and the Brexit, as a turning point for the future of the Union. Possible scenarios and alliances are analyzed, as well as the issue of using the procedure according to which the party with the highest number of votes appoints the future president of the European Commission (*spitzenkandidat*) and the election results. The good news of these elections was the high level of turnout, over half of the population, well above the previous elections. For Romania, the good news was the increased participation, the definite victory of the pro-European parties and the validation of a referendum on justice issues, related to European values. The European elections revealed a fragmentation of the political spectrum, a direct consequence of fragmentation at the national level and negotiations for key positions at European level were lengthy and difficult. All these indicate that "it is time for flexible alliances and regional interests that are obliged to converge in the direction of a European interest" (p. 257).

Taken together, the chapters of this book provide explanations for understanding various situations, a complex reality in which the model of liberal democracy is as current as possible, and the failure of non-democratic regimes to provide solutions to citizens' problems and expectations is increasingly obvious. As the author states from the beginning, there is no alternative model to liberal democracy that offers guarantees for the free manifestation of the needs of all those who establish a fully desirable society, both open to modernity and adapted to traditions.