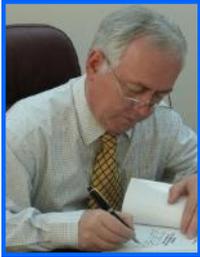


Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory"—I.L.Caragiale

## EDITORIAL



### From liberalism to illiberalism ... and thereafter?

**Corneliu PIVARIU**

The term, known primarily as *illiberal democracy* appeared relatively recently – in terms of historical time - and is most often quoted as being used by the well known politologist Fareed Zakaria in the article *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, published in 1997 in *Foreign Affairs*. In a nutshell, the illiberal democracy is considered a system of governance whereby although elections are taking place the citizens are not aware of the activities carried out by those who exert the real power as a result of certain civil liberties being cut. A country ruled by illiberal democracy is not an open society and many countries are listed as neither free nor authoritarian, but presumably free and are placed somewhere between democratic or undemocratic regimes. And that also because although there are constitutional limits defining the executive power, those in power ignore the respective provisions or that there is not a constitutional framework appropriate for democratic freedoms in place. This is why the illiberal democracy is known as well as partial democracy, as low intensity democracy or hybrid regime.

We find an interesting approach in Francis Fukuyama's article *The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy*, published in the 58th of August, 2018 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. He notices the transformations of the political world since the beginning of the 1970s until the first decade of the this century, when the number of democracies increased from around 35 to more than 110 while the number of people living in extreme poverty decreased from 42% of the total global population in 1993 to 18% in 2008. Fukuyama stresses nevertheless that in numerous countries and especially in the developed democracies the economic disparity increased dramatically since mainly the rich and the well educated enjoyed the benefits of economic growth.

This transition towards an increasingly open society and towards the liberal world order witnessed a gradual slow down or even became reversible. It is true that during the last years a number of democracies failed all over the world and democracy is losing ground. At the same time, many countries with authoritarian regimes, China and Russia ranked first among them, became increasingly attractive as template. Countries which seemed to be liberal democracies in the making or successful in the 1990s, including Hungary, Poland, Thailand and Turkey slipped back towards authoritarianism. In 1993 in Russia, Boris Eltsin assailed the parliament as a result of the unconstitutional acts it issued. He suspended the constitutional court, abolished the system of local governments and dismissed numerous governors. From the war in Chechnia to his economic program, Eltsin proved a total lack of interest towards the constitutional procedures and to the limits of his power. Maybe he was intimately a liberal yet his acts created a Russian super-presidency Vladimir Putin is successfully exerting today. Elections are being held regularly yet many foreign observers consider they are not free and correct. The assassination of journalists or of political opponents proves the limits imposed to the freedom of expression; the most important TV networks and newspapers are state owned or influenced by the government and support openly the government parties during the election campaigns. The state control over media is on the rise and its power is used as well for achieving certain foreign policy objectives while the actions of the political opposition are increasingly difficult.

A representative of the illiberal order in Europe is Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban who described in July 2014 his vision on Hungary's future as *illiberal state*. In his interpretation, the illiberal state does not reject the values of the liberal democracy yet it does not adopt them as central element of state organisation.

In a Freedom House report titled *Modern Authoritarianism: Illiberal Democracies* some prerequisites are presented so that illiberalism will gain ground in different countries, among which: when the

main ruling parties are defeated in elections and the illiberal forces succeed in taking their places; the fundamental weaknesses of the democratic institutions in the political sphere, including media, civil society, anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary. In practical terms, it is unlikely that illiberal forces manage to transform countries where the existing parties are strong, with loyal followers and where there is a power balance. If, however, the illiberal forces have enough political will and the defenders of the democratic institutions are not convincing and do not enjoy popular support, everything is possible, the Freedom House report underlines.

As early as 2015 Fareed Zakaria said that Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdogan's leadership became a typical case of illiberal democracy and, after the so-called July 2016 coup attempt and the legislative changes which followed, it became a state evolving towards dictatorship, completing the specter of illiberalism.

A notion and a reality existing for a long time and closely related to the emergence of illiberalism is that of the *parallel state* or the *underground state* (*Deep State* – the expression used in the USA). It is said that the origin of this term derives from Turkish language - *derin devlet*, the secret Turkish network founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for undertaking clandestine operations in order to preserve the government structure. In our opinion, the earliest form of the parallel state is as old as democracy and it developed alongside the states' democratic evolution. The term underground state was mostly used for describing certain situations in Russia or Turkey, only to spread thereafter to Europe, but also to the USA, and referred to actions favouring the conspiracy theories. Yet there is a great reserve in openly approaching this phenomenon, most probably as a result of the actions that this *parallel/underground state* are carried out in accordance with other rules and principles than the democratic ones.

A possible definition of the parallel state: a grouping of personalities with first of all important positions in the state administration – especially within the power institutions (intelligence services and the defense system, justice, economic decision makers, politicians), media, culture, education and non-governmental organisations, acting for the achievement of certain political, economic and of other nature objectives according to their interests or of some foreign powers as well, others than the national interests of the respective country decided by official documents.

The 2010-2011 Arab revolts led to the disappearance of some dictatorial regimes in the Middle East (except for Syria) yet they did not lead to democratization as strongmen regimes are still present and civil wars broke out in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. We are witnessing the triumph of the nationalism populism in many countries, one in one of the most durable liberal democracies in the world – Great Britain which in 2016 decided to leave the European Union (recent polls show that the population changed their mind and 59% of them would like to remain in the EU).

The troubled European Union, with a dismissive Brussels bureaucracy or, worse still, unable to discern today's world major geopolitical developments, dangling at the shelter of statistics underlying the relevance of the organisation worldwide yet without realizing enough what is going on in the east, west and south, will probably have the big surprise after the European elections to be held in May 2019. That is why the French president Emmanuel Macron, with a plummeting approval rate in his country had, on September 7th, in Marseille, a meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel, a day after he paid a visit to Luxembourg for preparing the general offensive of the *progress* against the *reactionary nationalism*. The meeting was intended to achieve joint actions for halting the electoral rise of the Euroskeptics populists and of anti-migration parties. Maybe more, Macron would like to form a Pan-European vehicle of the type of his party - En Marche, for acquiring a strong position in the EU.

On this background of political or even philosophical search, the world geopolitics tries to settle in a new equilibrium formula until which completion there will be economic and social convulsions and wars. A rather long period of time will pass until a new formula of global equilibrium is reached.