

Adriana Ciobanu

Democracy - greatest ideal

Democracy is the most evolved and rewarding form of social organization. The simple fact that the human race which has been trying for thousands of years to improve its' life ended up with the same regime as the Greeks more than two thousand years ago is a good-enough proof to this fact.

Democracy has changed its "presentation form" since it was first conceived by the Greeks, it had to be modified in order to meet the needs of modern societies. But the basic idea remains the same over the years, because the people of all times have the same craving for being free and having their fundamental rights respected.

I believe a democratic regime to be first of all some sort of Utopia: it is clear that it cannot be put into practice in the same way as it is theorized.

Theoretically, democracy is being seen as a set of moral and social rules which, if respected, are supposed to lead to a universal and total respect of human rights and to provide all the necessary conditions for every individual so that he can find his personal happiness.

Unfortunately, it does not work like that when brought into force. We can all realize that it is not enough for a community to adopt a Constitution which confirms a democratic regime. In order to have a strong democratic system implemented it is important first of all to understand the "democracy" concept and achieve the democratic values that are essential for the system to work. In reality, democracy is not a happiness provider for the people and it shouldn't be seen as such. It is a challenge, a goal itself.

I believe it is extremely important for people to understand that, especially the people living in countries which don't have a national tradition in democracy (the ex-communist countries from Eastern Europe). I live in one of those countries, and although I was only one-month old when the Revolution came, I still had to deal with the former regimes remembrance. When two totally different ideologies combine in the conscience of an insecure and undecided nation, the result consists of a few sacrificed generations, the buffers...

The transition from communism to democracy is so difficult for these countries because there are so many new elements to be understood. We have adopted a democratic Constitution, formed a Parliament and switched to a free economy, but the Constitution is so often misunderstood, the Parliament is made up of former communists that have replaced the words "socialism's glory" with "democratic values" in their speeches and go along with them, and the economy is also controlled by wily communists which carry the sign of "successful business men" now.

Constitutions can be clarified, the Parliament and Government members changed, and the business world will be transformed eventually, but the most difficult thing to do is to deal with a mentality that has been imposed on a nation for nearly 50 years. People are used to thinking there's nothing they can do to change the way things are being done in the countries they live in. And they are so used to this idea, and (so sadly) comfortable with it, that even when someone comes up to them and says: "If you don't like that, you can change it" they don't believe him and think that person has an ulterior motive.

This way of thinking truly affects the people in Romania. It's like having all the right conditions to do something, the opportunity you've been waiting for, but you don't get to do it because in the process you bump into one of those narrow-minded people.

In this case, the normal thing would be for the “old-thinkers” to analyze this new system, to try to understand how it works, how come these “smug teenagers” think they can change the unchangeable. But they don’t, they do nothing.

Actually, they do more than nothing. They explain to the “smug teenagers” that their goal is stupid, that they must think “realistically”. The worst thing of all is that those kids end up believing their parents and teachers, and they start thinking just like them, that they must accept everything that comes their way and not complain about anything. This is a pattern I’ve seen repeat itself every time the student’s council suggests something new to the headmaster of our school, or there’s a protest against censorship, or some teenager wants to join an environmental organization.

The thought that there’s nothing you can do to change the system can only make your life worse. The best example that this kind of communist thinking still persists in Romania even after 17 years of democracy is the construction of “Cathedral Plaza” in the center of Bucharest.

My school is situated in one of the old residential areas of the city. There are many historic mansions there, the inter-war bourgeoisie’s houses. Although some new constructions have been built there, they have been carefully adjusted so that they don’t ruin the charm of the place. They are no taller than 2 or 3 floors, not made entirely out of glass and the colors match those of surrounding buildings.

Very close to my school there is St Joseph’s Cathedral, a beautiful, 100-years-old catholic cathedral. Next to the cathedral there was an empty terrain, which has been bought years ago by a company that is now building a sky-scraper there. Besides being totally unaesthetic, the building may also affect the cathedral itself. The huge construction is placed a few meters from it, and specialists say that the area is unsuitable for building a sky-scraper, since the soil is gritty.

Everybody I know is horrified by this project; on my way to school I see people stopping in front of the building under construction, staring at the project-board and mumbling: “Why did they have to do it here? Why not somewhere else? ”. However, despite this general dissent, nobody is doing anything. The only opposition comes from the Catholic Church, but it’s more of a formal opposition than an active one.

Things have come this far because all the people in opposition to the construction think: “This is the work of powerful business men and corrupt politicians. How could we believe we can fight them?” This happened, indeed, because of some corrupt politicians that approved of the project in return of money or favors. But I honestly believe that if the people of this country would remind these politicians once in a while of the responsibilities they have, corruption would not be such a wide-spread phenomenon. They should realize that firstly they must keep their promises to the people that elected them, that they must listen to them.

The problem is, the people are not asking to be listened, because they are so sure they won’t be. They know from TV or papers they are living in a democratic country, they own their own business, they shop in malls, they travel abroad, but they still don’t know what democracy is. They still don’t know they can choose to be heard.

Democracy is a complex process, not just a status of a country. It is the opportunity for a continuous improvement of the world we live in.

Democracy is indeed a utopic idea. It is difficult to conceive such a world where people are equal, and perfectly happy with their equality. That is because it’s in the human nature to want more, to distinguish itself. This cannot be changed, and it shouldn’t be. Because what is also in the human nature is the need of having a goal, a universal dream which will never be fulfilled, but it will always be brought a little bit closer. And that alone is worth fighting for.

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