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Daniel Barbu
Politica pentru barbari
Politics for Barbarians

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The political writings of professor Daniel Barbu, a distinguished political scientist from the University of Bucharest, have added in their well documented and elegantly argued polemical tone new vistas to the present-day engrossing debate on the Romanian issues of modernization, or rather on its lack of systematic modernization. Such volumes as the *Republica absentă / The Absent Republic*, Nemira, Bucharest, 1999, *Bizanț contra Bizanț / Byzantium versus Byzantium*, Nemira, Bucharest, 2001 or the recently issued one, *Politica pentru barbari / Politics for Barbarians*, Nemira, Bucharest 2005, provide the reader with a timely opportunity not only to share an original political diagnose of recent years, but also to endorse an insightful examination of our political culture. The author's intention is revealed from the first page, which points not only to a certain hasty cutting out of introductory stratagems, but also to the gravity of the misgivings and shortcomings pervading recent political life in Romania. Daniel Barbu's starting premise consists actually in comparing the general perception of politics in recent Romania, grafted in the mindset of ordinary people as well as in the present-day political class, with Tocqueville's analysis of an early 19-th century nascent political culture: the American one. Obviously, this comparison holds true on a general level, excepting the salient particular differences extant between the two terms of comparison. The comparison targets the validity of classical political philosophy for the experience of Romanian governance, focusing on political representation and how it was has tackled in Romanian modernity. In this train of thought, if Daniel Barbu starts from claiming that Romanians " do no want so much to be represented, but rather to be governed", it is because the effective political task of representation has remained an unfulfilled hope in spite of the attempts to implement it, especially after 1989. The implicit confusion between being represented and being governed, leads to discussing the difference between being a subject and a citizen, and thus to perceiving the image of barbarity and barbarians. The divide between barbarians and the civilized sets for another distinction, that between a political elite, or an elitist region of the world (geographically mapped) where true, civilized politics is exerted, and the rest of the world, seen as the realm of political crimes and blunders. The question of how genuinely political representation has been dealt with in Romania after 1989 comes into focus when one looks for necessarily different political programs, and sooner or later discovers that these are replaceable versions of the same post-communist, populist demagoguery.

The shadow of the unique party is still towering over young Romanian democracy and the party-state concubinage is echoed in the dominant lack of trust in civil society. Instead of the appearance of different groups / societies of citizens who would declare their commitment for public causes, assuming thus their role of representatives in sustaining them, Romanians seem to continue to praise the impersonal status of power and its official rituals. The fountain of this welling

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power is to be located in the figure of political party leader, or in the paternal figure of the nation. Usually party leaders are perceived as 'locomotives", a recurrent metaphor showing the sacred place of the leading role in the party, at the same time the detrimental image for the ordinary party members, the periphery and the silence of it. The absence of an active and constructive response from civil society to an endless number of issues may point the finger to the long years of dictatorship mostly belonging to the communist period, and thus, to a political culture in which the issues of representation was meant either adorn dictatorship or to be the instruments of a rigid ideological yoking.

Under these circumstances, a radical assessment of the situation cannot, and should not be avoided or toned down endlessly. It is from this perspective, it seems to me, that Daniel Barbu resorts explicitly to a necessary distinction among real politicians, political mentors and demagogues. Real politicians are those who enroll in politics to dedicate themselves for the benefit of their communities and prove the authenticity of their commitment by their effective contribution to the rise of the ideological standards in their political groups, by making thus politics *visible* for the common citizen, by bringing eventually higher standards of living. In this way, the true politician should abstain from mingling politics with affairs, no matter how profitable this might seems chiefly in times when the position of the judiciary seems rather unsettled. Actually, the appearance on the public stage of rather unschooled would-to-be political leaders, who can barely tell the difference from one party to another, is a signal for the low standards of the political class, which has been already warned for several times by voters. The high risks run by the political class to jeopardize political symbols of democracy, and consequently nurture nostalgic feeling for totalitarianism should not be overlooked. Within these days, a politician's task appears so the more complicate, and it appeals, in Daniel Barbu's words, to a resemblance with a religious believer, in the sense that the politician should distinguish once again between private and public interests, sorting out governance from public administration. In this line, politicians should actually face the political and philosophical fundamentals which build the modern world, or otherwise they may be judged as insufficiently mature, chiefly after the experience of totalitarianism and its various forms all over the world. Political mentors though rare in the transition period of post-communist, should not be confounded with journalists. Whether journalists observe with an undeniable sense of tracing political intrigue or intuit perils for democracy, a political mentor is different from a political fighter or a political reporter. A political mentor counts on the interrelationship between culture and politics and therefore, exploring the political traditions, he should imagine or rather project the consequences of his remarks, praising silence as well as public interventions. In a country where political journalism has replaced almost completely political philosophy, Daniel Barbu could naturally aspire to the position or role of a political mentor. Dealing with such complex and sensitive issues as (and I am quoting some chapters of his recent book) as for instance " On the Romanians' Difficulties to Perceive Politics" , "Democracy and Contestation in Romania, 1918-2004", or "Between Village and State : How Many Origins Has Got Romania ?", Daniel Barbu makes it clear that politics is usually regarded in Romania as manipulation, unethical bargaining, naturally devoid of any idealism, or of any spiritual content. Demagogues have obviously contributed to the present state of things by practically proving that politics could gentrify and legitimize them better than their less flashy jobs. The enthusiasm the public affairs, considers Daniel Barbu, should call forth philosophical and cultural debates to endorse the competition for the benefit of the community, but instead, in Romanian politics at least, it engenders only the sense of a strong adversity eventually claiming the exclusion of the other, which reminds of the political tactics of our recent past. Contemplating the chasm between the meanings of modernity in Western Europe and the significance of modernity in Eastern Europe, the author may sound skeptical, true, but at least he commands the knowledge of his subtle assertions.

Politics for Barbarians exacts a mature blend of hope and realism in gauging Romanians' political heritage.