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Review of Paul Dobrescu's *Dragonii dezvoltării: Revine istoria pe supercontinentul euroasiatic?*

I have known Professor Paul Dobrescu for more than twenty years. I have had the opportunity to see how he has contributed to the establishment of a new university, how he has consolidated and added good reputation to it. I have tried to support his effort to internationalize this institution and I have participated in many joint conferences and workshops. I have listened to his presentations and read his books and studies. We've had long conversations about important global issues and about the new challenges the world is facing. I have always been impressed by the passion he invested in all these approaches and conversations, by his desire to find answers to important questions and to hear expert opinions. Looking retrospectively, I see that many of his previous economic, political and social hypotheses have been or are being confirmed. The volume *The Dragons of Development. Is History Coming Back on the EuroAsian Supercontinent?* is almost a synthesis of the global trends that Dr. Dobrescu has examined and of the mechanisms that have generated or enabled them.

From my point of view, Paul Dobrescu is one of the very few independent scholars and researchers in Romania, in the area of political and economic analysis. His studies do not answer to "orders" or fashions; They are based on sources and expertise that cannot be denied, and are built on broad cultural, historical, political and economic perspectives. Development, one of the main topics of the author, is examined in its complexity, as a testimony of a country or of a culture.

As my thoughts here are only a contribution to the round table that focuses on this important book (and I hope the author will get involved into the conversation), I will quickly mention the topics and ideas that I found relevant and I will ask some questions.

The first chapter examines the critical importance of Artificial Intelligence, one of the main areas of development in the future, a field where there already is a heated competition between the United States and China. The two countries are far ahead, innovation being on the U.S. side, while China has the advantage of easily collecting data from more than one billion citizens. In terms of innovation, China also has made gigantic steps, while the United States has now the ability to collect more and more data, so things are in constant evolution. *The question that I have here is related to Artificial Intelligence, to the problems that occur once individual freedom is affected, once privacy is more and more limited through the process of gathering in-*

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formation that helps producing viable algorithms. How are these challenges going to be managed by consolidated and/or emerging democracies, during the era of globalization?

The second chapter suggests that the social vision of development created by the West needs to be reexamined, as a consequence of the unbalances produced by the neoliberal globalization, of the 2007-2009 financial crisis, and of the hesitant answer to the pandemic. The neoliberalism initiated in the early eighties by Reagan and Thatcher (and consolidated by the fall of Communism) needs to be re-assessed. Francis Fukuyama's idea about "the end of history" seems almost a joke now... On the contrary, the role of the state seems to become more important: not the old style, focused on 'central planning,' but its potential contribution as a modern and strategic partner of the private businesses. *We need to analyze here what are the risks of the huge gap – regarding economic and financial power – between a small elite group and the rest of the society. What is going to be the role of the state in managing this inequity?*

In the third chapter, evidence is shown that the great competition is not anymore about liberalizing the markets, but about controlling the main channels of acquiring raw materials and of distribution. There is strong evidence that China is building infrastructure to connect with Africa and Central Asia, with ties to Europe via Russia and several EU countries. Germany seems to be temporary "tied" to China and Russia, either through its exports or through energy needs. *What is going to be the U.S. "counteroffer", under the current circumstances?*

The fourth chapter comes with data that supports the idea that the world power control will be divided. Military supremacy is significant, but not enough for such a control. The author examines the growth of India and Russia. Based on a variety of data, it looks like only one Western economy will be in the top five of the world in less than 10 years: This is going to be the United States, but maybe not the first one in the ranking... Under these news circumstances, it is interesting to see how Germany will position itself, and – consequently – what will be the strategy of the European Union. Both seem to be 'in the middle' now, but a clear choice will be needed soon. According to Paul Dobrescu, if the EU won't be among the protagonists of the development competition, Germany also will be in decline. The only viable option for Europe and Germany is to become a superpower of the same class with Washington or Beijing. *What are the main obstacles – internal and external – of such a trajectory? ...*

The last chapter is devoted to Romania. The lack of a long-term development strategy after 1989 is acknowledged. The author compares the inconsistencies and amateurship to what other countries in East and Central Europe (like Poland) have done. References are made to Israel and South Korea, as potential sources of inspiration. All these ideas and comparisons are not new. Many models have been brought to the Romanian public's attention after 1989. The problem is that, after so many disillusionments (let's remember the 'web' of highways that we were talking in the early nineties...), Romanians have become skeptical. *Are there leaders (personalities or parties) that can come into the public sphere with a viable development strategy and generate broad support for it?*

There are many things to be said or written about this fascinating book, which does not aim to be an oracle, but a tool to make readers think, based on information and analyses of exceptional quality. Paul Dobrescu's volume also is an excellent premise for a debate regarding the major challenges of this era and their impact on societies and individuals.