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Reply to reviewers of *Dragonii dezvoltării: Revine istoria pe supercontinentul euroasiatic?*

Questions help us reach the essence. By using only a few words, questions have the ability to synthesize thoughts, doubts, reflections that echo the quest for deeper meaning. They speak with great fidelity of a person's interests. They give voice to any ambiguousness arising from a text, or maybe, to a pre-existing preoccupation, amplified and precipitated by reading that text. In any case, questions sketch a *double intellectual portrait*: of the one who addresses the question and of the occasion that prompts the question, in this case, my work on the "Dragons of Development". Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to the editors of the Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations for facilitating this lively and open way of debating a paper, and to sincerely thank the reviewers who took their time to read the book and express their doubts and thoughts in the form of questions to be answered in the following pages.

The common denominator of some of the questions and problems raised by the reviewers is represented by the new technological revolution, the role of AI in this revolution, and their impact on the world today. No one doubts the fact that we are living *the greatest transformation of the information environment since Gutenberg's printing press*. Nevertheless, as John Naughton emphasized, "we're as clueless about where it's heading and what's driving it as the citizens of Mainz were in 1495" (Naughton, 2019). Four centuries have passed since then; during this time, the printing press shaped society and thinking, introduced new forms of communication, occasioned a massive improvement in the general population's level of education, made public schools and the mass dissemination of knowledge possible. It radically influenced everything. Now, we are at the dawn of a new era, one which will lead to least as many transformations as print did. We try to anticipate some of them. Admittedly, it is a difficult endeavor, on that cannot be entirely successful, even though it echoes the concerns of experts and researches in numerous fields. One reason is that "everyone has only a partial view, and nobody has the whole picture." It would be difficult, if not impossible, to present the whole picture, at a point in time when the new landscape is barely taking shape.

Therefore, the following period will be dominated by what is called "trial and error." Every country or organization concerned with its own evolution is engaged in a tense effort to search,

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to probe, to detect the early trends that will become dominant tomorrow. Whoever reads the world better, whoever manages to adapt faster to new discoveries will succeed.

Artificial Intelligence is the apex of the new technological revolution, the fourth in human history, also called the digital revolution. The terms used to describe this new setting for innovation, although comprehensive, can be misleading, as they focus on key-words such as technology and digitalization, on their conquests, their risks and benefits. Caught in this process of identifying consequences, we forget that upstream - perhaps to a greater extent than in the case of previous revolutions - lie *research and innovation, with their transformative virtues*. That is why all the powerful states make a top priority out of research and innovation. This duo leads to emerging technologies, feeds current tech evolutions and, very importantly, conditions the state to make the best of its potential. The most dynamic economies of the world have a greater *R&D intensity*, meaning GDP allocations in percentual terms. The country that allocates the most to research and development is South Korea – 4.6% of GDP in 2017 –, followed by Japan and Germany, with 3.2 and 3%, respectively. In the case of the United States and China, the figures are lower, 2.8% and 2.2%, respectively; the amount in absolute value is clearly higher. Do you notice the correlation? The countries with the highest positions in the world's economic hierarchy are the ones that direct the largest funds to the field of research and innovation.

Figures describe the state of the world today in the field of research: we have two superpowers, a harrowing pause follows, and then the second-class powers appear. China allocated about three times more for R&D than Japan, five times more than India, 8.5 times more than Russia, 10 times more than Great Britain. I believe we can talk about *bipolarism in research and development*, potentially leading to a new bipolar economic order, or even a new bipolar global order.

One of the most significant features of AI is that *it can only advance integrated*, with all components in a certain cadence and in a certain correlation. A company, even a country, can have laboratories, but if it does not have a sufficiently large database, it cannot develop competitive algorithms. Another company or another country may have a real tradition in the field, but if it has not created a friendly entrepreneurial environment, it risks not capitalizing on the discovery. There may be many start-ups in a country, but if that country does not have enough financial strength to implement innovation, new discoveries may not be capitalized on. Therefore, the promotion of AI requires the simultaneous existence of several conditions. If one of these components is missing, *the whole will not work*. The need for strategy, global image, coordination is required. And with it, the need to *bring up to date and rethink the role of the state, imposed this time from a technological direction*.

Artificial Intelligence is fed by research and innovation; at the same time, it has a particular affinity towards greatness: great powers, great countries, great companies. Why? Because it feeds on data, and data is held by the great powers, countries or companies. With a large amount of data, the big players develop more competitive algorithms that underlie better products. Being more efficient, the products, in turn, attract more users. So, they contribute to an even bigger database. The *spiral of growth* is triggered, which benefits the top players in the field. Are there any chances of catching up? No, and we don't know if such opportunities will emerge in the next years. Even the traditional powers, such as Britain, France, Italy, have this problem. The distance between the top and the bottom of the power hierarchy increases.

The volume we are discussing stresses the decisive importance of strategic vision. We are talking about emerging technologies, the „digital age”, but for the political decision-makers

the challenge prompted by this revolution is to secure the right vision. Countries guided by coherent visions, driven in the spirit of today's imperatives for change, will have a worthy place in the world of tomorrow. We often forget that, beyond the level of technological competition - which is often talked about, there is also a level of competition between strategies and visions for development. Therefore, in the volume I emphasized the role of the state, a vision of a state with strategic responsibilities, meant to preserve the balances at the macro level, to build the foundations for progress and development of that nation. Companies, no matter how large and successful, cannot think in strategic terms for society as a whole, they are not equipped in this regard.

The debates and comments regarding the last section of the volume, which is devoted entirely to Romania, revolved around the concept of the elite and its role in the evolution of a nation. The syncopated evolution of our country in the last 30 years cannot be separated from the modest performance of the political class as a whole, of our political elite (insofar as we can use the term in its true meaning in Romania's case). This topic was treated with indisputable urgency in the last century. We mention in this sense the unequivocal position of the scholar Simion Mehedinți: „The existence of each nation, in any given age, is as valuable as its most representative men. With the help of a great man, even a small nation can reach great achievements; with an insignificant man at the helm, even the greatest and strongest ship can hit the rocks and can ... be left at the mercy of the winds and waves” (Mehedinți, 1937, p. 3).

The period since the end of the Cold War was the fundamental test for the quality of national elites. Why? Because it was a period of great transformations; the quality of the leadership is put to test especially in such contexts. If we were to make a map of how countries and their economies have evolved over the last 30 years, we could establish a fairly accurate rating for the performance of the national elites.

For several hundred years, technology has been the engine of social development; successive technological revolutions acted as milestones of evolution. In her review of the volume, Delia Balaban notes: „Paul Dobrescu elaborated the chapter on AI in a perspective close to technological determinism”. This consideration is open to interpretation. Since I value this author's opinion very much, I wonder. Is this perception is rooted in how the topic was approached, in how the portrait of the new revolution was sketched in thick strokes, or is it based on the fact that today's world does not benefit yet from vision and strategies to guide the technological revolution? There is an undeniable contrast. It seems that the contemporary technological revolution has evolved largely at random, and now we are looking for new means to control it, to forge a new path of evolution, a path where the immense potential of the new technologies will benefit to a greater extent from political and social guidance. It is, if you will, the imperative of the day, whether we are talking about liberal or authoritarian societies, the developed world or the emerging world.

Mălina Ciocea notices another problem, starting from a judgment which was made in the volume: “how can a state like Romania keep in balance geopolitical interests, while striving to be part of a regional strategy?”

We encounter this problem not only in the case of Romania, but of each EU member state. In some occasions, the overall interest of the Union does not necessarily coincide with the interests of individual member states. How can the European and the national level be reconciled? By mutual concessions and – very importantly – by relating not only to the realities of today, but also to those of tomorrow.

Pragmatism is essential in this regard; it is the only attitude that leads to agreements in the benefit of both parties. Whenever I consider this complex issue, Germany's position on the G5 networks and Huawei comes to mind. Brussels has chosen to let the member states have the final say. Spain, for example, accepts Huawei on the 5G networks market, while the Czech Republic does not! In Germany there was an "exhausting" debate, with several "peak" moments. Up until the moment of writing, no definitive resolution was made. Huge interests and strategic stakes are involved; many states would have caved in to the pressure. Not Germany. In Germany, the debate continues... Many, many things depend on the leverage of the state during such negotiations, on its power but also on its determination, on the attachment to an idea.

As I was writing the book discussed in this journal issue, I was greatly impressed by a fact highlighted by the former British ambassador to Germany, Paul Lever: „The reconstruction of Germany after 1945 was a homegrown success. So too were the two other big economic challenges which German have faced, and overcome, since then; reunification in 1990 and a loss of international competitiveness ten years or so later” (Lever, 2017, p. 46). Let us remember the difficult position Germany found itself in after WW2! But it remained true to its credo that, when it comes to development, its own strategic vision is key. Of course, it assimilates various influences, it reflects the spirit of the time, but *originality is the distinctive note*: a synthesis of the particular features and conditions in each country, which can only be driven by the competences of that nation. And by no one else. This is the insight that the Romanian elites were missing then, and, if you will, are still missing today. We rediscover some truths that the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran once observed: “minor cultures” have a propensity “to imitate”, to search for the “prototype”, the “pattern”. This view is reaffirmed today by Ivan Krastev with respect to the elites of the former socialist states who inaugurated what the author calls the “Age of Imitation” (Krastev, 2010).

Tudor Vlad looks at the role of the state from another perspective: „*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.*” The inequality-driven divisions within Western society, especially the American one, is mentioned most frequently in analyses on the topic. Social inequality has many consequences for social mobility, the performance of various social groups and segments of the population, the shrinking of the middle class, and for a certain collapse in public trust. The latter is the most important consequence, in my view, because trust is the binder that ensures a society's cohesion, its immunity to various negative influences (including the wave of fake news and misinformation circulating in the world today). In support of this view, I would like to quote Paul Volcker, a former chairman of the US Federal Reserve in the 1970s and one of the great personalities of his era. In 2018, at the age of 91, Volcker published his testamentary work. Here is his statement on the decline of trust in the Government: “Polls show fewer than 20 percent of Americans trust government to do what's right most of the time, down from about 75 percent sixty years ago” (Volcker & Harper, 2018, p. 3). Trust does not have the precision of an economic indicator, but it sets two fundamental things: *the quality of government* and the way in which *the common good* is served. Nothing calls for a shift in paradigm more than a collapse of trust.

Having these issues in mind, I discovered with great professional interest a recent statement of the American president who, speaking about the „stagnation” associated with the existence of monopolies, with the lack of competition, states: “But, over time, we've lost the

fundamental American idea that true capitalism depends on fair and open competition. Forty years ago, we chose the wrong path, in my view, following the misguided philosophy ... and pulled back on enforcing laws to promote competition. We're now 40 years into the experiment of letting giant corporations accumulate more and more power. And what have we gotten from it? Less growth, weakened investment, fewer small businesses. Too many Americans who feel left behind. Too many people who are poorer than their parents. I believe the experiment failed. We have to get back to an economy that grows from the bottom up and the middle out" (Biden, 2021). It cannot elude us the fact that the new paradigm announced here aims to balance the power of the state and the power of the big tech, as well as the economic and the social dimension of development. There is an obvious similarity to the New Deal, the paradigm inaugurated by President Roosevelt following the Great Depression. Of course, we will have to wait and see how things will turn out. One thing is certain: if it were to be further elaborated and applied, the new paradigm would significantly diverge from the neoliberal one.

I cannot conclude without making some remarks on development and its significance for democracy, trust and social stability. Mălina Ciocea noted that in the last decade my efforts have been focused on development issues, a preoccupation reflected in a number of volumes, the latest being "The Dragons of Development. Is History Returning to the Eurasian Supercontinent?". I have devoted myself to studying development because this process ensures *the capacity to deliver democracy*. I am deeply engaged in the topic because it is in this field that Romania is lagging behind, just like the West and the European Union are also lagging behind to some extent. Our country is *out of phase with the tumult of contemporary development*. It seems that we are somewhere in the planet's stands and we are looking, largely resigned, at this global show. Even today we do not have a somewhat assumed development strategy, given that strategy is the essential element of development. The international climate may or may not be favorable or stimulating, but it is no substitute for one's own effort; what each nation wants to do with itself is an issue that cannot be taken up by anyone else. Not even by God!

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