

## **REVIEWS OF REVIEWS**

*Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, Vol. XIV,  
No. 1/2017

As Henrieta Șerban points out in her introduction to this volume, democracy can never be a finished product but must always be “a work in progress.” The articles contained within the volume are linked by a shared sense of the risks and uncertainties attached to the democratic project.

Keynes famously drew a distinction between risk and uncertainty. Risk can be assessed. We can make some attempts at answering the questions: how serious is the risk, how likely is it to happen, and how can we manage it. Uncertainty, as Keynes pointed out is different. It's what we don't know and cannot predict. It is what Donald Rumsfeld called “the unknown unknowns.” The articles look both backwards and forwards – towards what we can identify as risks, and backwards towards those things that we never envisaged, those “unknown unknowns”, that actually came to pass.

Another feature that links the writers in this volume is a sense that the optimism of Fukuyama, that history was about to end, was misplaced, and that rather than seeing liberal democracy as marching triumphantly into the future to the beat of a Hegelian drum, it turns out that there is no overall plan. The future is not foreordained and there is no overall plan. The articles in the volume are studies in contingency, in the specific qualities of events, their causes and their repercussions, and their associated risks and uncertainties.

In *Ideological Realpolitik, Euroscepticism and American Exceptionalism in Robert Kagan*, a sceptical reading of Robert Kagan's writing, Gabriel C. Gherasim identifies Kagan's preoccupation with “assertive exceptionalism” as an attempt to control risk, specifically the threats to America posed by terrorism and rogue states. However, Gherasim's critical reading of Kagan allows him to see in Kagan's analysis, not an account of the risks of America, but rather an example of the risks to European values that lie at the heart of Kagan's valorisation of power.

From a different perspective Silvia Serafimova takes up the theme of American exceptionalism, in *The Influence of Carl Schmitt's Theory of Just War on George W. Bush's War Politics*. Serafimova emphasises the extent to which in

Schmitt's theory, the friend/enemy distinction and the determination of a conflict as constituting a just war (*bellum justum*) are the result not of a rational process of evaluating evidence and seeing if the criteria for a just war fit, but are the result of a Schmittian decision – a decision by the sovereign. This means that the idea of a just war has acquired a new character, and represents the politics of fear, the politics of risk management by the use of overwhelming force, a form of violence that may bear only a tangential relationship to the concepts of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

In *Examining the Careers of the Boston Marathon Bombers*, Herman Butime engages in a valuable micro-study of terrorism, which examines the confluence of the various social and personal elements that led the Tsarnaev brothers to commit the Boston Marathon Bomb attack. Butime shows that nothing in the lives of the two brothers predetermined the outcome. There was nothing in their lives which made that inevitable, and so the outcome could have been foreseen. Risk and uncertainty come together to make this, looking back with the benefit of hindsight, a case of an “unknown unknown.”

Risk and uncertainty of another kind are the themes of the three articles which deal with Brexit, an event that was never expected to happen, least of all by the European Union and Britain's political elites. In *Brexit and the Future of the European Project – Possible Scenario*, Lucian Jora, deals with possible consequences in several key areas of Brexit for both the UK and Europe. The tentative nature of some of Jora's conclusions demonstrates the difficulty of predicting with any certainty what the results of Brexit will be. In *Exit: The Particle of an Entrapment* Viorella Manolache, drawing on the work of Claus Offe, is concerned with what the Brexit vote has shown about the nature of the EU. She sees the Brexit vote as a symptom of the fact that within the EU “almost no one believes in a transnational democracy”, and that the vote exposed the limitations of a political elite that were running the EU on “autopilot”. Ian Browne, in *Neo-Liberalism, Identity and Brexit*, sees the changes in the sense of identity that have occurred in England over the last 35 years as lying behind the Brexit vote. No politician on the Remain side addressed this issue, and so it was never recognised as a threat to Britain's continued membership of the EU. Manolache and Browne see lying behind the Brexit vote, not so much what was unknown as what was visible to all, but unrecognised. Risks can, as it were, hide in full view if politicians are so bound up in their own world, that they can't see what is in front of their eyes. And perhaps these are the most dangerous risks of all.

The clearest and most explicit examination of the idea of risk and probability is to be found in Scott Eastman and Eric Gilder's, *As America Trump(ets), the World Gets Tinnitus: Construing the Personal/Political Sphere of Donald Trump's Supporters and Its Effects Upon Accurately Forecasting the*

*Election of 2016*. Eastman and Gilder describe how a complex methodology using Bayesian sampling and incorporating the Black Swan ideas of Nassim Taleb concerning events that fall outside the normal range of possibilities was used to predict the result of the American election. The result was not as predicted and leads to the section, *Forecasting lessons learned (post mortem)*.

Lotfi Sour's *Rethinking the Euro Med Policy: A Cooperative Approach in an Increasingly Transforming Region* deals with more of Rumsfeld's "unknown unknowns" - the Arab Spring and its aftermath. The democracy-and-stability paradigm which in theory was meant to govern EU relations with the Middle East and North Africa "was far from being translated into practice" and that the future is very much uncertain, and what transpires in the future will depend in part on the EU's willingness to conduct a value based realistic foreign policy using trade policies and external assistance instruments. Whether the EU will do this is perhaps a "known unknown", something we know that we don't know – a risk we perhaps can assess and manage, if the political will exists.

An optimistic note is struck by Bogdana Todorova, in *The Position of "Unity" Between Theocracy and Theodemocracy in the Political Thought of Imam Khomeini*. Todorova sees a way of reducing tensions within a state, and thereby managing risk and reducing uncertainty, as lying in a unity of cultural and ethical values. Central to the ethical values is a recognition of the moral worth of individuals taking precedence over their material worth, and the importance given to the value of justice. Todorova offers a theo-democratic answer to the tension that can be found in Rousseau between the individual will and the General Will, where selfish interests are set aside in favour of a set of laws based on "goodness, justice, humanity and virtue" (Rousseau).

The central themes of this issue are risk and uncertainty, and how to manage the former and reduce the latter. Each author approaches this question from the perspective of democracy as "a work in progress" and that every problem is unique, and has its own inner logic, its own risks and its own uncertainties.

*Ian Browne*