

MAKING “NORMALLY” EXIST

MANDATORY VOLUNTEERISM

by Ion Olteanu

Ortega y Gasset proposed a criterion for happiness: a wish to live in another place or time is an expression of the lack of happiness. When it comes to citizenship, I believe things are the same. In a country where a significant number of citizens link their wishes and fulfillment to living somewhere else and in which the unbearable transition induces nostalgias or escapist thoughts, we can say that we are facing a citizenship deficit. Self-irony, which can be one of the people's best qualities under such conditions, should be considered distinct from the lack of self-respect or self-confidence.

When we speak about citizenship, we are placed on the peak of Maslow's pyramid. Normally, all the citizens of a country must have the right to reach this peak. What does “normally” mean? And who is responsible for making “normally” exist?

When we examine the parameters required for Romania's integration into the EU and entrance into NATO (with respect to living standards, median incomes, levels of consumption, local and parliamentary government structures, levels of corruption, civil society maturity and international competitiveness) we can draw different conclusions. The empty half or the full half of the glass can be seen, and this can happen either from the inside or the outside.

This is where cultural patterns and intercultural differences appear. My position could be considered a rather critical one. I'm not satisfied. Can the degree of dissatisfaction be an indicator of a good citizen? I believe it depends on the cause of dissatisfaction and on the share of responsibility assumed, by the person, for the fact that things are not as they are supposed to be.

A discontented person is not a good citizen if he blames the evil around him on 50 to 70 years of dictatorship, on older or newer external influences, on other countries, international organizations or the behavior of minority groups. Placing

blame on others means absolving oneself of everything, and most of all, responsibility. I believe that taking the blame for what goes wrong around one is a sign of health, maturity and strength.



And who considers himself responsible in Romania? Who abstains from blaming the others for what goes wrong? Those in power accuse the opposition; the opposition accuses those in power. The trade unions accuse the business owners. And they in turn accuse the trade unions. The public civil servants accuse the citizens, and the citizens accuse the bureaucracy.

I believe the healthiest part of society is made up of volunteer associations; this belief comes out of 12 years of transition experience. Volunteer associations assume, if not the blame for the things that go wrong, at least the mission to interfere in order to change them.

Of course, such a concept of citizenship (when discontentment prompts one to assume one's share of responsibility and volunteer to change the present state of things) is open to discussion.

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And if this concept is adopted as a criterion for differentiating true citizens, it would lead to the conclusion that the number of citizens in Romania is discouragingly small. But if it is adopted as an educational reference point and as a guide for good practice in public life, departing from the past can be achieved. Democracy in Romania will come about as a result of strengthening the volunteer sector, or it will not come about at all.

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