

# How to Escape from the Dead End of Post-Democracy?

## Representation and Principle of Popular Sovereignty

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**Abstract:** Discussion around the concept of post-democracy in political science partially overlaps with a long-term narrative about the crisis of democracy. While there seems to be a general consensus on the concept of post-democracy, this notion is rather controversial. The current paper analyzes the treatment of the concept of post-democracy in the works of Jacques Rancière, Jürgen Habermas, Colin Crouch and others. The paper seeks to problematize temporal and spatial reductionism present in some conceptualisations of post-democracy, pointing to the contingency, temporality and contextuality of the forms of representative democracy as a possible way out of the melancholy nostalgia for a “golden age” of democracy and a way to seek a *modus vivendi* of democracy and representation in new conditions.

**Keywords:** post-democracy, representation, liberal democracy, democratic legitimacy, popular sovereignty

Many contemporary political scientists and analysts contend that current representative democracies are overlaid by a new phenomenon - post-democracy. Discourse on post-democracy presents one of the partial discourses which point out the crisis of democracy. In order to suggest a certain breakthrough spirit in the current events as they are unfolding, social scientists tend to use the prefix “post-”. Terms such as postmodern, post-industrial, post-communist, and many others serve as cognitive shortcuts to express a turning point in the evolution of thought and political or economic development or to designate some new historical period. The prefix “post-” is not only an absolute negation or denial of previous period. It also indicates the continuation of a certain development, trends or some way of think-

ing.<sup>1</sup> Often, however, this rather vague statement summarises a whole set of phenomena that should be differentiated.

There is currently no homogeneous or compact theory regarding post-democracy, for when analysing democratic regimes we find ourselves in a space of large plurality and diversity of theoretical assumptions and approaches. The concept of post-democracy is filled with diverse content and apparently creates an impression of disorder. One could say that it has become a kind of buzzword. In scientific debates or among intellectuals, journalists and reporters, it is usually used as a simplified description of the current state of representative democracies.

The concept of post-democracy is most commonly associated with British sociologist Colin Crouch and his book *Post-Democracy* (2004). Crouch wrote about coping with post-democracy even before the publication of his book of the same title (*Coping with Post-Democracy* (2000)). The term itself had been coined and introduced earlier, by French philosopher Jacques Rancière in his book *On the Shores of Politics (Aux Bords du politique)*, 1990). He developed his conceptualization of post-democracy in the title *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy (La méésentente: Politique et philosophie)*, 1995). Political scientist Sheldon Wolin operates within a similar theoretical framework and conceptual understanding of post-democracy as Rancière, for the first time in his work *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (2001). In the same year as the publication of the first edition of Crouch's *Post-Democracy* made its appearance, philosopher Richard Rorty published his essay entitled *Post-Democracy* (2004) in which he described the securitization of violence as a result of the adoption of controversial security measures in the fight against terrorism, while one of the undesirable side effect is an erosion of democratic architecture and socio-political institutions as they had been established after the bourgeois revolution in America, Europe and the Great Britain.

The concept of post-democracy serves to describe the various transformations of institutions and mechanisms of representative democracy as well as their workings, where emphasis is put on the fact that this trend is negative, presenting an undesirable departure from the form in which representative democracy established itself in the countries to the west of the Eastern bloc following World War II. This concept is rather descriptive and analytical in

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1 There is an example of post-modernism: according to some authors, it does not necessarily a total breakthrough, rejection of modernism. Many see postmodernism as a continuation or rather an extension or radicalization of modernism. Lyotard, J.-F., *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester, Manchester University Press 1984.

nature, criticising the decline of current forms of representative democracy, than a normative one, as will be seen below.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of the concept of post-democracy can be seen in the context of the ongoing evolution of regime oppositions. We can see that the first conflict that the republican tradition got involved in was the conflict with the monarchy: “*democracy and aristocracy have united in opposition to monarchy in the process of legitimization of the representative government*”.<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, who shares a similar view, distinguishes among three forms of government: Republican, by which he understands aristocracy and democracy, monarchical, and despotic.<sup>4</sup> Although Montesquieu largely juxtaposes the republic and the rule of an individual, in principle he does not dismiss monarchy, for there, the ruling is based on fixed laws, which sets the difference between monarchy and despotism, where the rule of law is absent.<sup>5</sup> While over the 19th century, the main axis of political conflict was the contrast between democracy and autocracy, i.e., any establishment legitimizing the rule by a minority, whereby democracy acquired a new enemy alongside monarchy - aristocracy, during the 20th century this antithesis was reformulated into that of democracy versus dictatorship.<sup>6</sup>

After the fall of authoritarian regimes of real socialism, this development culminated in the so-called end of history, where a configuration of liberal representative democracy with market capitalism emerged as the winner.<sup>7</sup> Democracy now would face no external enemy in the form of a competitive regime. The effect would be that the need to dispute democracy gradually vanished. Removal of the contrast between formal democracy and true democracy would consist in overlaying real democracy with, and making it tantamount to, the fulfilment of the formal criteria of democratic process.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Bayoumi, S., *Notes on Post-Democracy*. Paper presented at the Post-Democracy Workshop, Brown University 2015 [cit. 21. 03. 17]. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/17170185/On\\_the\\_Concept\\_of\\_Post-Democracy](https://www.academia.edu/17170185/On_the_Concept_of_Post-Democracy).

3 Znoj, M., *Neorepublikanismus v polemice s liberalismem o demokracii* [Neo-Republicanism in a Polemic about Democracy with Liberalism]. In: Bíba, J. – Znoj, M. – Vargovčíková, J., *Demokracie v postliberalní konstelaci* [Democracy in Post-Liberal Constellation]. Praha, Karolinum 2015, p. 28.

4 Montesquieu, C. S. – Mavor, J., *The Spirit of Laws: Translated from the French of M. de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu: In Two Volumes*. Edinburgh, Printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid 1762, bk. 2, ch. 1.

5 *Ibid.*, bk. 3, ch. 2.

6 Znoj, M., *Neo-Republicanism in a Polemic about Democracy with Liberalism*, op. cit., p. 28.

7 Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York, Free Press 1992.

8 Rancière, J., *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1998, p. 96. We have in mind a phenomenon associated with various rankings and indices which serve to assess and place individual countries into diverse levels of democracy according to some formal criteria.

However, the thesis of end of history related to the theoretical debate on definitive paradigmatic victory of liberal democracy have not been confirmed.

Thus, there was a search for ways to restore the critique of democracy in an atmosphere of its proclaimed triumph, because the internal dynamics of development of representative democracies by no means proved that the historical development had stopped. It was therefore necessary to revise the conceptual framework for the critique of the regime in such a way that it could capture processes which, while not bringing about a change of the form of ruling or a change of the regime, yet are still rated as “alarming mutations”.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the concept of post-democracy serves as a third way, which at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century goes beyond the classical dichotomy of democracy - non democracy by a synthesis of historical oppositions persisting in the theories of democracy for the sake of a more precise and concise description of events and processes in contemporary representative democracies.<sup>10</sup> Post-democracy was born as an attempt to escape from the trap of the end of history. It suggests that the history of democracy continues into the next phase, and that its victory is not necessarily decisive.

This study presents three approaches to post-democracy by three authors: Jacques Rancière, Jürgen Habermas and Colin Crouch. Naturally, a disproportionately larger space is given to Colin Crouch since the term post-democracy is central for his reflections on democracy and he has attempted a truly precise and consistent conceptualization of this concept. The aim of this study is not only separately identify the various segments of post-democratic discourse and their differences but primarily trace out the common topics that occur in particular approaches. This text observes how particular authors display post-democracy actors, their behavior and how they act. The study refers to internal inconsistencies and reductionism hidden in different conceptualization post-democracy. At the same time I describe how the authors strive to revitalize the internal critique of democratic regime within the paradigm which proclaims the victory of liberal democracy. This

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9 Urbinati, N., *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2014, p. 2. For instance, the aforementioned political scientist Nadia Urbinati uses the analogy with body figure to explore some disfigurements of democracy in order to be able to capture changes in the “phenotype” of representative democracy, singles out “the power of will” (institutional component of democracy involving the right to vote and the procedures and institutions that regulate the making of authoritative decisions) and “the power of opinion” (extrainstitutional domain of political opinions). Within this second pillar of the diarchic system, which also includes representative democracy, it sets apart three disfigurements of democracy’s body: epistemic and unpolitical twists of deliberation; and the menace of populism and of the plebiscite of the audience against representative democracy.

10 Ballangé, A., Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities. *French Politics*, 15, 2017, No. 1, pp. 1–18. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41253-016-0024-3>.

study observes how the conceptual framework of representative democracy critique is formulated in recent decades of social changes that have changed the world of politics. In conclusion, I am trying to generalize different theoretical levels of post-democracy and subsequently place this generalization in the relationship between democratic legitimacy and representation.

Over the recent years, the concept of post-democracy, or the adjective “post-democratic” has resounded frequently not only in academic circles. Does the term carry enough weight to successfully establish itself in political theory and public discourse in the long term? To what extent is it reasonable to extrapolate a complete replacement of the term as a more likely alternative than the semantic adaptation of the concept of democracy? And, finally, to what extent is the concept of post-democracy able to resurrect the debate on the crisis of democracy and bring it up to date? Does post-democracy represent a viable concept, able to provide a new impetus to the current discourse and to offer any new prospects?

I claim that although post-democracy provides a useful analytical framework and field for criticism of representative democracy, it does not allow us to abandon the usual perception of democratic legitimacy. It becomes especially difficult in the circumstances of the widening gap between the legitimacy of governors derived from elections and the legitimacy of their actions. It is more and more common that citizens call for accountability in the period between the elections if they feel that politician no longer represents their interests or seriously harms interests of citizens. Politicians in this situation often refer to the fact that they have won more votes in the polls than is the number of protestors in the streets demanding their resignation. In short, there is growing pressure on the view, according to which the legitimacy is a strictly procedural attribute and is undeniably linked to the election process and is embedded in the principle of multitude or majority. Despite the fact that post-democracy critique refers to these circumstances, it is not able to bring a satisfying answer. Therefore it is necessary to put forward a new articulation of democratic representation of citizens' judgment that would help to offset an ongoing imbalance in order to strengthen the legitimacy dimension of representative democracy in accordance with the principle of popular sovereignty. This imbalance is caused by the complexity of relationships in the process of making political decisions, including the presence of many different actors who are entering into this process and are trying to influence it, at the expense of voters participating in elections. To this purpose, it is necessary to broaden the notion of representation and render it more flexible.

### Rancière's post-democracy: disappearance of politics

The topic of post-democracy is treated by Jacques Rancière in the context of his criticism of the end of politics, whose accompanying signs are decay of parliamentary representation and strengthening of political powers of actors without democratic legitimacy, in short, loss of interest in the system of representative democracy. He clearly defines what distinguishes democracy as a regime of disagreement from the consensus system in which erasure of democratic policies goes hand in hand with economic rationalization and expertisation of political institutions so as to achieve smooth and easy subordination of the state to the imperatives of global market and global capitalism.

Democracy as an establishment of politics as such is not always present, but exists only if there is a specific sphere of appearance of the people, of “part of those who have no part”, specific political collectives disrupting the regime in which community appears as given and natural, where all are incorporated in advance.<sup>11</sup> Post-democracy is a

“consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action. Post-democracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimation of a democracy after the *demos*. [...] It is, in a word, the disappearance of politics.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to make the *demos* invisible, politics must be made invisible first and foremost, by means of “the pincers of economic necessity and juridical rule”.<sup>13</sup> Democracy has thus abandoned its ambition to be presented as a power of the people, and remains reduced to a mere state of social relations, being identified with the rule of law, parliamentary regime, liberalism or the regime of public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

While Jacques Rancière does not strip the notion of post-democracy of its real historical context, his vision of democracy is rather different. Rancière points to a widespread discourse according to which we are in a period of triumph of liberal democracy over its regime adversaries, of the tremor of the end of history, when democracy has proven itself as the most effective political form for achieving the objectives of the political community as well as economic objectives of wealth production and satisfactory material condi-

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11 Rancière, J., *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 99–101.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–101.

tions for all.<sup>15</sup> Hence, Rancière's post-democracy also presents an attempt at critique of democracy in this historic configuration: it suggests that history has not stopped and that it is necessary to reject a consensus stating that there is no part of people without part - in other words, there is and there should be no politics.<sup>16</sup>

However, for Rancière, the prefix post- is not associated with any particular historical stage and rather relates to a certain practice, a *modus operandi*.<sup>17</sup> Such definition of post-democracy is therefore not diachronic; "post-democracy is not a democracy in the post-modern era"<sup>18</sup>, it does not start or last, but rather appears and disappears depending on the particular political practice. Thus, such understanding of post-democracy is different from Crouch's or Habermas's, who place it in a certain point in time from which it continues to exist. There is a parallel with other authors who likewise draft post-democracy as a certain political practice. Rancière associates post-democracy with democracy "not in a historical but in an ontological way"<sup>19</sup>: it is not only a subject of the current metamorphoses of representative democracy. For Rancière, the focus of interest is the point of inception of politics rather than the institutional framework or procedures of representative democracy. As he writes, no issue is political just on the grounds of power relations operating within it; neither elections, nor strikes or protests are political in nature, but they may become such, only on the condition that there is a confrontation between police logic and egalitarian logic.<sup>20</sup> In accordance with Rancière, post-democracy is present wherever there are any attempts to remove the public from the sphere of political deliberation and decision-making, regardless of the motives.<sup>21</sup> In some sense, post-democracy presents a tantalizing temptation to democracy.

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15 Ibid., p. 95.

16 Ibid., p. 25.

17 Ballangé, A., *Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities*, op. cit.

18 Rancière, J., *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 101.

19 Ballangé, A., *Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities*, op. cit.

20 Rancière, J., *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 40. The logic of the police, Rancière's terminus technicus, is to distribute and legitimate places and roles in society, ways of doing, being and saying. It claims that in the given political order all of the community parts have been (ac)counted (for) and that each has been assigned its proper place and prevents from the appearance of part of those who have no part that is the basic presumption of the presence of politics.

21 Kursar, T., *In a Post-Democracy Trap*. Bordeaux, Paper for the 7th ECPR General Conference 4-7th September 2013 [cit. 23. 03. 2017], p. 8. Retrieved from <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/d300b9fc-6795-488a-8950-5f03ff5aab2.pdf>.

## Habermas' post-democracy: democracy deprived of substance

In his book *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (2012), philosopher Jürgen Habermas suggests that the European Union now enters the era of post-democracy. Habermas notes that the post-democratic elites, extending the executive federalism of the Lisbon Treaty are trying to push forth the intergovernmental rule of the European Council.<sup>22</sup> Habermas refers to the system that Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy enforced during the crisis and calls it “post-democracy”.<sup>23</sup> He contends that the European Parliament has hardly any leverage. In his opinion, the European Commission has found itself in a similar strange position. Yet, the Lisbon Treaty attributed a central role to the the European Council, which Habermas sees as an “anomaly” and “step back” in the development process of European integration.<sup>24</sup>

Habermas' grip on post-democracy is probably the most shallow and the most vague. He gives no qualitative criteria that could be used for conceptual anchoring of post-democracy, we cannot assess whether the prefix “post-” refers to a distinct phase of democracy, its culmination or completion of projects, democracy in post-modern era, or as “anti-democracy” or the antithesis of democracy. Only on closer observation of Habermas's thinking can one deduce that he viewed post-democracy as something he describes as “*façade democracy*”:

“Behind the façades democratic political elites technocratically implement the imperatives of the markets almost without resistance. Trapped in their national perspectives, they have no other choice. [...] We can see our political institutions being robbed more and more of their democratic substance during the course of the technocratic adjustment to global market imperatives. Our capitalist democracies are about to shrink to mere façade democracies.”<sup>25</sup>

22 Habermas, J., *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response*. Cambridge, Polity Press 2012, p. 14.

23 Habermas, J., *The Crisis of the European Union in the Light of a Constitutionalization of International Law*. *The European Journal of International Law*, 23, 2012, No. 2, pp. 335-348. Retrieved from <http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/23/2/2277.pdf>.

24 Diez, G., Habermas, the Last European. A Philosopher's Mission to Save the EU. *Der Spiegel*, 25. 11. 2011 [cit. 22. 03. 2017]. Retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/habermas-the-last-european-a-philosopher-s-mission-to-save-the-eu-a-799237.html>.

25 Foessel, M., Critique and Communication: Philosophy's Missions. A Conversation with Jürgen Habermas. *Eurozine*, 25. 10. 2015 [cit. 22. 3. 2017]. Retrieved from <http://www.eurozine.com/critique-and-communication-philosophy-missions/>.



Habermas criticises depoliticisation while making it tantamount to marketization, politicians are portrayed as helpless actors, who have no choice at the nation-state but to technocratically implement the imperatives of the market. The substance of democracy is increasingly being hollowed out and all that is left of it is but its institutional facade. But we do not know what he exactly means by this substance and consequently we are not able to image what this substance should be in fact. Yet, Habermas speaks of post-democracy only at the level of EU institutions in the context of strengthening of the intergovernmental decision-making. This institutional rebalancing continues with the trend of hybridization of EU's political system, which prevents the European Parliament from becoming a regular authority of the legislature with strong legislative competence. This move is in contrast to transforming the institutional system of the EU according to the standard model of representative democracy with the proper division of competences in legislative, executive and judiciary.

However convincing Habermas's argument may seem, it must be confronted with the history of European integration. The post-democratic nature of the EU could be disputed from the very beginning: the European project was, at its inception, intended as a technocratic and apolitical, as lessons learned from the development of parliamentarism in the 1930s, and thus remained resilient to fluctuations in voter behavior and the influence of political parties. Expertocracy and the exclusion of the public was already present in the Schuman Plan. It is therefore appropriate to consider whether the Lisbon Treaty was a real negative rupture and a starting point of the recession of the democratization process of the EU institutional system or whether post-democracy constitutes the *raison d'être* of the European project, and its *de facto* point of departure.<sup>26</sup>

### **Crouch's post-democracy: democracy after democratic peak**

Colin Crouch in his book *Post-Democracy* (2004), and even four years earlier, in the work *Coping with Post-Democracy*, Colin Crouch comes up with a definition of what he calls post-democracy. Although in post-democracy, elections are held and, as a result, governments change, public election debate is a closely monitored performance controlled by the rival teams of professional experts in the techniques of persuasion. Public at large is passive, peaceful, even apathetic and responds only to signals that are directed at it. In the background of the election game, politics is shaped in private through

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26 Ballangé, A., *Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities*, op. cit.

the interaction between elected governments and elites that represent the interests of business.<sup>27</sup>

Crouch's concept of post-democracy is not a complete negation of democracy: elections and political parties continue to function. While the tools and forms of democracy remain in place - and today they are actually strengthened in some respects - politics and the government are increasingly getting back under the control of the privileged elites in a manner characteristic of the pre-democratic era.<sup>28</sup> Crouch illustrates this with the following abstract model: let us denote by pre-X time-interval 1. This interval is characterized by a lack of X. Time-interval 2 is marked by a high inflow of X, which results in the transformation of things affected by this change from the original state 1. The third time-interval is denoted by post-X, which implies that something new has been created that caused the importance of X to diminish; some things will subsequently be different from those existing in both time-interval 1 and time-interval 2. Although X still leaves its clear footprint, some things start to resemble those typical of time-interval 1.<sup>29</sup>

The evolution of democracy in Crouch's conceptualisation follows the trends in economy and in the area of transformation of the labour market, the growing importance of the service sector at the expense of agriculture and heavy industry, general improvement in living conditions for broad segments of population including the working class and subsequent class restructuring of the entire population. Crouch presents a rather detailed catalogue of current mechanisms of elections, political parties and political marketing under democracy, noting close links between politicians and lobbyists of multinational financial and corporate groupings and writes about current changes in the structure of social classes. Furthermore, he identifies a central feature of contemporary democracy, namely, the emergence of a new dominant entity - a combination of political and economic class.

Crouch adopts the development model of democracy from that applied to the evolution of the working class in Britain and represents it as a parabola. Over the 20th century, the working class, which evolved from a poor, ostracized social force yet gradually increasing in number, besieged the gates of political life to find itself, within a brief period of time, shortly before and after World War II, at its centre. In the 1940s and 1950s, political involvement was a result of the participation of the general public in the post-war recon-

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27 Crouch, C., *Coping with Post-Democracy*. London, The Fabian Society 2000, p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Post-Democracy.pdf>.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

29 Crouch, C., *Post-Democracy*. London, Polity Press 2004, p. 20.

struction; in this period the enthusiasm for democracy was widespread, but with an incipient crisis of the Keynesian system, the role of the working class began to decline, participation in political organizations dwindled and even the very act of elections started to experience apathy and declining participation.<sup>30</sup> He marks post-democracy on the timeline to illustrate how much our times begin to bear resemblance to the pre-democratic era, when social elites, which had dominated economic and social life, also had a monopoly on political influence and positions in public life.

### Crouch's normative perspective

Through post-democracy, Crouch seeks to revive the critique of democracy in an atmosphere of its declared victory. His approach - post-democracy as a governance of institutional forms of representative democracy in conjunction with the oligarchic forms - provides a means for bridging the traditional dichotomy of democracy - non-democracy at a descriptive level. Crouch places democracy in a diachronic scheme, describing its evolution towards post-democracy as “inevitable entropy of democracy”<sup>31</sup>: he presents it as a living organism, which has its beginning, its culmination and its decline.<sup>32</sup> While Crouch's concept of post-democracy is tinged with a sense of nostalgia and even melancholy for the heyday of democracy, he is rather reconciled with this development, claiming that it is “important to understand the forces at work within this and to adjust our approach to political participation to it”.<sup>33</sup> This is why he speaks of “coping with” post-democracy, rather than of reversing or overcoming it.

Crouch's normative perspective - representative democracy in its all-time high<sup>34</sup> - can be contemplated as the rule of Aristotelian moderation: the most distinctive feature of the democratic moment of the mid-20th century, as defined by Crouch, was that

“business interests learned to accept certain limitations on their capacity to use their power. And democratic political capacity

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30 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–10.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

32 Ballangé, A., *Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities*, op. cit.

33 Crouch, C., *Coping with Post-Democracy*, op. cit., p. 4.

34 Parallel to Crouch's democratic “peak” can be found in Bernard Manin's concept of party democracy (Manin, B., *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1997, p. 206).

concentrated at the level of the nation state was able to guarantee those limitations”.<sup>35</sup>

This moderation is embodied in mutual neutralization of the two systems of “antagonistic cohabitation”<sup>36</sup> - the system of representative democracy and market capitalism: while the former lays the foundations for political equality, the latter generates economic inequality, thereby tipping the scales of political equality. Aristotle defined *Politeia* as a mixture of oligarchy and democracy.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle’s theory on virtue is based on the golden mean between the extremes: “moderation and the mean are best“. The idea of balance, the government of “right extent”, represented by the middle classes, forms the basis of what is called *Politeia*.<sup>38</sup> Of all Aristotelian forms of government it is the *Politeia* which is closest to the representative democracies of today, just as is a mixture of elements of moderate democracy and moderate oligarchy.<sup>39</sup> What makes Crouch post-democracy stand out is the upsetting of the said balance and gradual prevalence of the oligarchic element.

Crouch regards the prefix “post-” not as a disappearance of democracy, not as its negation, but only as a partial return to its earlier stage. Post-democracy is not an exact replica of pre-democracy, for it retains many features of the democratic age. He understands post-democracy as a specific phase of democracy. Such temporal framing of post-democracy (like with Habermas) – i.e., post-democracy understood as a certain time period - raises several questions. The term post-democracy implies unidirectional historical movement, without a possibility of returning to an earlier historical point, which could, in a sense, be said of postmodern thinking or the post-industrial era. Like with other post-terms, a hypothetical question arises of vindicating the term post-democracy in the case of a sinusoidal shift to a new level of democratic age, or of finding a name for any new stage which would follow after post-democracy.

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35 Crouch, C., *Post-Democracy*, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

36 Dahl, R., *On Democracy*. New Haven, Yale University Press 1998, p. 181.

37 *Aristotle’s Politics*. 2nd edition. Ed. C. Lord. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 2013, bk. IV.

38 Lysý, J., *Dejiny politického myslenia I. (staroveký Blízky Východ, antika, Čína, India, Islam)* [History of Political Thought I. (Ancient Middle East, Ancient China, India, Islam)]. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského 2006, p. 55.

39 Manin, B., *The Principles of Representative Government*. op. cit.; Novák, M., *Aristotelova politická sociologie a moderní reprezentativní demokracie* [Aristotle’s Political Sociology and Modern Representative Democracy]. *Sociologický časopis*, 37, 2001, No. 4, pp. 405–423.

## Post-democratic distortion

Yet, in his work, Crouch makes a number of logical blunders, of temporal and spatial reductionism. He does not attach any importance to the ascending phase of democratization, which took place, with a certain lapse of time, in the US, UK, Northern Europe and Western Europe. In this initial stage the foundations of representative democracy were laid and new civil and political rights, including the expansion of the electoral law, were anchored. During the 19th century, in the United States, Britain and France (from the 1870s onwards), parliamentary governments existed continually. Crouch, however, considers this era to be pre-democratic, reserving only a relatively short period of the 20th century for the democratic stage. Nonetheless, workers' socialist and social-democratic political parties with mass membership in Germany, France or Britain were shaped in the latter half of the 19th century. They gained importance in the early 20th century and became part of the governments already in the 1920s. Crouch, however, estimates the democratic moment to have started even later.

Crouch offers a rose-coloured and idealised picture of the democratic moment. What is more, he seems to overlook that the problem of elites in democracies was ever-present, even in the period he calls "the pinnacle of democracy". The mid-1950s saw the release of *The Power Elite*, a book by sociologist Charles Wright Mills, which draws a picture of American society of the time where all the power is concentrated in the hands of a small, interconnected group of people, consisting of political leaders, military commanders and heads of large corporations. Even then the power was held by a handful of individuals. Hence, the problem existed throughout the entire period which Crouch calls a democratic moment.

By meticulously focusing on the democratic struggle of the working class in Great Britain, he ignores many other democratic struggles that took place at a time when the working class (or at least part thereof) found itself in the very arena of political life. As an example, even during the 1950s, USA still practiced a policy of racial segregation, while the struggle for civil rights for the black people (many of whom doubtlessly belonged to the working class) was still under way. In Western Europe of the 1950s and 1960s new proletariat was emerging. This social stratum was referred to as *Gastarbeiter*, i.e., "guest workers", who were recruited to work in Germany and other European countries where migrants moved in large numbers; often as a cheap labour force, many stayed in these countries without a permanent residence and, naturally, without citizenship, being deprived of many political and social rights.

### Trapped in the post-war paradigm of representative democracy

The world of Crouch's post-democracy is highly structured. There are several types of actors: corporations, politicians, marketing professionals, salaried employees in service of political parties, who have replaced party activists, blue-collar and white-collar workers and unions. The dealings of multinational companies, corporate lobbyists and representatives of trade interests are portrayed in a negative light. Their manners are shrewd and cunning, they leverage political decisions, and they use the state, which they have turned into a private cash cow, to their advantage.<sup>40</sup> Like with the previous authors of post-democracy, here, too, there is an issue of democratic legitimacy of political decisions. The scales in this case are tipped in favour of the commercial interests of big businesses rather than in favour of the interests of citizens and voters.

Politicians are attributed a negative role. Unlike Habermas, who views the politicians of nation states as powerless to oppose the agenda promoted by economic elites, Crouch depicts politicians as co-responsible for post-democracy, as active and directly involved in promoting the interests coming from elsewhere than from their constituents. They are far removed from the needs of citizens, and quickly learn to manipulate public opinion, but at the same time anxiously and abashedly spend enormous resources to glean public opinion to be able to respond. They are under constant scrutiny of "democratic gaze" and under pressure to unveil their secrets to "make government more open and more responsible". At the same time, however, they are in constant interaction with a corporate lobby. Its members are drafted into government positions, which they leave to devote themselves to lobbying for big companies. Interaction with a corporate lobby, in Crouch's view, fundamentally distorts and transforms even the structure of political parties.<sup>41</sup>

Citizens are portrayed as apathetic, they turn away from politics with disgust. At present, according to Crouch, a model of the so-called negative citizenship is prevalent: rather than promoting pro-active, engaged citizenship and political participation of citizens in elections, political parties and organizations, developing group identities, emphasis is put on the idea that politics is exclusively for the elites and, if a scandal or political blunder comes to light, enormous media pressure is exerted on those involved in the case, the political class becomes a scapegoat, which is to be held accountable, defamed, accused and exposed to aggression.

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40 Crouch, C., *Post-Democracy*, op. cit., pp. 19.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 70–77.

Crouch's normative ideas are intimately linked to the form of representative democracy of a highly advanced industrial society, which evolved after World War II: compared to today, more voters used to come to the polls with mass activism and party loyalty, as well as association in trade unions. Although Crouch sees activism within civil society as an expression of positive citizenship, as "democracy's creative energy"<sup>42</sup> and the way out of post-democracy, he, too, remains trapped in the post-war paradigm of representative democracy. For example, by still preferring "political parties as a necessary instrument for transferring the will of people to the political level of the community": Crouch believes in the success of the combination of traditional forms of political activity with the "new creative demos" which is not "too far from radical-identity pluralism which is socially and culturally rooted in the last quarter of the previous century".<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

In the contemporary political thought, which is concerned with reflections on the current development and transformations of representative democracies amidst the crisis of liberal democracy, and which, above all, focuses on the discourse on post-democracy, we encounter two dominant ways of thinking about post-democracy we have attempted to outline in this study.

The first is based on a diachronic line of thought, following the advance of democracy in a time continuum and its division into different historical periods. This way of thinking is represented by the aforementioned Colin Crouch or Jürgen Habermas. Yet, within this mindset, we may arrive at a much wider range of positions based on various axiological assumptions.<sup>44</sup>

First, the understanding of democracy as a permanent phenomenon, which is in the process of democratization and continuous improvement. Within this context, thinking about post-democracy is not very acceptable because democracy is constantly present. This mostly refers to the American tradition of understanding of democracy – fulfilling the formal criteria of democracy including regularly recurring free, fair and competitive elections in connection with human rights and market capitalism.

Second, the concept of democracy as a gradually diminishing, receding form, which exists in some sort of semi-democratic mode and which is on the decline. Within the second model, we apparently arrive at the prevailing trend of thought, which sees post-democracy as a certain phase in the devel-

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42 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

43 Kursar, T., *In a Post-Democracy Trap*, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

44 Ballangé, A., *Post-Democracy: Principles and Ambiguities*, op. cit.

opment of democracy, a stage of decline or demise, yet as one in which democratic and semi-democratic elements are still somehow present (represented here by Colin Crouch, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, or by Czech philosopher and social scientist Marek Hrubec<sup>45</sup>). In this context, democracy is seen as an attainable goal, which requires bold and active citizens; it must be defended and democratized in order to be cured of post-democracy.

Third, the concept of democracy as a currently non-existing phenomenon, which had already been experienced or which had never existed at all. Post-democracy here features not as a certain tendency but as a negative outcome of the advent of postmodernism (in the sense of epistemological or value relativism) and expert, apolitical EU decision-making, which has destroyed democracy (this pessimistic, conservative position, which is even further away from Crouch's melancholy).

Fourth approach also declares the absence of democracy while noting that, in fact, we have never had a democracy, restores the gap between formal and actual democracy as an ideal, but strives for something more: it unmaskes the current regime called democracy, exposing it as a hollow vessel, utilised as an excuse and legitimation of capitalism and of wars waged in the name of democracy (e.g. contemporary Marxist criticism, for example authors resurrecting the idea of democratic communism like Alain Badiou or Slavoj Žižek). Post-democracy can be perceived neutrally as a political opportunity for the establishment of a genuine democracy or as an opportunity to go beyond democracy and bring a whole new system of governance of human society.

The second line of thought on post-democracy is based on an understanding of democracy as a very specific, relatively narrowly defined political practice. Post-democracy in this sense does not come about as a particular historical stage, but is rather established as a result of suppression, erasure or circumvention of the democratic procedures of forming political will and political decisions or of reducing the importance of institutions of representative democracy. To Jacques Rancière, post-democracy is a specific consensual practice with the effects of erasing the logic of politics, which has taken root in liberal democracies in recent decades; yet these effects are not new or pioneering. According to Rancière, all identities embodying injustice have fused into a single identity – humanity, whose individual parts differ from each other solely by their racial or ethnic identity. Meanwhile, decision-making powers are seized by institutions and actors without democratic legitimacy. Democracy has become synonymous with the parliamen-

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45 Hrubec, M. (ed.), *Spor o Evropu: postdemokracie, nebo demokracie?* [*Dispute about Europe: Post-Democracy, or Democracy?*]. Praha, Filosofia 2005.



tary regime, the rule of law, with a certain social way of life, which eliminates democracy as a constituting element of politics, that is, the principle of equality, for the political nature of any act is neither an object nor a place where it occurs.

Both in the scholarly circles and in a range of analytical or media genres, post-democracy is a useful term. In day-to-day politics, however, there is still an ongoing debate over hegemonic articulation of the concept of democracy and all related concepts or projects.<sup>46</sup> In the shadow of the struggle over appropriating democratic ethos, post-democracy stands no chance of taking deep roots and replacing the idea of democracy. Democracy is a term that has proved to be highly flexible and it is obvious that it will be able to absorb also the latest changes in democratic regimes. The semantic limits of this concept, which has proven in history to be particularly adaptable to the identification with the division of power, rule of law, representative government and large territorial state units, are really hard to fathom.<sup>47</sup>

All of the above conceptualizations of post-democracy present a distinct response to the paradigm of the end of history, developed in Western political thought since 1990s. We have already seen how individual authors revised their assumptions and normative attitudes in order to restore the criticism of evolution - not extrinsic criticism from the position of vindication of its regime's adversary, but rather criticism from the inside, based on the defence of the idea of popular sovereignty - of representative liberal democracy in the atmosphere of its proclaimed triumph, which did not allow criticism or even suppressed it. It may be confirmed that various approaches to the articulation of the concept of post-democracy are characterized by the plurality of temporal placement of post-democracy as well as by ideological, axiological plurality, and thus are distinguished from one another by their normative attitudes. Although, based on our examination of a variety of approaches both to the substance and to the semantic articulation of the concept of post-democracy, there appears to be no compact or comprehensive theory concerning post-democracy, we have seen that individual authors come up with common or at least similar themes, which are becoming the hallmarks for the definition of post-democracy.

One could say that all these conceptualizations are trapped in the same discourse pertaining to the legitimacy of various ways of political decision-making in representative democracies under the influence of various transitions in the sphere of will-formation and public opinion. At the core of any

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46 Norval, A., *Averzivní demokracie. [Aversive Democracy]* Praha, Karolinum 2016, pp. 60–61.

47 Buchstein, H., *The Dynamics of Conceptual Change*. In: Ihalainen, P. et al., *Redescription: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*. Berlin, Lit Verlag 2006, pp. 5–12.

concept of post-democracy is an idea that the focal point of decision-making is transferred to the sphere of influence of actors without democratic legitimacy, whereby it is important that: 1. the penetration of these actors takes place outside the institutions and procedures of representative democracy, which are somehow undermined or questioned; 2. the bond between the citizens-voters and their elected representatives is always weakened or broken; 3. a powerful minority or different non-personified processes inhibit the influence of citizens in the state. In Crouch's view, behind the "curtain" of politics, interaction takes place between elected representatives out of touch with the interests of the citizens and corporate lobbyists. According to Habermas, behind a facade of democratic institutions increasingly stripped of their democratic nature, political elites at the national level seek to implement the imperatives of the market without facing resistance, while the EU institutions lack a true federal legislature endowed with full legislative authority, and thus the main say in the decision-making process is either with the unelected technocrats or with intergovernmental mediating institutions. Rancière, too, mentions loss of interest in the forms of representative democracy, decline of parliamentary representation, strengthening of the powers of politically unaccountable institutions and submission of politics to the needs of the market. And the list could be continued.

If we advanced one level higher in abstraction, we could sum up that in post-democracy, the point is always that people are, one way or another, excluded from the deliberation or decision-making process, with the result that the principle of popular sovereignty becomes violated or at least jeopardised. The enlightenment idea that the power of the State originates and derives from the people, found at the core of the principle of people's sovereignty, is the one which gave rise to modern democracy. Democracy was born out of countless struggles of different groups of citizens who had been marginalized and disenfranchised, "as the only feasible way for the achievement of legitimacy".<sup>48</sup> In other words, democracy with its promises involving a normative expectation of political inclusion of citizens has historically proven capable, in the conditions of modernity, of ensuring the legitimacy of political power once the source of legitimacy of the previous arrangements of political community had been exhausted. Democracy, however, is never fully inclusive and not everyone is an object of inclusion to the same extent. This implies that we can talk of democracy as of a "perpetually unfinished system"<sup>49</sup> or as of a reality that has never been brought to completion.

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48 Dussel, E., *Twenty Theses On Politics*. Durham, Duke University Press 2008, p. 51.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Such a response cannot be satisfactory as long as we admit that we are now faced with a real problem with the democratic legitimacy of political decisions, which Pierre Rosanvallon describes as follows:

“The voters grant their mandate in a world that is politically less predictable, by which I mean that it is a world no longer defined by disciplined political organizations with well-defined platforms offering a clear range of political choices. Hence there is a much greater gap than in the past between the legitimacy of governors and the legitimacy of their actions. In the past, elections tied these two dimensions closely together; today, their influence is more limited. [...] The legitimacy of the policies they adopt is permanently under scrutiny and must be reconquered day after day and case by case.”<sup>50</sup>

The source of sovereignty of democratic regimes – popular sovereignty – still remains undisputed. The problem is how parliament and political parties, of which it is composed, are depicted. In line with Nadia Urbinati, we agree that if we are to talk about the crisis of democracy, then it is not a crisis of democracy as a constitutional order but of one single specific form of democracy – “parliamentary democracy based on the centrality of suffrage, political parties, and the priorities of the law-making power over the executive”.<sup>51</sup> The prevailing decline of trust and dissatisfaction of citizens does not apply to the representative democracy *per se*, only to its parliamentary forms.<sup>52</sup> It is the process of seeking a *modus vivendi* of representative democracy in the new conditions. In the complexity of today’s politics, it is necessary to constantly review the legitimacy of the adopted policies and ask whether they represent the reasoning of citizens, serve the common good, take into account fundamental values and improve the living conditions of broad masses. These issues can no longer be left until they are decided in the following elections. To go beyond the horizon of post-democracy means to re-articulate the question of “*Who represents whom?*” and search for the answer in the light of tension between the principle of popular sovereignty and representative principle: these are the labour pains of a people which is looking for a new form of its self-presentation.

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50 Rosanvallon, P., *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2008, pp. 116–117.

51 Urbinati, N., Reflections on the Meaning of the “Crisis of Democracy”. *Democratic Theory*, 3, 2016, No. 1, pp. 6–31. Retrieved from <http://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/democratic-theory/3/1/dt030102.xml?>

52 *Ibid.*, p. 8.