FOREWORD

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Pau Mas Codina



Mural paying tribute to Fernando Salgueiro Maia, one of the captains of the Portuguese army who led the military forces during the Carnation Revolution in 1974 in Portugal. The mural, painted on the Avenida de Berna in Lisbon, is a project by the NOVA University of Lisbon – School of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Underdogs gallery, and was designed by the artists Tamara Alves, Moami, Petra Preta and Mariana Margarida Malhão. This mural reinterprets and replaces the previous one, which had been there since 2014. Photo: Carlos Fonseca/Wikimedia Commons

It is nothing particularly new to assert that we are in the midst of an epochal change. The foundations of the world that emerged from the cataclysm of the Second World War are no longer firm. The institutions that have been the backbone of the international system since 1945 are exposed both to the erosion of time and their rebuttal by old and new powers with regional or global ambitions. However, reforming the international system today is very complicated: there is no single nation with sufficient power and legitimacy to impose a new international order, nor is it feasible to articulate a new consensus-based order.

In a world marked by these changes, democracy is one of the first collateral victims. As International IDEA's *The Global State of Democracy 2023* report concluded [1] (as have so many other similar reports), the foundations of democracy have been in decline for many years around the world, even in what we call *consolidated democracies*.

The fragility of democracy is a reality that cannot be ignored in contemporary debate. From the proliferation of populisms to the growing political polarisation and taking in the phenomenon of digitalisation – which subjects the rituals and tempos of liberal democracy

to a permanent stress test – trust in democratic institutions has been severely put through its paces. This fragility – *crisis*, we should say – manifests in the erosion of democratic norms, the restriction of certain fundamental rights and freedoms, the growing distrust of the political class and electoral processes, or growing doubts about the effectiveness of a system that inevitably fails to deliver on the promise of a better life for everyone.

Against this backdrop, what Fareed Zakaria popularised as *illiberal* democracies, that is, systems that maintain the appearance of democracy through apparently free and competitive electoral processes, but where the principles and practices that define true democracy, such as the separation of powers, freedom of expression and accountability are seriously compromised, are increasingly emerging and spreading.

This is the subject of this new *IDEES* magazine special issue: an analysis of the state of democracy today, addressing opportunities and challenges in a fast-moving global context, based on a firm commitment to its core values.

In this same special issue, we also offer you a dossier in which we link reflection on the state of democracy in the world to the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution, which is celebrated this year. Also known as the Revolution of 25 April, it put an end to the *Estado Novo* dictatorship and facilitated the restoration of democracy in Portugal, heralding the so-called *third wave of democratisation*, proposed by Samuel Huntington. Looking at the origins of Portugal's democracy should help us improve our understanding of its evolution in recent decades and even shed light on the results of the recent elections, which are undoubtedly part of an undercurrent that runs through most Western democracies.

I cannot close without reminding that this special issue, and, in particular, the dossier on the Carnation Revolution, have been published in partnership with the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation, based in Lisbon. Many thanks to the Foundation, and especially to its director, Filipe Guimarães da Silva. And to you, dear readers, thank you also for reading us.

REFERENCES

1 — International IDEA (2023). *The Global State of Democracy 2023. The New Checks and Balances.* Stockholm: International IDEA. Available online.



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