

## Two Views of the French Revolution<sup>1</sup>

Milan Katuninec\*

Trnava University in Trnava, Faculty of Arts, Department of Political Science, Hornopotočná  
23, 917 01 Trnava, Slovakia  
mkatunin@truni.sk

### Abstract:

**Purpose and originality:** The purpose of this study is to highlight the potential risks for democracy in Europe by focusing on the views of two prominent political theorists and politicians relating to one of the most dramatic turning points in modern European history.

**Method:** In the study historical, comparative and analytical research method is used. I also tried to combine chronological and thematic approaches.

**Results:** From the experience of the French Revolution, two basic types of modern political outlook have been developed: progressive and conservative. Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville are also included in these basic types. Despite several distinct views and different attitudes to the French Revolution, Burke and Tocqueville agreed in their analyses of some of the causes of this Revolution. Some of their views are unacceptable from the perspective of today's democratic society. But Burke still appeals to us especially by emphasizing the responsibility of our generation for future generations and Tocqueville can motivate us especially by the fact that he was a strong proponent of liberty and he staked his life on liberty. Based on the political and historical examination of the views of these two prominent political theorists and politicians, we can point out that the democratic order can be legitimate only when the basic principles and values of democracy are balanced and mutually respect their limits. The tension between the principles of freedom and equality must be counterbalanced by the principles of solidarity and justice. The effort to exaggerate one of these principles and to subordinate the others to it interrupts and endangers the overall goal.

**Society:** The results should raise awareness about the risks that threaten democracy. The study also points out that there is a narrow link between political freedom and responsibility.

**Limitations/ further research:** Research will continue to focus on the views of other major political theorists who have influenced political thought in Europe since the French Revolution, which will require wider teamwork at the international level.

**Keywords:** Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, French Revolution, Europe, democracy, liberty, politics.

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\* Korespondenčni avtor / Correspondence author

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## 1 Introduction

The French Revolution was one of the turning points in modern European history, which contributed to accelerating political, social, economic and cultural change in France, and opened up new horizons and possibilities also for other European nations. The revolution has shown that the old certainties are standing on fragile legs, and that people are quite easily addressed by new attractive topics and expectations. Revolution, which became a symbol of hope for positive changes in Europe, was not a result of cool deliberation nor carefully mapped out strategy, but rather a result of a combination of circumstances. Still, many intellectuals of the era expected it to break out, since the state of chaos in governing the country alongside the establishment of a republic in the America (between 1776 and 1789 thirteen British colonies emerged as an independent nation The United States of America) encouraged masses of people in France to seek freedom. Society harboured growing resentment towards royal absolutism and the Enlightenment belief in social progress through the rule of the people spread throughout France. Revolution established the main principles of democracy: "liberty, equality, fraternity". The concept of universal hope for all emphasised by the French Revolution ignited a flare of hope that spread throughout Europe carrying optimistic prospects for the future of Europe, which, at first sight, gained a cosmopolitan nature.

However, the reality of political life at the dawn of the new era that was born with the French Revolution has shown how easily even the most humane ideas can degenerate into revolutionary tribunals, violence and bloodshed and it clearly suggested that democratization of the society would not be a peaceful steady movement and aroused concerns that when handled irresponsibly, freedom might turn into the worst gift humanity ever received.

From the experience of the French Revolution, two basic types of modern political outlook have been developed: progressive and conservative. Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville are also included in these basic types. The purpose of this study is to highlight the potential risks for democracy in Europe by focusing on the views of these two prominent political theorists and politicians related to one of the most dramatic turning points in modern European history.

## 2 Theoretical framework

This study seeks to contribute, through the knowledge of our recent past, to the development of critical thinking in the coming generation, which is growing in a complicated world of huge possibilities as well as threats. The sources in my research are predominantly books, studies and articles. Based on the sources, I will try to point out the important views of two prominent political theorists and politicians. The political and historical focusing of works by Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville clearly confirms that they differ on many topics.

However, both of them, from different positions, touch on very serious issues that are also addressed by our generation.

### **3 Method**

In the study comparative, historical and analytical research methods are used. I also tried to combine chronological and thematic approaches. The primary sources of the study are published works of Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville and their parliamentary speeches. My research is not just based on personal interpretations, I also compare the views of some historians and political scientists dealing with these two personalities. In the topic of the comparison of Burke's and Tocqueville's views of the French Revolution, the historian deals not only with historical heuristics but also must work with sources and literature of related scientific disciplines.

The comparative historical research method is considered to be an important method for addressing such questions as major societal changes. The use of this method provides the reader with some important information about the causes and impacts of the French Revolution, as well as Burke's and Tocqueville's theoretical views and political attitudes related to this important historical event. The comparative, historical and analytical method made it possible to examine some of Burke's and Tocqueville's views also in terms of their importance to the present day.

### **4 Results**

#### **4.1 Edmund Burke - an advocate of moral traditionalism**

One of the first political thinkers and politicians voicing fierce opposition to the French Revolution was Edmund Burke (1730 - 1797). Burke was an advocate of moral traditionalism, which could be also studied in comparison to the moral rationalism advocated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. Referring to the tradition, Burke emphasized the importance of preserving civil peace and freedom, and political or institutional changes being made in accordance with the common interest of citizens.

Burke was very cautious of rational optimism and individualism promoted by the Enlightenment. He considered human beings rather irrational creatures who needed to be restrained by organized society. According to him, "History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites, which shake the public...". And in these vices Burke sees the main causes of various "storms" (Burke in Howard, 1834?, p. 74).

Burke is often seen as the father of modern conservatism and of the Anglo-American conservative tradition, but as shown in the David Bromwich's biography (2014) of the first

three decades of Burke's professional life, Burke, for whom principles of politics were merely those of morality enlarged, is placed in the public mind somewhat too simply. Bromwich introduces Burke to the reader in a more liberal position.

Burke was not only a thinker but also a politician, and many of his views need to be examined in this relationship. He served for many years in the House of Commons, as a member of the Whig party. Burke had to take a personal stand on many important topics. He backed the Americans in their campaign for freedom from British taxation and took different attitudes towards the American and French revolutions. He "supported Catholic freedom and a freer trade with Ireland, in spite of his constituents' ire. He wanted more liberal laws on the punishment of debtors. He even pushed to curb the slave trade in 1780, a quarter of a century before it was abolished" (*The Economist*, 2014). The fact that Burke was a severe critic of slavery is proven by his speech to the House of Commons in May 1789. In this speech he describes slavery as "the most shameful trade that ever the hardened heart of man could bear" (Burke in *The Parliamentary history of England*, 1816, p. 70).

Burke realized that political practice can never be aimed at relentlessly pursuing political ideals. His attitude is important from the perspective of the relationship between politics and ethics. He pointed out that politicians can be negatively affected by the fact that they receive salaries for performing their functions. This could lead to the fact that the primary motivation in politics could become personal selfish interests which would negatively affect political ethics. Burke openly stressed also that among the most influential politicians should not belong merely those who can afford a political career just because of their economic background.

Society played an important role in Burke's ideas. He believed that "society is indeed a contract", in which no generation should be arrogant and think only of themselves. "Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure - but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in the trade of pepper and coffee, callico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" (Burke, 1999a, p. 96).

As already mentioned, religion has played a very important role in Burke's theoretical views as well as in his political attitudes. He considered religion as a source of morality, all goods and satisfactions. In his view, religion was the basis of civil society. Burke valued it as an important factor in political stability and society's progress. He presented Christianity "as a

source of the distinctive civilisation of Europe". Burke made this move "by emphasising how intertwined Christianity had become with the European social order" (Harris, 2012, p. 100). According to Ian Harris, Burke "emphasised the social benefit of Christianity, rather than its truth, ... he developed a correlation between revealed religion and society, and at the same time particularised it, by suggesting that specific religions suited specific societies" (p. 103).

For Europe, Burke "pleaded for the recognition of all European religions because they were prescriptive and useful in controlling chaos (from below)" (Heer, 1966, pp. 378- 379). The danger of such chaos and the absence of religion can also be seen in Burke's view of the French Revolution, which is the "most famous object of his entity". Burke presented Christianity "as a source of the distinctive civilisation of Europe" (Harris, 2012, p. 100).

Born in Ireland to a Protestant father and Catholic mother, Burke advocated the freedom of Catholics and supported the emancipation of Irish Catholics. The sensitivity to Catholic concerns, however, did not prevent him from presenting himself as a forceful defender of the English Revolution and he called the events of 1688 "happy and glorious revolution". The bloodless Revolution took place during the reign of King James II, who was the last Catholic monarch to reign over the three British kingdoms. He was King of England and Ireland as James II and King of Scotland as James VII. Some of his political activities and his religion led to anti-Catholic riots in England and Scotland. When king's second wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to their son James Francis Edward, there was a growing concern of the possible Catholic succession of monarch. Just months after the birth of his son, the Glorious Revolution replaced the reigning king with the joint monarchy of his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange. "Although bloodshed in England was limited, the revolution was only secured in Ireland and Scotland by force and with much loss of life." This is noted by historian Edward Vallance (2017), who also points out that "the events of 1688 constituted a foreign invasion of England by another European power, the Dutch Republic". The revolutionary settlement, however, "established the supremacy of parliament over the crown, setting Britain on the path towards constitutional monarchs and parliamentary democracy". French writer and historian André Maurois (1937) argues that "it was indeed a piece of good fortune for England that she could thus achieve the greatest alteration in her history, the transition from despotism to constitutional monarchy, without an unbridgeable gulf being made between Englishmen of opposing views" (p. 340).

The "glorious revolution" can be regarded as a "glorious compromise" between the new bourgeoisie and the old feudal institutions, as it resulted in the restoration of the constitutional monarchy in the Protestant line. A measure of granting comparative freedom of worship was passed in 1689, but, as Maurois notes, "Catholics and dissenters were still excluded from the public office" (p. 347). In 1701, under the reign of William of Orange, the English Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, according to which anyone who became a Roman Catholic, or who married one, became disqualified to inherit the throne.

#### 4.2 Restorative rather than revolutionary model

According to Burke, the English Revolution broke out because people's normative expectations were rooted in traditions. He claimed that the destitution of the king was an act of enforcing the shared norms regarding the legitimate exercise of political power. "Revolution was made to preserve our *ancient*, indisputable laws and liberties, and that *ancient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty" (Burke, 1999a, p. 31). In Burke's works, the English legal theory and defence of the English common law tradition played an important role. He therefore rejected contemptuously abstract rights that would not be based on specific laws and legal practice. He represented the tradition binding English attitudes as follows: "The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers" (Burke, 1999a, p. 31; Haller, 2001, p. 3). However, Burke idealized "his own disreputable revolutionary political ancestors, who had violently wrested parliamentary power from the king" (Hart, 1997: 20). Historian Leslie Mitchell (in Burke, 1999a, p. xix) points out that Edmund Burke preferred restorative rather than revolutionary model. This could be also seen when he appealed to the British virtues of continuity, tradition, rank and property. When he considered it important, he also openly criticized the King George III (1738 - 1820), who strengthened the powers of government through an "authoritarian turn", which, according to Burke, had discreetly strengthened the Crown's powers and personal advantages over the common good.

Burke also discussed the concept of prejudice. Those prejudices that he denominates as old or legitimate are based on reason and they function as a survival aid. Prejudice which originates in the past contains "the wisdom of the ages" and, in his view, "we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame on ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. ... Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts" (1999a, p. 87).

Markus Haller (2001) referring to Russell Hardin points out "the Burkean assumption according to which the antiquity of social rules must be among the conditions for the approval of social rules is mistaken. It is incompatible with the requirement that social rules can only be morally justified if it is also prudent to comply with them. And it cannot be defended on the grounds that the antiquity of social rules explains people's attachment to them. In order to avoid the objections against moral traditionalism one might want to give up this problematic assumption and embrace moral conventionalism. Such a change of view is not devoid of ideological consequences, however: moral conventionalism supports philosophical liberalism rather than philosophical conservatism" (p. 16).

Those who knew Burke best, have seen the violence of the language already in some parts of the *Reflections on the Revolutions in France* (published in November 1790), and therefore they assumed that Burke was mainly driven by personal visibility and considered *Reflection* only a kind of "personal manifesto" or "political pamphlet". Despite various criticisms, Burke's work was an immediate best-seller. "Within six months it had sold nineteen thousand copies. By September 1791 it had gone through eleven editions" (Mitchell, in Burke, 1999a, p. vii). And it can be counted among the most significant contributions in the field of international theory. In his *Reflection* Burke (1999a) writes: "When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild gas, the fixed air, is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgment until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface. I must be tolerably sure, before I venture publicly to congratulate men upon a blessing, that they have really received one. Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver; and adulation is not of more service to the people than to kings. I should, therefore, suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue, with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things, too; and without them liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long" (p. 8).

His doubts over the French Revolution, expressed three years before the executions of the Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and the Reign of Terror that followed, "sprang from his belief that democracy in France would not give rise to stability. This caution ripened into a conviction that the organs of the revolutionary state would become subjected by degrees to the pressures of mob rule and military dictatorship" (O'Gorman, 2004, p. 127). According to Frank O'Gorman, Burke's purpose in publishing his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was to confirm his fellow countryman "in their belief in the aristocratic, hereditary nature of the British constitution and to demonstrate its incompatibility with the revolutionary principles of France" (p. 127). In relation to the French Revolution Burke saw the dangers of mob rule, fearing that the Revolution's fervour was destroying the French society and thus he appealed to the British virtues of continuity, tradition, rank and property.

"In the French Assemblies, lawyers and men of letters had drawn up abstract declarations, enumerated the Rights of Man, and paraphrased Rousseau's Social Contract" (Maurois, 1937, p. 394). On this issue Burke took the following opinion: "No moral questions are ever abstract questions, because things are right and wrong, morally speaking, only by their relation or connection with other things"(Parkin, 1956, p. 104). Burke was convinced that the French Revolution "was destroying the structure built up through the centuries by the monarchy, and sought to rebuild another solely with the materials provided by Reason. But essentially the English intelligence was, as it still is, based on a historic sense. Burke kept repeating, in

countless forms, that man is incapable of living on his slender capital of reason, and that the individual must ask some credit of acquired wisdom from the funded reserves accumulated through the ages by countless generations of men" (Maurois, 1937, p. 394). According to Irish novelist and historian Seamus Deane (2004) "Burke successfully provided an ideology of tradition for the new imperial power when it faced its most critical challenge; he defined the British system as the alternative to revolutionary doctrine and violence, but was consistent enough to find that it was at best difficult to reconcile it with colonial or imperial violence" (pp. 22 - 23).

In the defence of incrementalism Burke actually stressed the importance of Common Law. As pointed by Markus Haller (2001, p. 7), for Burke incrementalism implies that "one advantage is as little as possible sacrificed to another". It proceeds by "a slow but well-sustained progress, the effect of each step is watched; the good or ill success of the first, gives light to us in the second; and so, from light to light, we are conducted with safety through the whole series" (Burke, 1999a, p. 170). Incremental improvements of the social and economic conditions under which people live should be a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of actual laws, yet never an attempt to approximate or even to bring about an abstract political ideal of a good society. Thus, as Burke (pp. 157-158) writes, "a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. Everything else is vulgar in the conception, perilous in the execution".

In the activities of the revolutionary French National Assembly, Burke saw an instance of opportunistic political change destroying civil peace: "When men are encouraged to go into a certain mode of life by the existing laws, and protected in that mode as in a lawful occupation – when they have accommodated all their ideas and all their habits to it – when the law had long made their adherence to its rules a ground of reputation, and their departure from them a ground of disgrace and even of penalty – I am sure it is unjust in legislature, by an arbitrary act, to offer a sudden violence to their minds and their feelings; forcibly to degrade them from their state and condition, and to stigmatize with shame and infamy that character, and those customs, which before had been made the measure of their happiness and honour. If to this be added an expulsion from their habitations, and a confiscation of all their goods, I am not sagacious enough to discover how this despotic sport, made of the feelings, consciences, prejudices, and properties of men, can be discriminated from the rankest tyranny" ((Burke, 1999a, pp. 156-157; Haller, 2001, p. 6).

When the French Republic declared war against Britain in 1793, Burke advocated a vigorous and uncompromising strategy that would "destroy the republic and restore the *ancient régime*" (Lock, 2012, p. 25). In his *Letters of a Regicide Peace*, written between 1795 and 1797, Burke (1999b) talks about war "with a system... with an armed doctrine... It has, by its essence, a faction of opinion, and of interest, and of enthusiasm, in every country" (p. 76). According to Friedrich Heer (1966), Burke "knew that it was an armed doctrine, and that the crusade would

necessarily be of long duration. But he was unable to take the next step and to free himself from the great heresy of all European reactionaries; that ideas can be fought against with arms" (p. 379).

#### **4.3 Alexis de Tocqueville - an essential thinker in understanding our world**

French political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) is often considered to be "classical liberal" or "liberal conservative" and, along with the English historian and politician Lord Acton (1834–1902), he is also called the "essential liberal of the nineteenth-century" (Smith, 2013, p. 2). Like Burke, Tocqueville also had experience with practical politics serving as a deputy in the French assembly and for a short period (from 3 June to 31 October 1849) he held the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. He started out his political activities with dreams of a great political career "but ended up with a more realistic and perhaps also disillusioned view of what he could accomplish" (Swedberg, 2009, pp. 215 - 216). Tocqueville (retired from political life after Louis Napoléon Bonaparte's 2 December 1851 coup d'état) was frustrated by the political development in France as well as in Europe, which is also mentioned in his correspondence with English lawyer Nassau William Senior from March 1852: "We see over the whole continent so general and so irresistible a reaction against democracy, and even against liberty, that I cannot believe that it will stop short on our side of Channel..." (Simpson, 1872, p. 26).

Like Burke, Tocqueville also dealt with the issue of slavery influenced in particular by extensive correspondence and direct conversation with several American friends. He did not think "slavery could be destroyed in the states, but he hated and reviled it". Probably the best known is his *Testimony against slavery* published in 1855. It is "cogent and brief; noteworthy, however, is it moving beyond emancipation itself to a statement of support for equal civil liberties for all" (Mancini, 2006, pp. 61 - 62).

Although with poor health and disappointed by the political developments in France, Tocqueville began to study the history of modern France. He dealt with the issue of the French Revolution much later than Burke. The first volume of *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* was published in 1856. (Tocqueville's research on the French Revolution and modern French history was unfinished because of his death in 1859). He analyzed and investigated the forces that caused the French Revolution and his work is based on many archival materials. Seamus Deane (2004) writes that while Burke was "a new man who re-envisioned the aristocratic world", Tocqueville was "an aristocrat who envisioned the New World" (pp. 22-23).

About Burke's views of the French Revolution, Tocqueville wrote that his "genius was illuminated by the hatred with which the Revolution inspired him from its birth". According to Tocqueville (2017), the English "taught by their own history and enlightened by the long practice of political freedom, perceived dimly, as through a thick veil, the approaching spectre

of a great revolution; but they were unable to distinguish its real shape, and the influence it was so soon to exercise upon the destinies of the world and upon their own was unforeseen" (p. 2).

Tocqueville (1856) says that the object of the French Revolution was not only to change an ancient form of government, but "it designed to abolish the old form of society". Therefore, it had to attack at once every established authority, "to destroy acknowledged influences; to efface traditions; to substitute new manners and usages for the old ones; in a word, to sweep out of men's minds all the notions which had hitherto commanded respect and obedience." (pp. 21 - 22). Tocqueville cites Edmund Burke's words: "This is the first time that men have so barbarously torn their country to pieces." He also admits that nothing was more astonishing "than the extraordinary ease with which the Constituent Assembly destroyed at a single stroke all the ancient French provinces, many of which were older than the monarchy. ... No doubt it appeared like tearing in pieces living bodies, ....". According to Tocqueville however, "...in fact, the provinces that were thus dismembered were only corpses" (p. 98).

Unlike Burke, Tocqueville "did not contrast the emergent modern society with a venerable and traditional order that must, by every rhetorical resource available, be rendered sacrosanct and timeless. On the contrary, he claimed that the centralized administrative state had concealed its operations behind an increasingly venal facade of traditional codes. His famous disagreement with Burke's analysis of the Revolution is rooted in this" (Deane, 2004, p. 3).

Tocqueville considered the French Revolution as a social and political revolution. "It did not tend to perpetuate or consolidate disorder, to "methodize anarchy" (as one of its leading opponents remarked), but rather to augment the power and the rights of public authority. It was not calculated to change the character of our civilization, as others imagined, or to arrest its progress, or even to alter, essentially, any of the fundamental laws upon which our Western societies rest." He saw the main purpose of the Revolution in the abolition of political institutions which during several centuries had been in force among the greater part of the European nations, "and which are usually known as the feudal system; in order to substitute therefore a social and political organization marked by more uniformity and more simplicity, and resting on the basis of the equality of all ranks" (Tocqueville, 1856, p 25). Tocqueville claims that Edmund Burke does not realize that the real object of the Revolution is to abolish the models of the old common law of Europe, "he does not perceive that that, and nothing else, is the gist of the movement" (p. 37).

According to Jean-Baptiste Noé (2018), Tocqueville "enrolled in the French liberal school for which the Revolution was more a continuity than a rupture... In his studies, especially in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville developed a reflection essentially based on law. This serves to demonstrate the transition from the aristocratic to the democratic age. But his analysis seems to stop in 1789. He never evokes terror or revolutionary

dynamics, as if this aspect of the Revolution did not interest him" Noé, however, also points out that Tocqueville extended revolutionary violence well beyond the period of terror that ran in the period of the French Revolution. "On the one hand, he thinks of revolution as the recognition of law and the person, on the other hand he shows the dangers of egalitarianism in the erasure of the person and the non-respect of natural rights. This makes this author an essential thinker in understanding and thinking about our world".

In relation to the question of whether Tocqueville should be seen as a conservative or liberal, it should be emphasized again that the terms conservative and liberal were coined in the early decade of the nineteenth century "to take account of the polarization of opinion resulting from the French Revolution" (Lakoff, 1998, p. 439). John Lukacs (1982) points out that this aristocrat and "perhaps the greatest of political thinkers and historical writers of the nineteenth century" cannot be simply categorized: "Even though the term 'conservative' poses a certain difficulty (it was not applied to politics until after Napoleon, and certainly not in Burke's lifetime), what separates Tocqueville from Burke and from his own contemporary conservatives may be summed up under three headings: religion, monarchy, liberty".

#### **4.4 Strong proponent of liberty**

The first study of modern public democracy is Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. (The first volume of the monumental work *De la démocratie en Amérique* was published in 1835 and the second one in 1840). Tocqueville (1990) saw the United States as a model of freedom and equality. In the introduction of this work he states that "the gradual development of principle of equality is therefore a providential fact. It has all the chief characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is lasting, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress ... There is greater equality of condition in Christian countries at the present day than there has been at any previous time, in any part of the world, so that the magnitude of what already has been done prevents us from foreseeing what is yet to be accomplished" (pp. 6-7). Tocqueville strongly believed that democracy was inevitable and in the coming of democracy he saw the "hand of God." In relation to this, Francis Fukuyama (2000) claims, that the categorical historical determinism implied in his introduction "makes Tocqueville sound a bit like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels." He asserts that "there are a number of reasons for thinking that Tocqueville's full understanding of democracy's inevitability goes beyond the simple assertion that it is the work of God...". At the same time he notes that Tocqueville "is clearly no simple partisan of democracy" (pp. 11-12).

According to John Lukacs (1982), "Tocqueville's view of democratic evolution was clear, but he was fully aware of its complex nature. The main element of its complexity was the relationship of its component, and often contradictory, elements of equality and liberty. His concentration on this subject would alone justify the recognition of Tocqueville as a latter-day Aristotle; yet Tocqueville, even more than his famous predecessor Montesquieu, knew that

modern mass democracy is not comparable to the democracy of the Athenian city-state, that it is a new historical phenomenon. Tocqueville's political thinking was realistic and existential, not abstract and theoretical".

For many conservative thinkers religion and democracy were incompatible. Lukacs considers Burke "a partial exception". Tocqueville (1856) also realized that the French Revolution "in its operation and its aspect resembled a religious one. It had every peculiar and a characteristic feature of a religious movement; by preaching and by propaganda" (p. 25). In democracy, however, he did not see the threat against religion. Also Lukacs sees him on the opposite side to those for whom this incompatibility was their "fundamental article of belief." According to Tocqueville (2003), in the eighteenth century Christianity had lost a large portion of its power all over Europe, but the scenes that took place in France during the revolution were without precedent. "Ardent efforts were made to eradicate from men's souls the faith that was in them, and leave them empty. ... Absolute infidelity, than which nothing is more repugnant to man's natural instincts, or produces more discomfort of soul, appeared attractive to the masses." Respect for religion, however, gradually returned after the revolution, "and infidelity disappeared or lay hidden in the general dread of revolution" (pp. 182-187).

Lukacs (1982) tries to point out that Tocqueville, "who regretted the end of the French Bourbon monarchy but who also saw that in the history of peoples continuity plays as much, if not greater, a role than does change, did not think that during the eighteenth century the divine right of kings mattered very much, whereas the conservatives believed that the democratic revolutions constituted a break with the entire order of the providential universe. Most important, the conservatives' criticism of the principle of equality was often combined with their criticism of the principle of liberty; this was very different from the convictions of Tocqueville who, throughout his life, regarded liberty—and by no means in an abstract sense—as the most precious possession of persons and of peoples".

Tocqueville (1840) saw democracy as an equation that balanced liberty and equality, at the same time being aware of the dangers, such as the fact that when "social conditions are equal, every man is apt to live apart, centred in himself and forgetful of the public" (p. 272). He considered the conflict between equality and liberty and between democratic freedom and tyrannical democracy to be the greatest weakness of democracy. Tocqueville was a strong proponent of liberty and he staked his life on liberty. He does not consider himself a revolutionary nor a conservative and he honestly confesses that liberty is his "foremost passion". In *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, Tocqueville (1856) writes: "Nor do I believe that a true love for liberty can ever be inspired by the sight of the material advantages it procures, for they are not always clearly visible. It is very true that, in the long run, liberty always yields to those who know how to preserve it comfort, independence, and often wealth; but there are times when it disturbs these blessings for a while, and there are times when their

immediate enjoyment can only be secured by a despotism. Those who only value liberty for their sake have never preserved it long. It is the intrinsic attractions of freedom, its own peculiar charm—quite independently of its incidental benefits—which have seized so strong a hold on the great champions of liberty throughout history; they loved it because they loved the pleasure of being able to speak, to act, to breathe unrestrained, under the sole government of God and the laws" (p. 204).

Tocqueville did not assert that democratic nations are secure from revolutions, which, even after the experience with the French Revolution, can provoke scepticism and pessimism about progress and human nature. For these reasons, he was concerned with institutions that could preserve freedom and equality harmoniously, prevent the exploitation of power, and motivate an individual not only in social, but also in political responsibility. He drew the electorate's attention to the peril of confusing freedom with equality and he anticipated potential problems arising from relying solely on general and equal elections that "elevate to positions of power" incompetents and the ruthlessly ambitious who are without refinement, originality, dignity, or care for public affairs. He expressed his fear that elections could lead to a non-liberal form of democracy, or even to something worse, and for this reason it was necessary "that they [elections] be bound in the much more complex institutional framework of a liberal order" (Krsková, 2006, pp. 61-66). However, he was confident that in democracy it can easily be discerned a state of polity, "which, when combined with the principle of equality, would render society more stationary than it has ever been in our western part of the world" (Tocqueville, 1840, p. 257).

According to some opinions, Charles Alexis de Tocqueville initiated the French branch of "sceptical liberalism". He expressed his concerns over the potential increasing conflicts among the liberals themselves, prioritizing the mob, and the destructive force of the so called democratic revolution. He believed that democracy as defined in politics is compatible with economic liberalism, but at the same time he realized that it would not be easy to ensure that people participate in governing the state; and yet a greater challenge would be providing them with the experience necessary and skills they lacked and needed in order to rule well.

Tocqueville saw yet another major weakness of democracy in the fact that public office is not very attractive for talented individuals and he pointed out the correlation between the worth of political representatives and the insufficient education of the electorate. In addition, the quality of governance is restricted by short electoral periods after which officials were usually replaced. This hinders the effectiveness of capable officials, who otherwise should not be restricted in the performance of their duties by party politics. Tocqueville also mentioned the danger of democratic regimes being possibly inclined to corruption. Politicians often yearn to ensure their continued electoral success in democracy, therefore there is a great deal of room for buying of electoral votes of various political groups, which leads to an increase in public expenditures (Frevel, 2004, p. 51). One can easily agree with Fukuyama (2000) that

Tocqueville's theory "anticipated almost all of the other theories of modernization and political evolution that would follow him" (p. 17).

Despite the risks that seem inherent in democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville believed that democracy would sooner or later come to Europe. But at the same time he realized that to make democracy a true democracy of values, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the role of human freedom in the development of a full and responsible human life.

## 5 Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to highlight the potential risks for democracy in Europe by focusing on the views of two prominent political theorists and politicians related to one of the most dramatic turning points in modern European history. From the experience of the French Revolution, two basic types of modern political outlook have been developed: progressive and conservative. The results of the study support the view that Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville can be included in these basic types.

In the research, we also had to take into account the fact that both were politically active and their published works could, to a certain extent, also be politically motivated.

The results of the study support hypothesis that several differences in Burke's and Tocqueville's view of the French Revolution were influenced, among other things, by the fact that, unlike Burke, Tocqueville dealt with the issue of the French Revolution much later and his work is based on many archival materials. The comparison of Burke's and Tocqueville's view of the French Revolution has shown that Burke ("a new man who re-envisioned the aristocratic world") can be seen as a representative of conservative political thinking and Tocqueville ("an aristocrat who envisioned the New World") as a representative of progressive political thinking.

Despite several distinct views and different attitudes to the French Revolution, however, both agreed in their analyzes of some of the causes of this Revolution. In the context of the discussion of the results of the study, it should also be pointed out that Burke did not reject social and political changes, which is basically confirmed by his own words: "A state without the means of some change, is without the means of its own conservation." He is praised not only by conservatives but often also by liberals. However, because of his negative attitude to the French Revolution, he is known in particular as the founder of traditional conservatism.

Considering the results obtained in this study, we can support the hypothesis that Edmund Burke, as a conservative, supported the view that people as imperfect beings are selfish, and therefore institutions and values that have stood the test of centuries must not be victims of extreme revolutionary changes. Burke still appeals to us especially by emphasizing the

responsibility of our generation for future generations. Tocqueville is known by the statement: "When the past no longer illuminates the future, the spirit walks in darkness". He agreed that the French Revolution resulted in a cruel confrontation with the *Ancien Régime*. Unlike Burke, however, he saw many positive impulses in the French Revolution. He can motivate us especially by the fact that he was a strong proponent of liberty and he staked his life on liberty. For Tocqueville, liberty is an important revolutionary legacy, but at the same time he fears that liberty is fragile and requires responsibility.

## 6 Conclusion

As far as the French revolution is concerned, no matter how critical our judgement, one must admit that it is nowadays associated with the victory of thoughts which altered the very groundwork of the social order in Europe; moreover, it marks the beginnings of a modern society of citizens, which never was, and never will be, gained by a simple, peaceful and straightforward course.

The French revolution was motivated and shaped by several distinct ideas, but it also had a significant influence on motivating and shaping several distinct ideas. This revolution has become a major impetus for moving away from the traditional European monarchy towards extending civil rights and strengthening parliamentarism. The revolution destroyed feudal relationships and class privileges based on estates and thus it laid the foundation for equality before the law and for a newborn national unity of the society. The concept of democracy seen as an egalitarian government of the people gradually spread to the political sphere of other countries where it rivalled the traditional authoritarian political systems; this view of democracy stated that every citizen would benefit from the law equally and no special privilege acquired by birth or office would determine their rights and duties.

However, due to several well-known negative events the French Revolution also provoked scepticism about progress and human nature. From the experience of this Revolution, two basic types of modern political outlook have been developed: progressive and conservative. Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville are also included in these basic types. Despite several different attitudes to the French Revolution, Burke and Tocqueville agreed in their analyses of some of the causes of this Revolution. In their work we can also find words about the importance of knowing history as well as our responsibility for future generations. Based on the political and historical examination of the views of these two prominent political theorists and politicians, we can point that the democratic order can be legitimate only when the basic principles and values of democracy are balanced and mutually respect their limits. The tension between the principles of freedom and equality must be counterbalanced by the principles of solidarity and rule of law. The effort to exaggerate one of these principles and to subordinate the others to it interrupts and endangers the overall goal.

Research limitations are mainly related to the fact that it is quite difficult to explore all the important archive sources related to Burke and Tocqueville. Research will continue to focus on finding answers to important questions related to comparing Burke's and Tocqueville's theoretical works, and will look at a deeper analysis of their political attitudes and views such as Tocqueville's critique of socialism. It will also focus on the views of other major political theorists who have influenced political thought in Europe since the French Revolution, which will require wider teamwork at the international level.

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**Milan Katuninec** is Professor of History at the Department of Political Science in Trnava University in Trnava. He has numerous publications and he is a chief researcher and scientific co-worker in several research projects focused on Contemporary Slovak and European history, democracy, extremism, totalitarian ideologies and movements, social policy and relationship between ethics and politics.

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## **Povzetek:** **Dva pogleda na francosko revolucijo**

**Namen in izvirnost:** Namen te študije je osvetliti potencialna tveganja za demokracijo v Evropi z osredotočanjem na stališča dveh vidnih političnih teoretikov in politikov, ki se nanašata na eno najbolj dramatičnih prelomnic v sodobni evropski zgodovini.

**Metoda:** V študiji se uporablja zgodovinska, primerjalna in analitična raziskovalna metoda. Poskusil sem tudi kombinirati kronološki in tematski pristop.

**Rezultati:** Iz izkušenj francoske revolucije sta bili razviti dve osnovni vrsti sodobnega političnega pogleda: progresivni in konzervativni. V ti osnovni vrsti sta vključena tudi Edmund Burke in Alexis de Tocqueville. Kljub več izrazitim stališčem in različnim odnosom do francoske revolucije, sta se Burke in Tocqueville v svojih analizah nekaterih vzrokov za to revolucijo strinjala. Nekateri njihovi pogledi so z vidika današnje demokratične družbe nesprejemljivi. Toda Burke nas še vedno privlači, zlasti če poudarja odgovornost naše generacije do prihodnjih generacij in Tocqueville nas lahko motivira predvsem s tem, da je bil močan zagovornik svobode in je svoje življenje postavljaj na svobodo. Na podlagi političnega in zgodovinskega pregleda stališč teh dveh vidnih političnih teoretikov in politikov lahko izpostavimo, da je demokratični red lahko legitimen le, če so osnovna načela in vrednote demokracije uravnotežene in vzajemno spoštujejo njihove meje. Napetost med načeloma svobode in enakosti mora biti uravnotežena z načeli solidarnosti in pravičnosti. Prizadevanje, da bi z eno od teh načel pretiravali in si drugo podredili, prekine in ogrozi splošni cilj.

**Družba:** Rezultati bi morali ozaveščati tveganja, ki ogrožajo demokracijo. Študija tudi poudarja, da obstaja med politično svobodo in odgovornostjo ozka povezava.

**Omejitve / nadaljnje raziskave:** Raziskave se bodo še naprej osredotočale na stališča drugih pomembnih političnih teoretikov, ki so od francoske revolucije vplivali na politično misel v Evropi, kar bo zahtevalo širše temsko delo na mednarodni ravni.

**Ključne besede:** Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, francoska revolucija, Evropa, demokracija, svoboda, politika.

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