BOGDAN MURGESCU, *ROMÂNIA ȘI EUROPA. ACUMULAREA DECALAJELOR ECONOMICE (1500-2010) [ROMANIA AND EUROPE. THE ACCUMULATION OF ECONOMIC DISPARITIES]* (IAȘI POLIROM, 2010), 526 pp.

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One of the topical issues that have bothered the Romanian society over the past twenty years – and even before that – is the causes of the economic gap between Romania and the West. When, why, how it emerged and is there any chance that Romania will finally catch up with the West? The point of reference is usually constituted by the developed western countries of France, Germany, Britain or the United States. Bogdan Murgescu, the Bucharest University professor and expert in economic history, is also asking himself these basic questions which are the bases of a fundamental research. If someone would have expected him given the long period of time the book covers to look the same sources, to use the same approach or to use the same frame of reference then he would be wrong. The book is not a synthesis book, but a research undertaking, the series of data he uses are collected and compared from many sources and well fitted into the narrative, while the comparison is not undertaken with the incomparable, but with Denmark, Ireland and Serbia, all of which were comparable by 1500 in terms of economic development with Romania. Moreover, the book is solidly rooted into the intellectual debate started by the Annales School, especially by Ferdinand Braudel, whose concepts the author refreshes, and into the tradition of Bucharest sociological school started by Dimitrie Gusti and continued by Henri H. Stahl and, in the West, by Daniel Chirot. In his quest for the material explanations of historical developments and in his *longue durée* perspective, the author seems to have been also influenced by the famous book of British professor Paul Kennedy *The Rise and fall of the Great Powers. Economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000*. The result is outstanding, the book being equipped with all the ingredients of a best-seller by its solid and vast documentation, strength of arguments, quality of writing and no last by the very topical questions it provides with well-thought answers.

It is not the scope of this short review to thoroughly assess the value and significance of this book, but rather to briefly look into the comparison it

makes with the Danish case. Nothing seems more different in Europe than Denmark, an example of successful story, and Romania, a country still striving to overcome its backwardness. By his analysis of Denmark's economic development, Bogdan Murgescu's book provides a good overview of the economic, social, cultural and political evolutions responsible for the Danish entry into the category of developed societies slowly during the second and third quarter of the 19th century and for Romania's failure to go past this challenge. One of the driving forces in this respect was not only the agricultural restructuring due to external and domestic economic and trade developments, but also to the great progresses in education, in agriculture and animal husbandry and in the cooperative movement strongly encouraged by Edward Tesdorpf, the chairman of the Royal Society of Agriculture between 1860 and 1888, and the famous reformer Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundvig. The comparison between Denmark and the other cases studied in his book provides Murgescu with arguments to support Lars G. Sandberg's argument that the human capital was the crucial factor responsible for the success or failure of the retarded countries during the 19th and 20th centuries (p. 199).

The book compares the cases of the four countries (Romania and Denmark included) during the early modern history, the 19th century, the inter-war period and the post-war time, but the comparison between Romanian and Danish road to modernity in late 19th century offers perhaps the best insights and the most fruitful conclusions to the author of this book. The overcoming of economic backwardness, concludes Murgescu, is possible, but the examples he uses prove that the preparation takes at least a generation and the breakthrough another one, which once again demonstrates the advantage of his *longue durée* and comparative approaches. However, to make this breakthrough one shouldn't expect some brilliant leadership or the providential man, but take the steps towards a gradual opening to the international economic channels and avoid the deep social polarization.

Thus, the book represents one of the most authoritative responses to Romania's long-term failures to overcome underdevelopment and, by virtue of examples it offers, the possibilities and choices it has to take the EU country in order to fully integrate into the European family. The case of Denmark and the differences between the two countries over the past a few centuries is again brought into discussion by the author of this book after a recent series of articles and a Ph.D. paper dedicated to the relations and reciprocal perceptions of the two countries by Oana Lăculeanu-Popescu.