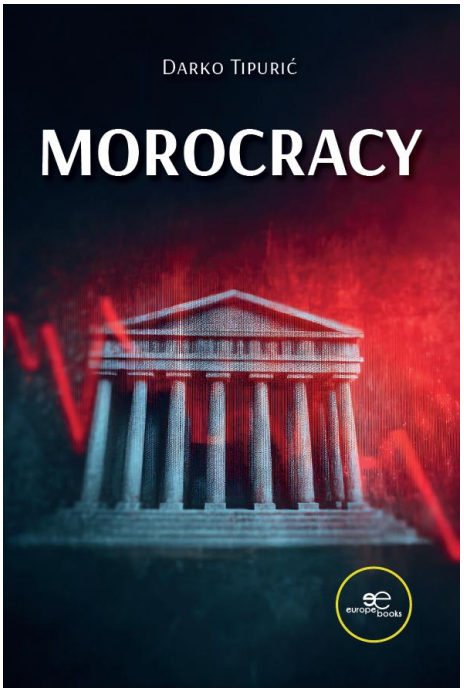
An Interview with Professor Darko Tipurić on Morocracy, for the Italian Television Programme “Conoscere”



This interview marks the publication of Morocracy by Professor Darko Tipurić, released in summer 2026 by the international publishing house EuropeBooks. In the book, the author, who is President of the Croatian Corporate Governance and Management Society, develops the concept of morocracy in a systematic way. He defines it as the rule of the incapable, understood as an institutionalised pattern rather than an individual aberration. The book builds on his long-standing research into corporate governance, state-owned enterprises and public institutions. It offers a conceptual framework for understanding negative selection, institutional simulation and political colonisation. In the conversation that follows, Professor Tipurić explains the origins and meaning of the concept, distinguishes it from related notions, and examines its consequences and the possible paths of resistance.

1. What is morocracy, and why did you feel the need to coin a new term for it?

The word comes from two Greek roots: moros, which means foolish, dull, lacking judgement, and kratos, which means rule or power. Morocracy is therefore the rule of the incapable. But I want to be precise from the very beginning, because the term is easily misunderstood as an insult or a joke. It is neither. Morocracy does not describe the occasional incompetent manager, minister or director. Every society has those, and always has. It describes a condition in which incapacity stops being an individual failure and becomes an organising principle of a system.

In a morocracy, incapable people are not in power by accident. They are selected, promoted, protected and reproduced by the institutional logic itself.

Why a new term? Because I spent many years studying corporate governance, state-owned enterprises, boards and public institutions, and I kept encountering the same pattern without a name that captured it. We had concepts that came close. We spoke of corruption, of clientelism, of partitocracy, of bureaucratic pathology, of the Peter principle. Each of these explains something, but none explains the whole. Corruption is about illicit gain. Clientelism is about exchange of favours. The Peter principle is about individuals rising to the level of their incompetence. What I was observing was something more structural and, in a sense, more disturbing: whole organisations, sometimes whole sectors, in which competence had become a liability and incapacity an advantage.

Social sciences have always needed new concepts when reality outgrows the old ones. Max Weber had to name bureaucracy as a distinct form of rational authority. Robert Michels had to formulate the iron law of oligarchy to explain why democratic organisations become ruled by small elites. Concepts are not decorations. They are instruments of perception. If you cannot name a phenomenon, you cannot see it clearly, you cannot measure it, and you certainly cannot resist it. A name makes the invisible visible.

There is also a moral reason. People who live and work inside such systems often feel that something is deeply wrong, but they lack the language to say what. They blame themselves, or they blame particular individuals, or they become cynical. When they are given a concept, they realise that their experience is not private and not accidental. It has a structure. It has a logic. And what has a logic can be analysed, understood and, at least in principle, changed.

So morocracy is my attempt to give a name to a form of power that is everywhere around us, yet rarely described as what it is: the institutionalised authority of those who should not have it. It is a diagnostic concept, not a slogan. The book tries to describe its anatomy, its mechanisms of reproduction, its consequences, and the conditions under which it can be broken.

2. How does morocracy differ from familiar notions such as incompetence, corruption or bureaucracy?

This is the most important question, because a concept is useful only if it marks a real boundary.

Let me start with incompetence. Incompetence is a property of an individual. A person lacks knowledge, skill or judgement for a given role. Incompetence exists everywhere, and healthy systems correct it: they train, replace, or simply route around the incompetent person. Morocracy begins precisely where this correction fails, and fails systematically. It is not the presence of incompetent people that defines it, but the absence of mechanisms that would remove them, combined with the presence of mechanisms that reward them. In a morocracy the incompetent are not tolerated; they are preferred.

Corruption is related but different. Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. The corrupt official is often quite capable. In fact, corruption frequently requires a certain intelligence, an understanding of rules in order to bend them. Morocracy can coexist with

corruption, and they often feed each other, but morocracy does not require greed. It can be entirely honest in the narrow sense. A director may never take a bribe and still preside over an organisation in which no one capable can survive. The damage is done not through theft but through the systematic destruction of judgement.

Bureaucracy, in Weber's original sense, is in fact the opposite of morocracy. Weber's ideal bureaucracy rests on expertise, written rules, impersonal procedures and appointment by qualification. It was conceived as the triumph of rational competence over arbitrary personal rule. Morocracy often wears the clothes of bureaucracy. It has procedures, forms, committees, strategies and reports. But it is a hollowed bureaucracy, a form without substance. Procedures exist not to produce good decisions but to protect those who make bad ones. Rules become a shield rather than a standard. This is what I call institutional simulation: the organisation looks rational from the outside while being governed by entirely different principles inside.

I would also distinguish morocracy from two terms people sometimes suggest. Kakistocracy, the rule of the worst, is primarily a moral category. It speaks of wicked or unprincipled rulers. Morocracy is primarily an epistemic and institutional category. It speaks of those who lack the capacity to judge, decide and lead, regardless of their morals. Mediocracy, the rule of the mediocre, is closer, but mediocrity is relatively stable and harmless. Morocracy is active. It does not merely settle for the average; it pushes out the excellent, because excellence is perceived as a threat.

That is the decisive difference. In a morocracy, capable people are not simply unnecessary. They are dangerous to the established order, because their very presence reveals the incapacity of those in authority. The system therefore develops antibodies against competence. This is why I describe morocracy as a form of negative selection: the institutional equivalent of an immune system that attacks healthy tissue.

3. How do incapable people reach and keep positions of authority, and why do institutions so often reward them?

The answer is not psychological but structural. It is tempting to explain morocracy by the cunning of individuals, but the more interesting question is why institutions allow, and even invite, such outcomes.

The first mechanism is the substitution of loyalty for competence. Whenever appointments depend on political, personal or clan networks rather than open evaluation, the criterion of selection changes. The question is no longer "Who can do this job best?" but "Who can be trusted?" And trust, in these networks, means predictability and dependence. A capable person has options; he or she can leave, object, or build an independent reputation. An incapable person owes everything to the patron. Dependence is therefore a qualification. This is especially visible in state-owned enterprises, where I have long studied what I call political colonisation: boards and management positions treated as spoils to be distributed rather than as roles to be filled.

The second mechanism is defensive recruitment. A leader who lacks capacity will instinctively surround himself with people who will not expose that lack. He hires those who are weaker, more obedient, more grateful. Those people, in turn, do the same. Over a few cycles, the whole

hierarchy is recalibrated downward. No single decision looks catastrophic, yet the cumulative effect is the quiet hollowing out of an organisation's intellectual capital.

The third mechanism is the simulation of accountability. Incapable authority survives by producing the appearance of performance: strategies nobody implements, indicators designed to be met, reports that describe activity rather than results. When boards, supervisors or the public cannot or will not look beyond these appearances, the simulation becomes self-sustaining. Douglass North taught us that institutions are the rules of the game. In a morocracy, the formal rules remain intact, but the informal rules, which actually govern behaviour, reward compliance and punish truth.

The fourth mechanism is the control of information. Capable subordinates who bring bad news or offer alternatives are marginalised. Over time, people learn that silence is safer than judgement. Albert Hirschman described the choice between exit and voice. In a morocracy, voice is punished, so the most capable choose exit, leaving the organisation, or the country. Those who remain have adapted to the system, and the system becomes even more homogeneous.

Why do institutions reward this? Because in the short run morocracy is comfortable. It reduces conflict, it secures loyalty, it protects the networks that distribute power. Competence is uncomfortable: it asks questions, demands standards, threatens arrangements. Institutions with weak external accountability, without real competition, independent boards or a demanding public, naturally drift toward comfort. Morocracy is, in that sense, the path of least resistance. It does not need a conspiracy. It only needs the absence of resistance.

4. Is morocracy specific to certain countries or political systems, or is it a more universal phenomenon?

Morocracy is universal in its possibility, but not in its intensity. No society is immune, but some are far more exposed than others, and understanding why tells us a great deal about how to resist it.

As a tendency, morocracy appears wherever power is separated from accountability. You can find it in a multinational corporation where a protected executive surrounds himself with loyalists, in a university department where mediocre people control hiring, in a sports federation, a hospital, a church, a political party. It exists in rich and poor countries, in democracies and autocracies. In that sense it is an anthropological constant, rooted in very human desires: for security, for comfort, for the protection of one's position. Wherever people can shield themselves from evaluation, some of them will.

However, the conditions under which morocracy becomes dominant, rather than marginal, are specific. I would emphasise four. First, weak institutions of evaluation and accountability. Where courts, regulators, boards and the media cannot independently judge performance, incapacity remains hidden. Second, a large discretionary role of politics in the economy and public administration. When political parties control appointments across state enterprises, agencies and public services, loyalty becomes the main currency of advancement. Third, small and closed elites. In smaller societies, networks are dense, everyone knows everyone, and personal ties easily override impersonal criteria. Mark Granovetter showed how economic

action is embedded in social relations. That embeddedness can be a source of trust, but it can also become a cage that protects the incapable. Fourth, a historical legacy in which formal institutions were imported or imposed while the informal rules remained unchanged. Societies that adopted the vocabulary of markets, governance codes and European standards without internalising their substance are particularly prone to institutional simulation.

I come from Croatia, and I will not pretend that my country is a neutral example. Post-socialist and transitional societies in Southeastern Europe show many of these conditions at once: a strong role of parties in economic life, a large state sector, small elites, and a long habit of formal compliance with external requirements. That is why the concept emerged from my research here. But I am careful not to make it a Balkan exoticism. The same mechanisms operate in Southern Europe, in parts of Latin America, and, increasingly, within the political and corporate life of mature Western democracies. Populism, the cult of loyalty, the contempt for expertise and the reduction of politics to spectacle create fertile ground for morocracy everywhere.

So I would say: morocracy is universal as a temptation, local as a configuration. Each society has its own version, shaped by its history and institutions. The value of the concept is that it allows us to compare these versions, and to see that what each country thinks is its own peculiar misfortune is often part of a broader pattern.

5. What are its consequences for organisations, public institutions and society as a whole?

The consequences are serious precisely because they are slow. Morocracy rarely produces a single spectacular collapse. It produces erosion, and erosion is hard to see until the ground gives way.

For organisations, the first consequence is the loss of judgement. Decisions are made by those who do not understand them, and those who do understand them are excluded or silenced. Strategy degenerates into ritual. Resources are allocated by loyalty rather than by return. The organisation may survive for a long time, especially if it is protected by a monopoly, by the state budget, or by political patronage, but it loses the capacity to adapt. When a real crisis arrives, it discovers that it has no one left who can think.

The second consequence is the departure of talent. Capable people do not usually fight morocracy openly; they leave. They go to another firm, another sector, another country. This is why I see a direct link between morocracy and brain drain. Young educated people in many European countries do not emigrate only because of salaries. They emigrate because they do not believe that competence will be recognised at home. Every such departure strengthens the system they are escaping, because it removes those who might have challenged it.

For public institutions, the consequence is the loss of legitimacy. Citizens are not naive. They see when hospitals, agencies or state enterprises are run by people appointed for reasons that have nothing to do with ability. Over time, this produces a deep cynicism: a belief that all institutions are the same, that effort is pointless, that success depends only on connections. Such cynicism is perhaps the most damaging result of all, because it destroys the moral resources needed for reform. Trust, once lost, is extremely expensive to rebuild.

For society as a whole, morocracy produces what economists would call enormous opportunity costs. We usually measure the damage of bad governance in losses: failed investments, bankrupt firms, wasted public money. But the greater cost is invisible. It is all the innovations that were never made, the enterprises never founded, the reforms never attempted, the talented people who never reached the positions where they could contribute. A morocratic society does not simply perform worse. It systematically underperforms its own potential.

There is also a cultural consequence. When incapacity is rewarded long enough, it becomes normal. People adjust their expectations, their ambitions, even their language. Mediocrity is called realism, servility is called loyalty, silence is called prudence. Hannah Arendt wrote about the banality of evil; I would speak, more modestly, of the banality of incapacity. It becomes the air we breathe. And a society that no longer notices the incapacity of its authorities has lost one of the essential conditions of self-government: the ability to judge those who govern.

6. Is there a way out? What can citizens, organisations and leaders do to resist it?

Yes, there is a way out, but not a heroic one. I am sceptical of the idea that morocracy will be defeated by a single great leader or a moral awakening. Systems are changed by changing the incentives and structures that sustain them, and by persistent work of many people over a long period.

The first line of defence is institutional design. Morocracy thrives where selection is opaque and evaluation is absent. The remedy is transparent, competitive and merit-based appointment, especially to boards and management of public enterprises and agencies. Independent supervisory boards, professional nomination committees, clear performance criteria and real consequences for failure are not bureaucratic details. They are the immune system of an organisation. This is why I have spent so much of my career on corporate governance. Good governance is, ultimately, an architecture designed to make incapable authority difficult to obtain and impossible to keep.

The second line of defence is transparency. Morocracy depends on simulation, and simulation dies in the light. Published data, independent audits, free media and open public debate make it harder to hide incapacity behind procedures and reports. Every honest measurement is an act of resistance.

The third line belongs to organisations and their leaders. A capable leader can deliberately do what a morocratic leader avoids: hire people better than himself, invite disagreement, reward those who bring bad news, protect the voice of competence. This requires a certain inner security, because it means accepting being challenged. I often tell my MBA students that the true test of leadership is not whether you can command, but whether you can tolerate people who know more than you do.

The fourth line belongs to citizens and professionals. Here I would speak of professional ethos and civic courage. Every doctor, engineer, economist, teacher or civil servant who insists on standards, who refuses to sign what he does not believe, who speaks when silence would be more comfortable, is a small obstacle to morocracy. Individually these acts look insignificant. Collectively they define whether an institution has a backbone. Hirschman's lesson matters

again: if all capable people choose exit, the system wins. Sometimes the more difficult choice, voice, is the more necessary one.

Finally, there is education. We must educate people not only to be competent, but to recognise and name incompetent authority, and to understand the mechanisms through which it reproduces itself. That is, in a sense, why I wrote this book. Understanding does not by itself change the world, but no change is possible without it.

I remain cautiously optimistic. Morocracy is powerful, but it is not a law of nature. It is a human construction, sustained by human choices, and what humans have built, humans can rebuild. The question is only whether we will do it before the costs become irreversible.