

Senhor Presidente da Câmara de Cascais, Dr. Carlos Carreiras,  
Senhor Diretor do Instituto de Estudos Políticos da UCP, Prof. João Carlos Espada,  
Srs. Embaixadores,  
Docentes, estudantes, palestrantes, distintos convidados,  
Minhas senhoras e meus senhores

Voltamos, em presença, a reunir-nos no Estoril Political Forum e as minhas primeiras palavras não podem deixar de ser, de novo, tal como aconteceu em outubro de 2021, de regozijo pelo regresso da presença real, que não é apenas a manifestação de uma materialidade básica, mas o reconhecimento tácito que de existe na interação dinâmica de corpos no mesmo espaço uma produção de sentido que ultrapassa a mera informação. Isto é, os corpos em presença também têm capacidade de conhecer, intuir, aquilo que a teoria da cognição designa como ‘conhecimento tácito’.

Todavia, não é apenas um consenso tácito que o Instituto de Estudos Políticos da UCP continue a ser um reservatório da formação de excelência e do debate informado no ambiente crescentemente tensional da atividade política. O Instituto de Estudos Políticos da Universidade Católica Portuguesa afirmou-se de forma sustentada como *honest broker* do pensamento democrático em Portugal, lançando o debate e formando cidadãos capazes de pensar estratégica e responsabilmente o futuro, razão pela qual cumprimento o Diretor do Instituto, Prof João Carlos Espada e a sua equipa de Direção que, com clarividência e assertividade têm vindo consistentemente a afirmar a exigência de um debate político solidamente informado para que a qualidade da nossa democracia saia reforçada. Para que possa subsistir perante as ameaças autocráticas, que são constantes e permanentes exige-se uma educação de qualidade, livre e informado e é essa a missão que a Universidade Católica Portuguesa tem vindo a afirmar em Portugal, desde a sua fundação em 1967.

Dear participants of the Estoril Political Forum, distinguished guests,

I am delighted to welcome you once again to the Estoril Political Forum and to this extraordinary venue in Estoril. This year, the Forum confronts the authoritarian challenge, a challenge both of macro and micropolitics. A challenge of the grand scheme of things and of the minor practices of the everyday.

Education is the key to unleash the potential for transformation that is necessary, if our common home is to have a future. The war in Ukraine has crushed the great accomplishments of late modernity: peace, the right to nourishment, to education, to shelter, the rule of law and political pluralism. Basically, the war in Ukraine disrupts the basic right to have rights which supports the modern democratic order. In these trying times of need, our reflections in this assembly are seismically connected with the tragedy of our times and to the responsibility carried by those who defend true freedom to raise their voices and act systematically and consistently against the nepotic narcissism of authoritarianism.

Our current predicament materializing in all-out war, corporate greed and the worsening of the climate crisis, intolerance and social disruption derives from the build up of a dissonant reasoning, that places the use function of everything before its intrinsic value, that subsumes value to monetization and instrumentalizes humanity to short term objectives. In an essay written during the occupation of Poland in II World War, writer Czeslaw Milosz saw that more than the raw violence unleashed upon his fellow countrymen, the most corroding element of the occupier's actions lay in the disruption of a structured system of knowledge, behavior and belief, jettisoned by an anti-intellectual agenda. "From contradictions rooted deep in our system of knowledge", he wrote, "a conviction has arisen about the fundamental unknowability of the world, along with an understanding of truth with limited responsibility, truth for human use, with no pretensions whatsoever to

being eternally binding.” (Milosz, 2005: 70) Democracy rests on the empowerment of individuals to make reasoned choices, substantiated by the rule of law, political pluralism, and the basic freedoms guaranteeing human dignity and the tolerant coexistence of respectful difference. Democracy is never accomplished because it rests on the possibility of individuals to reason and to think, to choose and to dissent. It rests on potential - to understand and make informed choices - and trust. Hannah Arendt claims in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* that “ The ideal subject for totalitarianism is not the nazi or the communist, but the person for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (that is, real experience), and the distinction between true and false (that is, the patterns of thought) no longer exist.”

Democracy requires the ability to select and distinguish. Political action cannot be subsumed to simplification. It requires a commitment to different perspectives, to antagonist views, to plural understandings of reality, as diverse as the situations of our motley humanity, to complexity, in fact. If we are to honor a common interest for each other, or as Pope Francis writes in *Fratelli Tutti*, to honor a common debt (FT, 35) and responsibility, then there is no other way then to mobilize against demeaning, degrading and unjust social combinations that persist in limiting the rights of some groups to access the rights of a few others. There is a certain vernacular right to narration, to tell one’s story and to memory, no matter how contradictory the past and how diverse the present, that underlies Hannah Arendt’s fundamental claim of ‘the right to have rights’. On the contrary, authoritarian predispositions cannot be bothered by complexity. They instill simple narratives as we’ve witnessed on different occasions, from the life threatening actions in Russia against Putin’s war on Ukraine to the Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Authoritarianism, as political scientist Anne Applebaum argues, is an attack on complexity (Applebaum, 2021:106).

The fight against complex social narratives occurs on all sides of the political divide, and is both traversed by nostalgia for a past that never was or activism for an as yet unscripted future. The current situation does not take us out of the loop

of responsibility. The failure of liberal democracies to close the inequality gap, to choose dignity over profit despite the scientific and financial possibilities of doing so, to articulate self-interest with the common good, have dangerously discredited the system. The rise of the incongruous concept of ‘illiberal democracy’ and the growing attempts to showcase the success of authoritarian capitalism over its democratic counterparts, on the one hand, and on the other the inability of democracies to build coalitions grounded on values and to act, even in support of self-defense, when action is of the essence, suggests that the ‘pharisaism of democracy’ (Milosz, 2005:85) Czeslaw Milosz saw at work in the League of Nations in the 1920’s still abounds.

But for us all there is hope. This is what moves us forward and will allow us to advance. Democracy is far from a perfect system, but it is still the best to the exclusion of all others. In the words of the American poet Amanda Gorman, “While democracy can be periodically delayed,/It can never be permanently defeated”, (18) its greatness lies in the purpose of living together in harmony, respectful of all. And that is a goal that the false glitter of the authoritarian spectacle may defer but never conquer. May we all, and you all, do our bit to confront the challenge!