

Estoril Political Forum 2022
30th International Annual Meeting in Political Studies

“Confronting the Authoritarian Challenge”

Estoril Palace Hotel, 27-29 June 2022

Opening Address João Carlos Espada

Senhora Reitora da Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Professora Isabel Capelo Gil,

Senhor Presidente da Câmara Municipal de Cascais, Dr. Carlos Carreiras,

Senhora Directora do Estoril Political Forum, Dra. Rita Seabra Brito,

Senhores Embaixadores, Distintos Convidados, Senhoras e Senhores, Caros Amigos,

Gostaria de começar por agradecer a presença de todos nesta 30ª edição do Estoril Political Forum. Um agradecimento muito especial a S. Exa. O Presidente da República, Professor Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa – que nos dá a honra e o privilégio de nos conceder mais uma vez o seu Alto Patrocínio ao nosso Estoril Political Forum, que nos enviou uma muito tocante mensagem que todos pudemos escutar. E um agradecimento especial também ao Senhor Presidente da Câmara de Cascais, Dr. Carlos Carreiras que nos dá o privilégio do seu apoio há mais de 10 anos.

Pedia agora a vossa compreensão para usar a língua inglesa, de forma a comunicar directamente com os nossos convidados estrangeiros.

Now to our English-speaking participants and friends:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 30th International Annual Meeting in Political Studies, now also called the “Estoril Political Forum.” We are delighted to let you know that you are participating at Portugal’s largest annual meeting in Political Studies – and, yes, indeed, almost thirty years have now passed since we had our first meeting, in the Arrábida Convent, in September 1993.

We are also delighted to let you know that we are publishing today the first volume of a hopefully three-volume edition on these International Annual Meetings in Political Studies. This first volume – which is available at the entrance of our meeting and is on display at the central table – covers the first 10 editions, from 1993 to 2002.

I would like to thank emphatically Marc Plattner – who has kindly written a very touching *Foreword* to this book -- for his very kind friendship and support over all these years—26 years, in fact, because I believe we first met in 1996, two years before he first came to our Arrábida Meetings in 1998. (And I will shortly come back to this first encounter of ours).

On the topic of our tradition of annual meetings in Arrábida and in Estoril since 1993, the main point I would like to make is that all these 30 editions have not been the result of a plan, or of a trick, or of a plot, or of a conspiracy.

Petty minds nowadays fill the so-called "social media" with insidious stories about conspiracies. I am delighted to say two things about this: first, I don't use social media; I just rely on good friends who keep me aware of what is going on over there; second, I am particularly delighted to say that our tradition of annual meetings since 1993 has nothing to do with plans, plots, conspiracies, or power politics.

We were fewer than 20 participants in Arrábida in 1993. In October 2021, here at the Estoril Palace Hotel, our 29th edition, we have had more than 600 registered participants. How did this happen? Very simply, in my view, by the excitement of ideas. We came together in 1993 because we shared an attachment to, and a curiosity about, some ideas that were not vulgar. And our meetings have grown because more and more people have been attracted by these ideas. The same ideas have been the source of the launch of our Institute for Political Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal in 1996: we had 40 students at the MA program that we launched in 1996. We now have more than 400 students within our BA, MA and PhD programmes.

Ideas indeed were at the root of the launching of all these undertakings. In 1993, I was invited to promote a week-long course in Political Theory in Arrábida by Bernardino Gomes—an Atlanticist Portuguese democratic socialist that I had vaguely met through another Atlanticist democratic socialist, the then President Mario Soares (to whom I had been political adviser in his first presidential mandate, 1986-1991). But we were not close—and I was certainly not a socialist. Bernardino Gomes simply may have found some common ground on our mutual attachment to the Western tradition of liberty under law.

In 1996 I was invited to launch a program in Politics at the Catholic University by Mário Pinto—whom I barely knew, and I was not a member of the Catholic University. Mário Pinto may simply have thought that there was common ground between us, mainly because of my liberal opposition to jacobinism and the so-called 'enlightened despotism', as well as my liberal opposition to post-modern nihilism.

Also in 1996 I met Marc Plattner—who kindly decided to come to Portugal to attend a lecture by Samuel Huntington, whom I had invited to launch a Lecture series called 'The Democratic Invention', which was the inauguration of the Mário Soares Foundation. I had never met either Huntington or Plattner—but a deep friendship with Marc emerged from that encounter. Marc even kindly decided to replicate "The Democratic Invention" lecture series in Washington a couple of years later and very kindly invited me to co-edit with him a book with the papers presented at the lecture series.

All these three encounters happened obviously not because of plans, but because of ideas. It is difficult to define the ideas that have generated this tremendous excitement—and we should always be skeptical about definitions, as Karl Popper, one of our great mentors, used to say. I would nevertheless tentatively submit three main topics:

In the first place, a clear and uncompromising attachment to liberal democracy, including market economies, checks and balances, and personal liberty,—basically defined as absence of coercion by others, as Isaiah Berlin, another of our great mentors, has recalled.

Next, a clear and uncompromising attachment to the Atlantic Alliance as the bulwark of liberal democracy and the Free World. We have from the outset been very clear about our attachment to the Western Tradition of Liberty under Law; and we have always made clear that this pluralistic tradition is rooted in Athens, Rome and Jerusalem. And it undoubtedly includes the

great American liberal democracy—as Alexis de Tocqueville, another of our great mentors, has taught us.

Last but certainly not least, we have always made clear our attachment to the classical understanding of the Idea of a University as a place of learning—as Michael Oakeshott, another of our great mentors, used to say. This means the understanding of a University as a place for the pursuit of Truth, the Good and the Beautiful—and not as a place of propaganda. This means the stern defence of Free Speech and the stern refusal of tribalism and of collectivism. This also means the engagement in an on-going pluralistic, civilized conversation, and the refusal of ideological warfare among “unfortunate dichotomies,” as Ralf Dahrendorf, another of our great mentors, used to say.

To conclude, and to put a long story short, **Ideas Matter**. And the **Idea of a University** matters above all. Please allow me to conclude therefore with a brief quotation from John Henry Cardinal Newman in his classical work *The Idea of a University*, which we always quote in the presentations of our Institute for Political Studies of the Catholic University of Portugal:

“A University is a place where inquiry is pushed forward and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.” (1854)

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Thank you very much for your attention. And please enjoy our 30th edition of the International Meeting in Political Studies – the Estoril Political Forum – which I am sure not surprisingly, is under the general title “Confronting the Authoritarian Challenge”.