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Estoril Political Forum 2023

Senhor Diretor do IEP, Prof. João Carlos Espada
Sra Vereadora Joana Pinto Balsemão, em representação do Presidente da Câmara de Cascais
Caros palestrantes, Srs Professores, distintos convidados
Caros estudantes do IEP,
Minhas senhoras e meus senhores

É com renovado gosto que vos dou as boas-vindas ao Estoril Political Forum, um evento de referência no (longo) calendário de eventos académicos da Universidade Católica Portuguesa, este ano dedicado a um tema que tem tanto de relevante como de oportuno “Rebuilding Democratic Consensus at Home and Abroad”. Quero em particular cumprimentar o Instituto por 31 anos de um trabalho académico notável em prol da formação de especialistas que justamente laborem para criar pontes onde elas não existem, para criar consensos democráticos e não falsos consensos de matriz autoritária, para dignificar a ciência política como área estratégica para a afirmação do país e dos valores das democracias.

O Papa Francisco, que visitará a Universidade Católica em agosto salienta que vivemos não simplesmente um tempo de mudanças, mas uma mudança de época. A universidade constitui-se como espaço de regeneração essencial deste nosso tempo, propondo a abertura a novos protagonistas, sem deixar de cultivar e preservar um olhar sobre o passado e a tradição sem os quais não existe futuro.

Prof. João Carlos Espada, querido amigo, agradeço-lhe a visão e o extraordinário trabalho que levou o Instituto a mais de três décadas de um aturado trabalho de renovação e defesa dos valores das democracias liberais e desejo o maior sucesso para os caminhos futuros.

Distinguished speakers, distinguished colleagues, students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

What use are scholars in times of need? Why is it still relevant in our ‘miserable times’, as poet Friedrich Hölderlin described the war-ridden atmosphere of the early 19th century, to discuss democracy? Is ours not the time when survivability and security take precedence over education, science, culture? This is clearly a false equation. And yet, the unjustified and unprecedented invasion of Ukraine has proven all our assumptions about the present wrong. Essentially, at the

end of the 20th century, just as the master narratives subsided, a new euphoric discursive regime began to emerge. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the astounding conquests of science, global interconnectedness and the third technological revolution, suggested or rather imposed on our late modernity the belief that history had been brought to completion. Democracy and a certain strand of reformed capitalism had become hegemonic; globalization had flattened the world and brought former antagonists closer, fostering peace where war had previously lurked; and the progress of science suggested that in no time the most ravaging diseases would be conquered. Humanity had then done away with totalitarianism and war: Disease and even famine were on its way to becoming ghostly remnants of a bygone past. Reality has proven us wrong.

As we speak, the great glories of late modernity seem to have been crushed: 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 must therefore start from an understanding of the present tragedy but also of the immense possibilities the seeds of education afford for an effective democratic development of our world.

I am often reminded of an obscure meditation written by Virginia Woolf in 1940 during the *Blitz*. In 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid', she describes the repeated experience of anticipating the drop of enemy bombs over her house in London:

The Germans were over this house last night and the night before that. Here they are again. It is a queer experience, lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death. It is a sound that interrupts cool and consecutive thinking about peace. Yet, it is a sound (...) that should compel one to think about peace. Unless we can think peace into existence we - not this one body in this one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born - will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead. (Woolf, 2021: 41)

Woolf describes fear and anxiety in an about-to-die situation. The writer is aware of the numbing effects of fear and of the need to unthink it, through a substitution of these thoughts by representations of peace. Woolf's peace project is a whole program that speaks to a civilizational model that is tolerant, respectful and inclusive, sustainable and economically robust, socially and ethically just. A program of democratic consensus, really, a consensus about the core values that organize our societies, including the right to dissent, which lies at the core of the exercise of politics.

As university leaders, we have been granted the awe inspiring task of preparing the future. This may be a hollow signifier or a tremendous endeavor because it forces institutions to realize

that there is no plan B for our societies. In our times of climate hazard and crisis, of populism and disruptive dissent, education is the path to avert global catastrophe.

Quoting Woolf, education allows for democratic consensus to be thought into existence.

How then may we educate future generations for democracy? The first condition to be met is the sponsoring of programs to promote global access to education, which is a constitutional right of developed democracies; the second, to attune educators and learners to the complexity, the diversity and the variety of our world, in support of pluralism, unpacking narrow and supposedly patriotically bent educational models, that educate for dissent and not for tolerance and peace; the third, to consider that just as democracy is an ideal in the making, so should educational models promote a broad understanding of reality overcoming a monocultural understanding, structured upon disciplinary, social, cultural, economic, religious and political silos. War is the result of a siloed education.

In exile in the United States during the Second World War, German writer Thomas Mann travelled around the country lecturing on the importance of defending democracy. His own political transformation and the experience of the German transition from the Weimar Republic to National Socialism had taught him that democracy is an attitude and an intellectual stance that originates in education, but its defense requires passion. A passionate education for democracy equally requires a symbolical approach and good storytelling. Telling a good story is a first step to change the world. And luckily we have many of good stories to tell. In this year's Estoril Political Forum speakers are invited to discuss precisely an alliance experience that is also a good story: the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance in its many important iterations throughout the centuries, including academical alliances, such as the Europaeum, a University alliance curated by the University of Oxford and that the Institute of Political Studies has been championing at Católica for over a decade. Welcome thus to the storytellers of this important alliance, and all the other networks gathered at Estoril, and allow me to finish with an invitation to all participants to continue to write, in style, the story of liberal democracy and its apology of democratic consensus.