

# Estoril Political Forum 2023

## 13th Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture: *Europe Whole and Free*

Wilhelm Hofmeister, Remarks as discussant on the Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture

In May 1989, during a visit to the city of Mainz, which is close to my hometown and where I had studied at the Johannes Gutenberg University, I observed the preparations for the visit of then US President George Bush. As usual in Germany, there were a lot of criticism of the de facto cordoning off of the city centre because of the visit of an US president, and above all because of the still ongoing US military presence in Germany and Europe and, of course, also of NATO. There in Mainz, in that special year of 1989, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, President Bush delivered a remarkable speech entitled: "A Europe Whole and Free". He gave this speech at the invitation and in the presence of the then German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. At the time, both Bush and Kohl, could and did not imagine and neither did their audience, that not even six months later, on 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall would be opened and only another year later the division of Europe, and ultimately the division of the world into East and West would be overcome. The vision of a "Europe whole and free" never seemed more tangible and realisable than in those moving years between 1989 and 1991, i.e. between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The vision of a "Europe whole and free" presented by President Bush reflects the idea of a unified and undivided Europe, characterized by democracy, freedom, and security for all its nations. However, the US president also warned:

*„too many in the West, Americans and Europeans alike, seem to have forgotten the lessons of our common heritage and how the world we know came to be. And that should not be, and that cannot be.*

*We must recall that the generation coming into its own in America and Western Europe is heir to gifts greater than those bestowed to any generation in history: peace, freedom, and prosperity. This inheritance is possible because 40 years ago the nations of the West joined in that noble, common cause called NATO. And first, there was the vision, the concept of free peoples in North America and Europe working to protect their values. And second, there was the practical sharing of risks and burdens, and a realistic recognition of Soviet expansionism. And finally, there was the determination to look beyond old animosities. The NATO alliance did nothing less than provide a way for Western Europe to heal centuries-old rivalries, to begin an era of reconciliation and restoration. It has been, in fact, a second Renaissance of Europe.“*

These are words spoken by George Bush in Mainz on 31 May 1989. In the light of the current challenges we face in Europe, these words have not lost their relevance.

"Europe whole and free" - this emphasizes the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the entire European continent. It promotes the idea that all nations should be able to

coexist peacefully and resolve conflicts through diplomacy rather than resorting to armed confrontation. The promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights, of course, was and is an essential element to build a "Europe whole and free". It implies that all European countries should have functioning democratic systems, where citizens have the right to freely choose their governments and enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The European Integration is the other side of the coin. Because a Europe "whole and free" cannot exist when its countries do not engage in making the today European Union stronger, more resilient against the old and new types of threats and hopefully create an ever-closer Union based on cooperation, economic integration, and shared values.

Since 1945, the end of the second world war, 1957, the signature of the Rome Treaties, since 1990, the German Unification which symbolized the end of the division of the continent, and since 1992, the signature of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, integration and cooperation of the European countries evolved in a way that could hardly have been imagined.

In the meantime, states that did not even exist in 1989 are members of the Union. All this has contributed to the fact that despite the discussions and also conflicts that have always accompanied the integration process, that despite the clashes of interests that are natural when sovereign states negotiate common policies with each other, the vision of a free and united Europe has continuously taken on clearer contours.

Russia, it should be remembered here, was also to become part of this vision and of the united and free continent. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in June 1994 and entered into force in December 1997, which built the legal basis for relations between the EU and Russia, was considered to be the fundament for ever closer relations between the two parties. The underlying spirit of this agreement is captured in its first paragraph, which states under the headline GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

*"Respect for democratic principles and human rights, as defined in particular in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, underpins the domestic and external policies of the Parties and constitutes an essential element of partnership and of this Agreement."*

Reading these lines, one would like to turn back time, if it were possible. Because since 24 February 2022, the day of the Russian invasion and the start of its war against Ukraine, our expectations that one day all the countries of this continent and all the people who live here would experience the benefits of a "Europe whole and free" have turned into fears that our freedom and security, respect for human rights and also the prosperity that European integration has created for all those involved in it are fundamentally threatened. There is a broad consensus in Europe that Russia, with its invasion of Ukraine, has not only attacked and is threatening that country, but that this is a threat to the liberal and democratic order in the other countries of our continent - and at the same time a threat to the idea of freedom and democracy and its dissemination in other parts of the world.

Ideas are sometimes stronger than states and their institutions, even military apparatuses. That is why authoritarian regimes fear the idea of freedom - not least the freedom of thought, which is the most difficult to control. It is precisely for this reason that, in addition to our concern for Europe, we must be equally concerned that our concern about the threat to the

idea of freedom, human rights and democracy is not shared in other countries and regions of the world. We must observe that political leaders of many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia are, if not indifferent to the Russian invasion, but much less concerned about the idea of freedom and democracy than about the supply of wheat to their countries and the economic consequences of the war for the world economy. We find this somewhat difficult to understand. And yet it is also a reaction to the fact that we have perhaps made too few efforts so far to represent the values we share in Europe even more clearly to other countries and partners – and that we ourselves perhaps sometime compromise to quick when we have to choose between freedom and prosperity through trade and other arrangements with countries led by authoritarian leaders and political forces. I know that this is an old and difficult dilemma to which an answer must be found again and again. This is not the moment or the time to have that discussion. But one consequence seems obvious to me: we must work with constant vigilance and sustained effort to ensure that "Europe whole and free" does not remain a dream, a vision. The realisation of this vision depends on our continuous efforts to strengthen the foundations of a free and peaceful Europe. Timothy Gordon Ash has formulated this task very simply and very precisely on the last pages of his book "Homelands". He writes: " to defend, improve and extend a free Europe makes sense. It's a cause worthy of hope".