

EPF  
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Unlike the pioneers of the Convento of Arrabida, who started what was to become the EPF more than 22 years ago now, I was invited to join in 2007 and I have attempted never to miss this annual gathering of great minds.

Liberal democracies can only survive if they accept debate and the EPF has been a place of true debate, where disagreement is accepted and encouraged, where one has to defend an opinion and then, because of a heated exchange, perhaps change one's mind.

What the philosopher John Gray has called 'the problem of hyperliberalism' today, or essentially 'thought crime' as in George Orwell's *1984* dystopia, has got no place at the EPF. Professor Joao Carlos Espada and his extraordinary devoted team at the Political Institute have made the forum a shelter for fierce debate in a civilised environment. Together, they have made the EPF the living embodiment of what academic life, but also political and civic life, should look like if ideas were taken seriously and different opinions were expressed, challenged but also respected.

The EPF is a tribute to what we are slowly losing in our liberal democracies – a politics of virtue – and the flame of liberty is being kept alive there every year.

Free debate, tolerance and liberty, have never been more challenged than they are today in the western world and the EPF reminds us that our democracies rest on those values, nothing else.

Professor Joao Carlos Espada and colleagues need to be thanked and saluted for preserving for us this little space of freedom in Estoril, every single year in June.