

Online Discussion of Estoril Political Forum

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As has been mentioned, I am truly a veteran of the Estoril Political Forum

In fact, 23rd consecutive year, going back to 1998, even before it took on its present name and format. Then it was called the Course in Political Theory and Political Science, and it met in a lovely but rustic setting at the Convento of Arrabida.

A small group took part – perhaps 20 people altogether, more or less equally divided between students and professors – professors gave the papers and students offered comments – and they were tough but respectful critics

Over the years the gatherings gradually grew larger and beginning in 2000 they moved from Arrabida to the region around Lisbon. Since 2006 they have been held at the Palacio in Estoril, a truly palatial hotel in a wonderful location.

Both the expanded accommodations and the new proximity to Lisbon made it possible to greatly increase the number of participants. I think there now must be 400 to 500, and they include not only distinguished scholars but also leading Portuguese political figures and the ambassadors of major Western countries.

Subject matter too has broadened. Political theory has not been abandoned, but primary focus is the major political issues of the day. These have included questions of law, culture, political economy, governance, the nation state, citizenship, and ideology.

There has always been an important international dimension to our discussions, notably on the European Union and the transatlantic relationship, but also extending to coverage of Africa, Brazil, Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.

Have celebrated major anniversaries—from the 800th of the Magna Carta to the 30th of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

But every meeting in one way or another dedicated to deepening our understanding of liberty and democracy and the challenges that they face. Our commitment to these principles is unalloyed. We do not pretend to be neutral about them.

But that does not mean we are dogmatic. The Estoril Political Forum encourages a pluralism of viewpoints within this framework, and so our sessions typically are marked by vigorous debate and disagreement.

I regularly learn a good deal from the annual meeting and come away with a better sense of the concerns that are currently animating scholars and political leaders. Plus, I invariably enjoy the congenial and civil atmosphere that reigns at the Estoril Political Forum. This is a tribute to its guiding spirit, Professor Joao Carlos Espada. Together with his colleagues at the Institute, many of whom are his former students, he has made the EPF one of the world's leading conferences on politics.