Estoril Political Forum
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"The Challenge to Europe and the West"
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Professor Ribeiro, Mr. van Schie, Professor Espada, Professor Brito, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to join you in Estoril for this year's Political Forum—a gathering perfectly timed by my friend Professor Espada to bring us together just as or after great events occur, with participants who have much to teach us about how to interpret them, and beautifully planned by Professor Brito and her staff. And I should say, as an American, that the Estoril Political Forum offers relief from a breathless focus on follies and controversies that engross our media and politicians amid real challenges, which often keep us from looking past the end of our noses, and a welcome chance to renew our acquaintance with the current situation of Europe and how this continent is coping with challenges of its own, even through the haze of a European focus on homegrown follies and controversies that engross your own politicians and media.

The title of this panel is "The Challenge to Europe and the West," which is a challenge for us on the panel to identify the challenge. Let me try. I have three points to make this evening—three different ways of addressing the challenge faced by Europe and the West—the second point more briefly than the first, and the third point more briefly than the second. First I want to explain the challenge posed to liberal democracy by Russia; second, the challenge posed by the indifference or impartiality toward liberal democracy on the part of liberal citizens and leaders; and third, the challenge of improving our understanding of politics in the liberal democracies.

The starting point for our geopolitical situation is the most astonishing political event of my lifetime, the demise of the Soviet Union. In the wake of that event, Americans and our allies in western Europe watched in wonder and triumph, if not without a tinge of lingering foreboding, especially in Britain, as the division of Berlin into two—which I had seen with my own eyes when I was seven years old—ended and Germany was reunited. The eastern half of Europe came out from under what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called "the rubble" of Soviet communism, clamoring for liberal democratic rights like freedom of religion, free speech, and free markets. The old notion that liberal democracy had friends and enemies was replaced by idealistic expectations of a Europe whole and free, with no enemies of liberal democracy anymore. Francis Fukuyama wrote a book heralding the end of history, almost two centuries after it had been foreseen by the German idealist philosopher Hegel, the triumph of liberal democracy, in a unipolar world dominated not by the rational Prussian state, but by the United States and its allies in Europe.

But politics did not go away, nor the difference between friends and enemies of liberal democracy. Germany, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were engaged in deglutition of lands and peoples formerly in the Soviet sphere. Without the pressure of uniting against a Soviet threat, Western Europe felt increasingly differences not only between members adopting the Euro and those that did not, but also between richer members in northern

Europe and poorer ones in the south. To these differences were added those between old members from western Europe and new ones from central Europe. East European countries followed different paths toward membership in the European Union and NATO. Poland, like the Baltic republics, joined the EU and NATO with great relief, and Poland quickly became one of their weightier members. Czechoslovakia peacefully cut itself in two. Romania and Bulgaria struggled to throw off Soviet-style corruption and achieve liberal reforms. Hungary and Poland did not always live up to western standards of parliamentarism and liberal democracy. Turkey, on the fringe of Europe, turned from hopeful aspirations to join the EU and an embrace of European-style liberalism, in keeping with the legacy of Atatürk, to inventing its own kind of homegrown Muslim authoritarianism. The Balkans, which had been the tinderbox of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, flared up again, as Yugoslavia split into separate countries, and religious and ethnic differences provoked war between its Serbian rump and the new nations surrounding it. A weakened Russia fought over whether it would join the western world or remain a second world of its own, but even in its weakness aggravated those other divisions in Europe, frightening the Baltic countries, stoking trouble in the Balkans, and aiming to keep Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in its own orbit. Meanwhile the United States was attacked by radical Islamic terrorists on September 11, 2001, and had to face the fact of a new enemy. The second Iraq war and its aftermath in the turmoil of the so-called Arab spring, a mostly unsuccessful attempt to achieve liberal democracy in the Middle East and North Africa, gave rise to a great migration of people into Europe. Later in the last decade, Europe and the United States suffered a worldwide economic contraction.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it became clear that Russia under Vladimir Putin, even more than Turkey, had turned its back on liberal democracy and in fact was pursuing a course that was hostile and aggressive to it. Russian imperial designs on its neighbors had already caused war in Georgia, rattled the Baltics, and meddled in Moldova and the Ukraine; but it was above all the Russian invasion of the Crimea and eastern Ukraine, aggravated by the downing of a Malaysia Airlines passenger plane from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur in July 2014, later found to have been hit by a Russian missile from territory controlled by rebels allied with the Russians in eastern Ukraine, that awakened Europe to the returning danger from Russian imperialism. Russia judged it had a free hand to conquer and annex Crimea and help rebels seize territory in eastern Ukraine after the American president drew a red line in the sand for Syria not to cross, and then reacted with nothing stronger than recriminations and expostulations when the Syrian government used chemical weapons against their foes. Nor is this story over. Despite some effort to strengthen NATO's defenses in the Baltics, Russian warplanes, surface vessels, and submarines are increasingly probing our weakness all over northern air and waters; Russian territorial claims, backed up by new military bases, industrial sites, and a strong fleet of icebreakers, are proliferating in the Arctic; and Russian officers, dressed in unmarked uniforms as little green men to fool the gullible and others grasping for excuses not to intervene, stir up more trouble in eastern Ukraine, which will break out again when Putin decides that the moment is right. Russian support for Assad in Syria has not only removed the threat to his thuggish rule, as the new French president acknowledged last week, but also prolonged the civil war, intensified the refugee crisis in Europe, and allowed Russia to build a naval base in Latakia and establish naval strength in the Mediterranean Sea. Even more important, it has created an effective diversion to their outrages in Ukraine, which has prevented any reaction in the West stronger than ineffectual sanctions and remonstrances.

This, then, is the challenge that Europe and the West face: the first successful invasion and seizure by armed force of the sovereign territory of one European nation by another since the Second World War, with no justification but the fig leaf of a phony referendum after the fact, no effective resistance by Ukraine or any other nation in Europe or North America that might sympathize with its plight, and no reason not to expect more of the same, with more of the Ukraine or other countries now independent of the former Soviet Union under threat, as soon as it becomes expedient for Russia to reclaim them. With Russian military strength growing, despite constraints in equipment and training, the unwillingness of Western countries, especially in Europe, to devote enough resources to their own defense, leaves eastern Europe wide open to Russian adventurism—especially as liberal democracies are distracted by having to cope with the sovereign debt crisis, the complicated and protracted disruptions caused by Brexit, the continuing and worsening threat from the migrant invasion, regular terrorist attacks from radical Muslims stirred up by the Islamic State, and the tension between pan-European aspirations for a closer political union and widespread national reluctance to give up national and religious traditions and sovereignty to technocratic bureaucrats in Brussels. Even without this new Russian threat, democratic statesmen in Europe and the West would have had their hands full with all of these problems they have to address, but this more menacing threat, from a country that is no friend to liberal democracy, sharpens the challenge to liberal democracy in Europe and the West.

This challenge would be formidable enough without coming on top of a second challenge that has been growing within liberal democracies—a challenge that is internal to liberal democracies and goes back before the demise of the Soviet Union. I mean the growing political importance of political leaders and prominent citizens who do not believe in liberal democracy, are hard put to explain what it is and is not, are indifferent to its fortunes, or who think fairness requires them to be impartial between liberal democracy and its enemies when their interests conflict. Curiously, this problem seems to be most acute among the most favored citizens of the liberal democracies: rulers, opinion leaders, and people who reap the greatest rewards from living in free and decent regimes. Ordinary citizens, who struggle to keep up with their more prominent peers, are less likely to share these doubts themselves, but even more likely to suffer from them. The origins and growth of this second challenge are more obscure and remote than the origins of the first, but one can trace the second challenge first to the encouragement of citizens by political writers of the Enlightenment to turn their attention and energies away from politics toward their own private concerns, making their lives richer and more comfortable but lessening their devotion to their country and the public good, which tends to legitimize selfishness, reduce citizens' vigilance against dangers to their country's welfare, and make them forget that they owe anything to their country for protecting the freedoms they enjoy. Worse, it tends to make them easy marks for those who attack the rights and liberties protected by liberal democracy, and the freedom and comforts they allow, by claiming that the failings of liberal democracy can be cured by assailing them.

Too many signs of this rot in the supports for liberal democracy are all around us in the twenty-first century, even without the aggravation of Russian disinformation: the contempt of our identity politics to democratic forms that protect our liberty, identified long ago as a danger sign by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*; a growing willingness to countenance restrictions on freedom of speech, religion, and commerce on account of people who take offense at the exercise of those rights by other citizens; and a coarseness in our political discourse which

is impatient with listening to arguments or reasoned deliberation and not unwilling to resort to force instead to have one's way. What is often called elite opinion, by which I mean the opinion of people with unusual influence rather than unusual insight, is leading the way in spreading the hasty, superficial judgments that Solzhenitsyn warned against in his Harvard address.

If the first impulse for this decline in civic virtue came from the Enlightenment, certainly the framers of the American republic were aware of the tension between encouraging the selfish pursuit of one's own happiness and the requirements for a decent and just political community. By a series of ingenious political expedients they tried to protect the free citizens they encouraged from the possible depredations of their own neglect or abuse of the advantages of liberal democracy. But some of their expedients proved weak, while others were dismantled by reforms in the Progressive era, when leaders persuaded that liberal democracy needed a purer and more moral foundation tried to replace the messiness of liberal politics with the rigor of a more rational bureaucracy. If fortunately there were limits to their success in the United States, they had more influence in Europe, and the European Union was built with help from leaders imbued with the same spirit. It is not unreasonable that citizens in the liberal democracies have begun to doubt the ***bona fides*** of leaders in politics and the media with such questionable attachment to the democratic principles of the founders of their countries, but the effect of this dissonance between the foundations of our democratic regimes and the beliefs their leaders advance as politically correct is a weakening of our understanding of those foundations and of our resolve to strengthen and preserve them.

This brings us finally to the third challenge for Europe and the West. Nothing could be clearer from more than four decades of university teaching than the decline in the standard of education among our young people. Professors who claim that students today know more about the world and are more intelligent than ever before are lying through their teeth. There is no reason to think university students have more natural ability today than they had one or two generations ago, nor any reason to think their natural ability has declined. What is clear is that, on the whole, teachers in our liberal democracies are making very poor use of students' prodigious natural abilities to learn in primary and secondary school, not helping young people rise to the challenge of learning as much as they possibly can before they arrive at universities—which leaves us a body of prospective citizens who are remarkably ill-informed about the world around them, and particularly about their government and their political regime. Students are so used to finding a superficial answer to any question on their telephones that they don't understand the difference between information and knowledge. They have little idea how to master a body of knowledge and even less idea why and about what they should want to do so. Liberal arts disciplines that have strayed from their moorings are part of the problem: historians who neglect political, diplomatic, and military history to study more marginal, ephemeral fields of human activity; political scientists who ignore the great books of politics to spin lightweight theories based on mathematical models of human behavior; or professors of literature who are contemptuous of readers who try to understand the intentions of great authors, and instead read into every literary work their own trendy viewpoints on race, class, and gender.

With such preparation and training, it is no surprise that students often know no more about their chosen field when they graduate from university than when they first arrive there. Nor is it a surprise, without examples to show them something different, that they leave the university

without any special respect or understanding for their own liberal political regime, which has afforded them the liberty and the leisure to spend years at the university devoted to education. Without an education that opens their eyes to the permanent problems and possibilities of politics, we cannot expect them to gain political understanding or form political viewpoints that deserve attention and respect from their fellow citizens and might contribute to preserving the decent and honorable features of liberal democracy in their countries.

Therefore it is particularly encouraging to see the kind of education that goes on, and has gone on now for more than a quarter of a century, here at the Catholic University of Portugal, in the library, in the classroom, and in such special gatherings as the Estoril Political Forum, thanks to the political understanding and inspired teaching of Professor Espada and his colleagues, whose students by their careful study, awakening talents, and growing understanding of politics show promise of developing the depth of political knowledge will be necessary to preserve the blessings of free government in Europe and the West.