

Estoril Political Forum 2023
31st International Annual Meeting in Political Studies

**“Rebuilding Democratic Consensus, at Home and Abroad
& Celebrating the 650th Anniversary of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance”**

Estoril Palace Hotel, 26-28 June 2023

Opening Address João Carlos Espada

Senhora Reitor da Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Professora Isabel Capelo Gil,

Senhora Vereador da Câmara Municipal de Cascais, Dra. Joana Pinto Balsemão,

Senhora Diretora do Estoril Political Forum, Dra. Rita Seabra Brito,

Senhores Embaixadores, Distintos Convidados, Senhoras e Senhores, Caros Amigos,

Gostaria de começar por agradecer a presença de todos nesta 31^a edição do Estoril Political Forum. Um agradecimento muito especial a S. Exa. O Presidente da República, Professor Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa – que nos dá a honra e o privilégio de nos conceder mais uma vez o seu Alto Patrocínio ao nosso Estoril Political Forum e que nos enviou a tão tocante e inspiradora mensagem a que tivemos o privilégio de assistir no início desta sessão.

Um agradecimento especial também para a senhora Vereadora da Câmara Municipal de Cascais, Dra. Joana Pinto Balsemão, que, juntamente com o Presidente Carlos Carreiras e o Vice-Presidente Miguel Pinto Luz, nos apoiam aqui no EPF há mais de dez anos.

Pedia agora a vossa compreensão para usar a língua inglesa, de forma a comunicar directamente com os nossos convidados estrangeiros.

Now to our English-speaking participants and friends:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 31st International Annual Meeting in Political Studies, now also called the “Estoril Political Forum.” We are delighted to let you know that

you are participating at Portugal's largest annual meeting in Political Studies – and, yes, indeed, thirty years have now passed since we had our first meeting, in the Arrábida Convent, in September 1993.

We are also delighted to let you know that we are publishing a new book with the proceedings of last year's edition of the Estoril Political Forum – the 30st, as you may recall, under the general title “Confronting the Authoritarian Challenge”. And I am also delighted to recall that we have published last year the first volume of a hopefully three-volume edition on these International Annual Meetings in Political Studies. This first volume covers the first 10 editions, from 1993 to 2002. Both books are on display at the central table and they are available at the entrance of our Conference.

On the topic of our tradition of annual meetings in Arrábida and in Estoril since 1993, the main point I would like to emphasise is that all these 31 editions have not been the result of a plan, or of a trick, or of a plot, or of power politics.

We were fewer than 20 participants in Arrábida in 1993. We now have more than 600 registered participants at our meeting this year. How did this happen? Very simply, in my view, by the excitement of ideas.

We came together in 1993 because we shared an attachment to, and a curiosity about, some ideas that were not vulgar. And our meetings have grown because more and more people have been attracted by these ideas. The same ideas have been the source of the launch of our Institute for Political Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal in 1996: we had 40 students at the MA program that we launched in 1996. We now have more than 400 students within our BA, MA and PhD programmes.

Ideas indeed have been at the root of the launching of all these undertakings. It is difficult to define the ideas that have generated this tremendous excitement—and we should always be skeptical about definitions, as Karl Popper, one of our great mentors, used to say. I would nevertheless tentatively submit three main principles:

In the first place, a clear and uncompromising attachment to liberal democracy, including market economies, checks and balances, and personal liberty, — basically defined as absence of coercion by others, as Sir Isaiah Berlin, another of our great mentors, has recalled.

Next, a clear and uncompromising attachment to the Euro-Atlantic Alliance as the bulwark of liberal democracy and the Free World. We have from the outset been very clear about our attachment to the Western Tradition of Liberty under Law; and we have always made clear that this pluralistic tradition has nothing to do with racial or ethnic prejudices, but with a cultural conversation – a pluralistic cultural conversation which is rooted in Athens, Rome and Jerusalem. And it

undoubtedly includes the great American liberal democracy—as Alexis de Tocqueville, another of our great mentors, has taught us.

Last but certainly not least, we have always made clear our attachment to the classical understanding of the Idea of a University as a place of learning—as Michael Oakeshott, another of our great mentors, used to say. This means the understanding of a University as a place for the pursuit of Truth, the Good, and the Beautiful—and not as a place of propaganda. This means the stern defence of Free Speech and the stern refusal of tribalism and of collectivism. This also means engagement in an on-going pluralistic, civilized conversation, and the refusal of ideological warfare among “unfortunate dichotomies,” as Ralf Dahrendorf, another of our great mentors, used to say.

Incidentally, Ralf Dahrendorf, -- a German-born British citizen who became a Peer of the House of Lords and to whom I owe the deepest gratitude for having been my D.Phil supervisor at Oxford – Ralf Dahrendorf may certainly be quoted as an inspiration for the main title of our meeting today, “Rebuilding Democratic Consensus, at Home and Abroad”. And we are proud of having this year the 13th annual edition of the Ralf Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture – which will be delivered by our great friend Timothy Garton Ash, who was himself a close friend and colleague of Ralf Dahrendorf.

Dahrendorf always emphasised the distinction between what he called “constitutional politics” and “normal politics” and the crucial importance of this distinction for the survival of liberal democracy. Because in liberal democracies people accept the general rules of constitutional politics, they are able therefore to disagree and compete about different political proposals and different political parties. This simply means, to put it bluntly, that in a civilised liberal democracy we all must be prepared to know how to win, as well as how to lose – especially how to lose an election.

This brings me back to another great teacher of mine, the Austrian-born British citizen, Sir Karl Popper – who was himself a teacher of Dahrendorf at the LSE – and who literally ordered me to study in Britain, when we first met in Lisbon, back in 1987. Sir Karl then told me emphatically that I must – not only should – study in Britain. Only by studying and living in Britain could I try to discover what he called “The British Mystery” – the combination of a deep love of liberty and a deep sense of personal duty. Sir Karl then described this liberal-democratic British mystery as the mystery of gentlemanship: someone who does not take oneself too seriously, but who is prepared to take one’s duties very seriously – especially when most are talking only about their rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, and to make a long story short, **Ideas Matter**. And the **Idea of a University** matters above all. Please allow me to conclude therefore with a brief quotation from John Henry Cardinal Newman in his classical work *The Idea of a University*, which we always quote in the presentations of our Institute for Political Studies of the Catholic University of Portugal:

“A University is a place where inquiry is pushed forward and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.” (1854)

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Thank you very much for your attention. And please enjoy our 31st edition of the International Meeting in Political Studies – the Estoril Political Forum – where, last but certainly not least, we will also be celebrating the 650th anniversary of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, the oldest alliance in the world still in force – We will be delighted to have this celebration under the inspiring patronage of Sir Winston Churchill.

Thank you.