

ESTORIL POLITICAL FORUM 2023
Rebuilding Democratic Consensus at Home and Abroad

Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture
Prof. Timothy Garton Ash: «Europe Whole and Free»
27.June.2023

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I would like to start by thanking the Institute for Political Studies the kind invitation to be one of the discussants of the «Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture», and to greet the distinguished members of this panel, all students and public. Allow me, please, to single out my deep honour to comment the lecture presented by Prof. Timothy Garton Ash, one of the most outstanding academic historians and public intellectuals of our time – whose insightful lessons I first encountered in 1991, as an undergraduate History student, when I read his book *The Magic Lantern*, on the Eastern European revolutions. Three decades have gone by: and the roller-coaster of successes and failures of our recent past, challenging our present, is masterfully explored in Prof. Garton Ash's new book, *Homelands. A Personal History of Europe*, a flying-off-the-shelves best seller, already available in Portuguese edition. As the lecture we have just heard – entitled «Europe Whole and Free» – largely stems from the book, my discussant statement will focus both.

1.

Homelands. A Personal History of Europe is a wonderful book, blending a full account of European evolution since 1945 with autobiographical memoirs and micro-stories experienced by ordinary people and decision-makers in pivotal moments and places. The narrative runs through five chronological frescos of Europe over nearly eighty years: 'Destroyed', 'Divided', 'Rising', 'Triumphing' and 'Faltering', plus a cinematographic 'Epilogue' set on Normandy. In close dialogue with Tony Judt's work, these divisions cover both post-war Europe (1945 to 1989), and post-Wall Europe (1989 to the present – although 2022 may be already entailing a dramatic 'back': back to war, in a

Europe and a world also experiencing a back to walls). This broad account is given a heartfelt human touch by the personal recollections amassed over the years by Prof. Garton Ash, in his capacity to relate to, learn with, and advise anonymous and powerful people. Therein lies the uniqueness of the book: it reads as a factual *Bildungsroman* of a passionate liberal internationalist who has devoted his entire life to the study and the promotion of Europe, freedom, and peace, both observing and acting upon European change.

Homelands speaks of the wonders and difficulties of being European – as Europe is a beautiful part of the world where one can feel at home abroad (hence the title, meaning that European liberal lands are *homelands* for us all); but a threatened one, because wars and destruction are recurrent patterns laying beneath the continent's surface. The book recalls the 'memory engine' that weaves the story of generations: the 14ers, the 39ers, the 68ers, and the 89ers, even allowing the reader to imagine a future generation of 08ers, the cohort of young adults who came of age in the wake of the capitalist crisis, or of 22ers, the youngsters who will have to reason the *Zeitenwende* of Putin's warmongering. Furthermore, it is permeated with first-hand accounts of Prof. Garton Ash's rendezvous or dialogues with key figures such as Lech Walesa, Helmut Schmidt, Erich Honecker, Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev, Pope John Paul II, the two George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Tusk, Javier Solana, or Durão Barroso, and with his two dear mentors and friends, Václav Havel, and Lord Ralf Dahrendorf. All this runs alongside vivid portraits of Prof. Garton Ash being in the right place, at the right time: in Gdansk, in 1980, witnessing the birth of the Solidarity; in Warsaw, Berlin or Prague, in 1989, witnessing the first Polish semi-free elections, the fall of the Wall and the Velvet Revolution; in the killing fields of former Yugoslavia, in 1995, witnessing the genocide of the Balkans at the gates of a happy Maastricht Europe; in Kiev, in 2004, witnessing the Orange Revolution; or in Davos, in 2009, witnessing the spectacle of the world powerful gathered there.

The book presents a critically adamant defence of a continent that rose from the ashes of 1945's 'zero hour' to become more than just a geographical notion, or a 'Euro-mess' of conflicting nationalities. The cradle of Western

civilization resurrected and came to embrace a post-communist Eastern counterpart, creating a space-place-belonging synthesis of diversity and unity – a complex entity that Prof. Garton Ash refers to as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an ‘all-embracing work of art’, or a *kaleidotapestry*, that is, a ‘kaleidoscope’ and a ‘tapestry’ of peoples, times, histories, ambitions and deeds, coming together, for all its flaws, as a successful world case-study.

The last chapter of *Homelands* contains the teaser, or the abstract, for the lecture we’ve just heard, and a shrewd advice on the intellectual attitude with which all of us should cope with the present and the immediate future. The teaser offers solace: ‘From Helsinki to Athens, and Tallinn to Lisbon, you’ll find yourself in the largest area of relative freedom, prosperity and security achieved in European history. This is not yet Europe ‘whole and free’, but it’s closer to that goal than our continent has ever come before’. Yes, the upward turn of freedom and progress that gained momentum in the 1980s was replaced by a downward curve from the end of the 2000s on, through a ‘polycrisis’ fed by the EU constitutional sluggishness, the global capitalist crash, the eurozone bailouts, Russia’s seizure of Crimea, illiberal populisms, Britain’s Brexit, Donald Trump, the Covid pandemic, and Putin’s all-out war on Ukraine. Despite all this, since it stood and stands for freedom, progress and peace, Europe is a cause – and that is the key message we’ve just received – ‘worthy of hope’, if the difficulties of the present are met, and the near future imagined, with ‘pessimism of the intellect’ and ‘optimism of the will’, anticipating the worst and working for the best.

2.

Present-day Europe offers more freedom and well-being than in the 1970s (when the Iron Curtain still existed, and Portugal, Spain and Greece were exiting their dictatorships), in 1945, or even before, in Stefan Zweig’s idealized ‘*Belle Époque*’. However, as the lecture conveyed, the ambition of a Europe ‘whole and free’ has seen recent setbacks. I’ll go now to the second part of my statement, laying some questions about Prof. Garton Ash’s presentation and his enriching descriptions and prescriptions.

Restoration of international peace and security depends on Ukraine winning the war. But given the military stalemates on the ground, the economic uncertainties in Europe and the question as to where the United States are heading after 2024, how can we avoid war weariness sowing the temptation, among voters in Western democracies, of sacrificing Ukraine, or parts of it, just to end the war?

Then there is the irony so rightly pointed out. To match enemy empires – Russia, in the near borders, or China, in the global arena – Europe should gain itself some characteristics of an empire, a liberal one, with reinforced supranational capacity to operate. This implying either a ‘germanization’ of Europe or a strengthening of Brussels through ‘an ever-closer union’ that may run against the EU national diversity, how can we guarantee the ‘wholeness’ without pushing the pendulum to a forced unity? And – perhaps striking an emotional chord – how can a post-Brexit United Kingdom remain a collaborative ally of EU in the cause of ‘whole and free’ Europe?

Now considering Hungary (if not Poland). How can Europe whole and free relate to states inside EU who have been eroding democracy to the point of creating illiberal regimes which, by now, are just competitive authoritarianisms? What message do near-dictatorships being part of a ‘free’ Europe send to European electorates and the outer world?

An important part of the lecture dealt with geography, in a 21st century world, with eight billion inhabitants. Geographically speaking, as correctly highlighted, Europe does not end to the East and South, it merely fades away. We perceive some contradictory signs – on the one hand, an anti-Russian urge for a 2nd Eastern enlargement, comprising Ukraine, the West Balkans, perhaps Georgia and Moldova; on the other hand, a closure of Europe to the migrations coming from war-torn or poverty-afflicted regions (hence the refugee crisis, the Mediterranean graveyards or the Ceuta new wall). How can we foresee the development of this tension between enlargement and containment?

A free Europe being a beacon – if not *the* beacon – of a free world has been a key idea of our continent’s narrative over decades. It seemed an achievable goal up to twenty years ago, and that over-confidence, turning into

the hubristic historiosophical mistake mentioned, was the cause of so many problems. But isn't there in any internationalistic liberal project (which we're called to defend), another hint of hubris, that others may reject? Rather said: how universal can Euro-Atlantic Western values be, or what kind of practical compromises will we have to establish with, say, China, India, Turkey, or Brazil – lest we want to be left alone inside a fortified isolation?

Prof. Garton Ash showed us that the upwards and downwards of History had different elements, even if their etiologies became mutually reinforcing. Still, faltering is not falling, and we should hope that post-Wall Europe current setbacks will not undermine the structuring legacies of post-war (that is, the EU, the UN, the Western Atlantic ties, or the very notion of free progress). So, on a broad view of our global present (remembering the utility of Koselleck's historically informed guess working), where are we, Europeans, now: still descending towards further signs of barbarism in war, populism in politics and splintering of the international order, or already on the come-back to an ascending path? Should we re-read Stefan Zweig or Václav Havel? And if the latter must be our guide, for a much needed 'perestroika of liberalism', what is, where is it, and who holds our present day 'magic lantern', the light, the inspiration to re-create a Europe 'whole and free'?

3.

I will close with a very short note. All my considerations and questions come from a post-89er historian (that's me), who has learned a lot with the extensive work of one of the best post-68er historians (that's Prof. Garton Ash). They stem from a desire to understand where we evolved from, where we are, and where we can go to from here; and that is what binds here a huge scholar, his readers, and our public. Thank you so much for your book, lecture, and teachings – and thank you all for your kind attention.