

# **The Ralf Dahrendorf Memorial Panel: Liberal Democracy, The Euro-Atlantic Alliance of Values and the 640th Anniversary of the Windsor Treaty**

(Estoril Political Forum, 2026)

Introduction  
Joao Carlos Espada

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Welcome to our traditional and most distinguished Ralf Dahrendorf Memorial Panel at the Estoril Political Forum.

This year not only are we keeping the traditional wide range of topics related to Liberal Democracy, The Vital Centre and the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, as we are also including a reference to the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance founded by the Windsor Treaty in 1386 — yes, I repeat, 1386 — yes, indeed, 640 years ago.

In other words, “just the other day”, as King Charles mentioned in Washington, DC, a couple of weeks ago, in the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Declaration Of Independence — which we, of course, are also proudly celebrating at this Estoril Political Forum.

And indeed yes, we are also proudly celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the American Declaration, having had as our keynote speaker at the Open Session yesterday our distinguished friend Marc F. Plattner — the Founding Editor of the American and International *Journal of Democracy*, one of the founders of the American bi-partisan **National Endowment for Democracy** — launched in the good old days of President Ronald Reagan, and also a sort of Founding Father of our own IEP — where Marc still gives us the privilege and pleasure of remaining Co-Chair of our International Advisory Board.

I am sure that Lord Dahrendorf would have enjoyed this broad reference to Liberal Democracy, the Vital Centre and the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, as well as to the American Declaration of Independence, the Windsor Treaty and the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance — the oldest alliance in the world, still standing today, which, by the way, was quoted by Winston Churchill in his famous

speech in Fulton, Missouri, in the presence of President Truman, in 1946, when he famously denounced the Communist “Iron Curtain” and appealed to a defensive Euro-Atlantic Alliance of Liberal Democracies — of which, he said, the Windsor Treaty had been an outstanding and successful example of a defensive alliance.

Coming back to Ralf Dahrendorf, he was, above all, a distinguished scholar and public intellectual committed to the cause of the Open Society against its enemies — a cause that has been based on and has gradually evolved on the truly old tradition of a pluralistic conversation between Athens, Rome and Jerusalem.

This cause of the Open Society against its enemies was outstandingly recalled in the 1940s against totalitarian Nazism and totalitarian Communism by Sir Karl Popper — a teacher of Dahrendorf, and also a great admirer of Winston Churchill.

Sir Karl Popper, by the way, as well as Sir and later Lord Dahrendorf, were not born in Britain. Sir Karl was born in Austria and went into exile, during World War II, into New Zealand — then, as now, part of the British Commonwealth, if I am allowed to recall — where he wrote the outstanding book *The Open Society and its Enemies*. After the war, Karl Popper was invited to teach at the London School of Economics (the famous LSE).

The German born Ralf Dahrendorf was his PhD student there and later became the Rector of the LSE (1975-1985) — not being yet at that point a British citizen, as he was always been very keen to recall, as an emphatic expression of the British Open Society.

Ralf Dahrendorf, by the way, had a very personal knowledge of what a non-open society can be: he was arrested when he was 15-year old by the Nazi regime in Germany; his father was also arrested by the Nazi regime, and then again by the Communist regime in East Germany after the war — just because, as a leader of the German Social Democratic Party, he refused the fusion of his party with the Communist Party in East Germany.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I must confess that I could certainly go on and on recalling Karl Popper and Ralf Dahrendorf. My intellectual and personal debts to both of them are immense — Popper having been my Referee in my application to Oxford in 1989, and Dahrendorf having been my D.Phil supervisor at St. Antony’s College, in Oxford (1990-1994), where he was then the Warden (1987-1997).

They both came to Portugal several times, both at the invitation of former President of the Republic Mr. Mario Soares — whom they both admired as a defender of the Open Society in Portugal against its enemies, in the far-right and the far-left.

It is therefore my great privilege and pleasure to host at this Dahrendorf Memorial Panel today a very distinguished set of speakers emphatically committed to the pluralistic ideal of the Open Society and of Liberal Democracy.

It is for me a special privilege and pleasure to have as our Chair Professor Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins — former member of the Board of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, former Minister of Education and of Finance, and above all, if I may say, a distinguished speaker at every Estoril Political Forum since its very beginning — actually in Arrabida, back in 1993, much before Estoril. Well, “just the other day”, actually, as we have learnt recently with King Charles.

I will introduce the Speakers and the Discussant in due course, as they are all classical Friends of ours and of the Estoril Political Forum. It is now my great pleasure and privilege to give the floor to our Chairman, Professor Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins.