



Doutoramento Honoris Causa

Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

25th March 2015

I stand here in front of you with mixed feelings, with humbleness and pride, extremely moved. Please forgive me if today, as in the past, I become emotional. I have been passionate in all my deeds, from school to the workplace, from the fora of international conferences to the ravines of Afghanistan and Angola, from government offices to the streets of Kiev. And I am elated to be at university again, this time to receive an honorary degree.

I have spoken at universities both as minister and speaker but it feels different to come to receive an honorary degree and to become a part of your academic community. Universidade Nova is among the world's top universities under 50, the quality of its education and research recognized in Portugal and internationally.

I stand here in front of you in the knowledge that my recent predecessor as the recipient of this honour was Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian intellectual and Nobel Prize Winner in Literature. He, too, is passionate about life. He, too, has frequently been emotional.

Although I have never met him in person, there is something we have in common. We have both been passionate about democracy, about civil liberties,



freedom and justice. In his novel "The Feast of the Goat" he described the way human commitment to freedoms and passion for life erode even the strongest dictatorships, such as the Trujillo government in the Dominican Republic. In his most recent book, "The Discrete Hero," just published, he describes how an individual can defy the reign of a powerful mafia. Llosa is an optimist, as passionate as I am. He is also an important public intellectual, who does not fear to speak his mind. I feel that this is also an affinity that we share. When you try to see beyond the concerns of current politics, you sometimes overreach but its better than never saying anything interesting.

Llosa, unlike some other great Latin American writers has not been enchanted with leftists ideologies. He stayed cool and balanced despite the fads of his time. You chose to recognize his life's accomplishments. The senate of Nova obviously appreciates that a public intellectual's courage is a precious commodity.

So here I am, a modest bachelor of arts, still grateful to my alma mater, Oxford University, to have acquainted me with the tradition of both British conservatism and British Enlightenment which have inspired me ever since. I hope to be as balanced as Mario Vargas Llosa.

So, what lessons can we draw from the British philosophical tradition today?



One of my intellectual heroes was Edmund Burke, who, in the memorable year of 1791, wrote: "Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites ...in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption, - in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference of the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without" (*Letter to a Member of a National Assembly*, 1791). I know of no more eloquent and no more balanced way to say that the need of self-restraint is a prerequisite of benevolent human organization.

In another place Burke says: "Neither the few nor the many have a right to act merely by their will, in any matter connected with their duty, trust, engagement, or obligation" (*Appeal from the New Whigs to the Old*, 1791). How true this is today in the Europe of diversity, in a consensual interdependence of European peoples, at a time of rising populisms of both the left and the right. We have created the European Union to escape our continent's 20th century wars and divisions. We now need it to restore our optimism about the future. Our destiny is vested in interdependence and neither small nor big actors on the international scene may escape responsibility towards each other. We all have this collective responsibility that democracy in Europe has bestowed upon us.

I am glad that here, in Portugal, a country which has undertaken an immense



effort to meet its obligations and to live up to the expectations of its people, pan-European solidarity is seen as the best option. Twice in the past 40 years you have implemented adjustment measures to mend your economy and reinvigorate your society. In Poland we have followed your undertakings with interest and admiration. We have also followed your path from authoritarianism to democracy and from collectivism to the free market. Today, Poland and Portugal have much in common; they are both politically free and with growing economies. And both our economies are benefitting from trade and cross investment. Suffice it to say that my bank in Poland is the Millennium bank, and I buy my port at Jeronimo Martins Biedronka chain, the second-largest employer in Poland.

My British education also acquainted me with the thought of Sir Karl Popper. I never met him, although I believe there are some of his students in this room. Sir Karl's intellectual response to the totalitarian regimes prevalent in his time (his two main works were written in 1944 and 1945, respectively) are again relevant today. In particular, "*The Open Society and Its Enemies*" seems particularly apt given how many enemies our open societies now face. Popper taught us a rationalist attitude. "A rationalist - he says - is simply someone for whom it is more important to learn, than to be proved right; someone who is willing to learn from others - not by simply taking another's opinion, but by gladly allowing others to criticise his ideas and by gladly criticizing the ideas of others" (*On Freedom, in All Life is Problem Solving*, 1999).



Personally, I have always enjoyed a lively debate. I tried to learn from the wise and the good, have criticised and been criticised. Often deservedly, which I sometimes even enjoy.

Popper also said something even more acutely true today than in his days. Popper called it the tolerance paradox: "Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them" (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1946, note to chapter 7). Our Europe faces this dire paradox in both its neighbourhoods. We feel it when we look South, and we feel it when we look East.

Please note that I do not say: "you feel it when you look South, and we feel it when we look East". Both you and us are confronted with the same challenge because, as Europeans, we are all us. As we tragically learned in the last few days, Polish tourists, along with others, can be viciously murdered by terrorists in Tunis; you can also be shot for daring to draw a satirical cartoon or be beheaded by the sea for being a Christian. Thugs can poison you with a radioactive concoction in London. Or you can be shot walking along a river in Moscow, presumably because of insufficient enthusiasm for a war.

As Europe, we are the largest and richest area of freedom, democracy and

human rights on the globe today and indeed, in history. Through our tragic experience we have learned to cooperate, to compromise, to engage in democratic give and take not only at the national level but also within our multinational family. What unites and distinguishes us is our commitment to voluntarily agreed rules. Rules in government, business and social life. We believe that governments are here to serve us, to create legal spaces for our individual strivings for happiness, rather than collectively take us to a delusional utopia.

Until recently, it looked like the success of the West in facing off both Fascism and Communism, made our model attractive for others to emulate. We were pleased and proud at the turn of the last century that the greatest-ever proportion of humanity came to live in democracies. As Europe, we extended the hand of friendship to those in our neighbourhoods who wanted to join the world of rules. In the South, the European Union proposed the Union for the Mediterranean to accelerate the movement of goods, capital and labour between us and those on the northern shores of Africa who wanted to develop faster. In the East, we devised the Eastern Partnership as a way to assist the modernization of post-Soviet states and perhaps welcome some of them within our Western family. That offer – of ever closer association for those who are willing to share our rules – still stands. But we cannot be blind to the fact that our pacific invitation is misinterpreted, ill-received, or rejected by those who fear tolerance and rules as a way of life. Both state and non-state actors in Europe's



immediate neighbourhood openly declare contempt for the alleged blandness of our values. They declare war on our world in word and deed, in broadcasts, on social media, by acts of terror and by invasion. Instead of prosperity they offer followers messianic heroics. They interpret our humanistic virtues as weakness, and their own propensity for violence as strenght.

They are wrong. Yes, it's true that as democracies we are slow to respond or to mobilize. Yes, it's true that you can mislead, cheat, or bamboozle us or for a while. Yes, it's true that for us violence is the last, not the first resort. But they underestimate our determination once we have decided we have no credible partner for dialogue. They underrate the capacity of our free societies in defending our way of life once we have been roused.

The solution to Popper's tolerance paradox is to demonstrate to our enemies that our tolerant societies have the will and capacity to defend themselves. We need to show, as nations, as Europe and as the West, that neither terrorism nor international bullying will pass. That freedom is the possibility of constant renewal and therefore offers a model of society that will ultimately prevail. This is the supreme challenge that we all face.

Thank you for attention.