

La Toja Declaration

The La Toja Forum - Atlantic Link was born as a space to reflect on and defend the values that define our democratic societies; values we identify with representative democracy and open societies based on the individual freedom, equality, and dignity of people. In short, with liberal democracies that believe in the division of powers and the balance between them, in the independence of justice, in political pluralism, in freedom of speech, in respect for minorities, and in the necessary guarantees to avoid the arbitrariness of public authorities over society and its members. These values are reflected in the field of economics, in the social market economy based on free private enterprise, and internationally they correspond to a multilateral cooperative order for the provision of global public goods, from free trade to the environment and, of course, peace, with regard to international law and human rights.

For decades, these principles have promoted the global development of freedom, prosperity, and peace, thus improving the lives of millions of people around the world. However, today they face extremely ambitious challenges to which they must respond.

The new geopolitical and strategic scene differs greatly to that of the second half of the twentieth century; it is plain to see that Western hegemony under the leadership of a single superpower is being questioned. China aspires to replace the United States as the world's great global power, and the tension between these two giants has provided an opportunity for other players such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey to play a much more important role on the international stage. We are a long way from the "end of history" scenario predicted some years ago by those who certified a clear Western victory in the Cold War. Rather, what seems to be unfolding before us is a scenario of European and even Western decline and, consequently, a decline in the strength and appeal of their values for the whole international community of nations.

Simultaneously, we find ourselves in a deeply disruptive technological revolution, which we have agreed to call “digitalisation”. This change is full of unimaginable opportunities, but it also involves very demanding challenges. Besides technological supremacy among superpowers, what is at stake is that digital development, with its infinite possibilities, remains at the service of the people, their freedom, and dignity, and not the other way round. That is the challenge facing new humanism today: that technology does not become a means to control and dominate society by authorities - whether public or private - of an undemocratic nature.

Similarly, we must make an effort to minimise the damage that this new technological revolution, together with other phenomena such as globalisation, may cause among broad sections of the population. Unequal distribution of wealth, high public debt and the resulting cracks in intergenerational solidarity, impoverishment of the middle classes, and loss of social mobility elements require us to rethink and renew the social contract that ensured the cohesion of our Western societies from the end of the Second World War to the present day.

This is also compounded by the threat posed by the proliferation of populist and nationalist groups and leaders within the very same democratic societies that feed off all these uncertainties to call into question democratic principles and values which, until now, were firmly established. Liberal democracy and its principles are being questioned by those appealing to nationalism in the face of globalisation, xenophobia in the face of migration issues, populism in the face of institutions, and identity as the only argument for political debate.

In the first La Toja Forum - Atlantic Link, we discussed the future of liberal democracies, the migration phenomenon at a global level, the definition of the Atlantic space itself, the social unrest that has fed populism, the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and data management, the commitment to sustainability, and the future of work; debates that served to strengthen our convictions and our Western and European values, as well as the absolute need to defend them.

We concluded that the concept of “the West” rests on the Atlantic Triangle. That is to say, not only the traditional Anglo-Saxon link between Europe, the United Kingdom and North America, or the Ibero-American link from Portugal and Spain, but we must cross them, incorporating Africa, to understand that the Atlantic area is built from the respective continents, as a complex and indissoluble whole based on three enduring and necessarily balanced concepts: democracy, market economy, and social justice.

We also felt that, in the case of Spain, these values were best reflected in the 1978 Constitution, on which the greatest period of democracy, progress, and wellbeing in our recent history was based. We advocated respect for our strong democratic institutions and especially for the constitutional monarchy, which is embodied today by Felipe VI, the best guarantee for the continuity of our democracy. We upheld the consensus that made it possible at a very difficult time in our history, and which must continue to guide us at this juncture, in order to meet the challenges facing our country: from education and the overlap with digitalisation, to foreign policy, macroeconomic rigour and attention to the interests of society as a whole, defending the market economy based on private enterprise and, of course, our territorial model, as well as defending representative liberal democracy.

The success of the first La Toja Forum has strengthened our conviction about the need to continue discussing the Atlantic link from here, from Spain, and doing so unreservedly as a whole. Spain cannot remain self-absorbed and detached from major global debates. We must take on the leading role as much as possible; only by doing so will we find our place in a world that is tilting towards the Pacific and Indian Oceans. We have the objective conditions to do so and the La Toja Forum wants to contribute to this by collaborating with organisations that share the same objectives as us.

We have made a good start, but we cannot stop there, and we must persevere in our efforts. That is what we shall do, because, ultimately, we are talking about freedom. That magic word which, over the centuries, has inspired the plans, desires, and hopes of so many human beings, and the ideal which today unites both sides of the Atlantic, in both the north and the south.