

EUROTOPIA

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE

The long journey from Florence 2002 to Athens 2006



What you have in your hands is the 3rd issue of Eurotopia, a publication born out of the New Social Movements—that's why it looks like them. We don't have headquarters, directors or a national office. We live in the space of the Social Forum, we breathe the air of multiple languages, we feed on global internationalism. We get excited by the "CPE" victory in France, we wish the best for the Italian Left, we admire the efforts of our friends in Russia, we try to make visible the movement in the UK, we ask questions about the unity process in Germany.

Eurotopia is both process and an event. It's a process of bringing together magazines and papers for a debate between these ESFs, to exchange information and opinions, to map Europe as a battleground of the Movement. We want to prove that European horizontal cooperation can take place even if we speak different languages, live thousands of kilometers from each other and have different political priorities.

We are now at a crucial moment, both for Eurotopia and European social

movements. The challenges ahead are enormous and exciting. We all need to grow stronger, expand and find ways to reach a wider audience—particularly among those who up until now have been absent, like most of Eastern Europe. Our idea with this 3rd issue is to reflect on our trajectory so far and the possible futures of our movements.

Our efforts respond to reality and we are delighted to see that this Athens ESF is a huge success for the European movement. A real open, accessible, democratic, colourful and radical one. A Social Forum that provides new hope and possibilities.

So like the movement we will pass these four days listening, discussing, organising, dancing, drinking and demonstrating. We are happy to be here and intend to stay!

We hope you find this issue interesting and informative, and we urge you to send us any comments and suggestions you may have—and to get involved!

See you on the streets.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ACROSS EUROPE: WE?

Four and a half years on from the first European Social Forum, it is a useful moment for us all to reflect. Over 30 activists from across Europe have responded to a survey aimed to stimulate such shared thinking on questions concerning building an 'us': key moments, networks, main impacts, failures, innovations, recurrent problems and challenges for the ESF. This article is just a rough beginning. It remains open for you to develop it further at the Eurotopia website:

(www.eurotopiamag.org). It is also a pilot experiment in applying the ESF open space philosophy to the collective construction of an E-yearbook on social movements in Europe (www.euromovements.info/yearbook).



'WE' ON THE EUROPEAN SCALE?

'The "we" should not be taken for granted' warned an activist researcher from Athens. But there is significant agreement about a 'we', understood as diverse movements, struggles, networks and political tendencies building common campaigns and opening new public space for discussion across Europe, as part of a struggle for another world. A conflictual 'we' and a multiple 'we' (see the website for a fuller elaboration of these ideas).

Many responses stressed this diversity of the 'we'. Some described the diversity of political tendencies, others of strategic vision. A particular divergence of emphasis was over the relationship between 'the European' and other local, national, regional and global dimensions. Some stressed the need to create a European common ground and denounced too much focus on national or local levels while others argued for the need to create concrete connections with daily struggles at the local level. Further responses from Barcelona viewed a European 'we' as a transit for a global 'we' - reminding us that the ESF was a response to a global call at the World Social Forum.

others - with a lot of agreement over Genoa 2001 and Florence 2002 - a pattern emerges from these lists. First, there is the period between the end of 1980 and November 1999 which, looking back, was a period of build-up, when campaigns exposing the anti-democratic role of multilateral organisations from the World Bank through to the WTO, and including the EU, begin to appear. Counter-summits, the first in Berlin in 1988 and in Amsterdam in April 1997 were mentioned. The latter stimulated the first networking processes at the European level, most notably the European marches against unemployment and precarity. International networking with global objectives grew rapidly and ambitiously in the 1990s with the emergence of ATTAC, People Global Action and Via Campesina.

It was with the mobilisation against the WTO in Seattle in November 1999 that this emerging global movement finally broke into the headlines and became public. In Europe as elsewhere, there was an extraordinary burst of transnational activism and enthusiasm in the following three years. Symbolic and catalytic of this was the speed with which Indymedias and other transnational networks took shape.

2002 saw the opening of a new phase with the first ESF in Florence, followed by Paris 2003 and London 2004. These facilitated a process of European mobilisation and also moved the emphasis on to developing positive proposals and alternatives. Florence, it seems has a special place in the collective memory because of the number of people who attended, the call for an international mobilisation against the war on February 15th and also because of the way it thwarted Berlusconi's attempt to whip up fear and hostility. Florence also saw the launch of Babels the network of voluntary translators (see page 6). The defeat of the Aznar government in Spain in 2004 was the first sign of national repercussions to internationally inspired mobilisations, the fall of Berlusconi in Italy was the latest. 'We are now in a new phase when movements based in particular territories see global transformation as starting from transformation of where they are'. Similar thinking is shared by two leading activists in the more militant sections of the Italian trade union movement, FIOM and Cobas, who see the campaign against Berlusconi's 'gran opera' (great works) such as the high speed train in the Sussa Valley (see page 6) and the campaign of French young people against precarious contracts as signs, in the words of one of the union activists, 'that the global justice movement is putting down roots.' A regular ESF participant from Moscow referred to what he hoped would mark a

key moment in the future, opening a new phase to the East: a G8 contra-summit meeting planned for in St. Petersburg in July 2006.

WHAT PAN-EUROPEAN NETWORKS AND GROUPINGS HAVE BEEN BUILT?

Whatever else it has or hasn't achieved the ESF has been, as one response put it: 'a space for the interaction of networks in a process of continuous redefinition.' There has been little, if any building of more permanent structures, like the ATTAC model. Autonomy and collaboration are the keywords of these fluid new 'structures.' One result is that, as a respondent from Paris observed: it is common for 'individuals to participate in several groups and the same is true now for organisations that belong to different and several networks at the same time'. Responses highlighted the following networks but there are hundreds more: the 'No US Bases' network which started in Paris in 2003 and now involves antiwar activists all over the globe; the Education Network which co-ordinates activists in teaching unions across Europe but as yet has no consistent student presence; the Health Network whose union participation is not strong but has greater participation of citizens' associations and local communities; the Euromayday coordination of marches against precarity meets at the ESF through the autonomous spaces that have grown up with 'one foot in and one foot out'; the Charter of Principles for Another Europe (see page 6); the European Local Social Forums network; European coordination for Palestine; the Pan-European network on housing rights, and the Red Frassanito against Borders in Europe; the ESF Memory project and the Euromovements network around the systematisation of the knowledge, that has emerged partly out of a decision of the European Preparatory Assembly (see page 6).

The relation of feminist organisations to the Forum is important and uneasy. One of the organisers of the Women's Assembly in Athens reports that 'women's networking has been strengthened to a great extent by the social forum, on the other hand many women are wary of the social forum because of a certain male domination. The World March of Women is a very broad network. Its priorities are violence against women; unemployment, precarity at work and poverty'. The list keeps growing - and changing.

WHAT IMPACT HAVE WE HAD?

People are cautious of claiming impacts too soon and the general feeling is that, anyway, it is not enough! The most visible impact, most people

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would agree, has been to undermine the legitimacy of the institutions of the much vaunted 'new world order', to open up a public debate and compel world leaders to hide behind high walls or in inaccessible places. 'Before the birth of this movement, neo-liberalism was opposed only to nationalism and protectionism, now the debate is on which kind of globalisation we want (neo-liberal vs. social and democratic globalisation).' 'Capitalism has lost its inevitability'. New ideas for alternatives are on the agenda too; the cross fertilisation of experiences and ideas has led to 'the widening of the range of democratic tools for managing the common good and public decisions.' There have also been important impacts as far as defeating or weakening neo-liberal measures within the institutions. The success of the 'European no' in France is the most notable. The weakening of the Bolkenstein Directive was another example, even though the objective was its abolition. The preventing

of European Commission from introducing patents and regulating software has been a strategic though not so well known achievement. On Iraq we did not stop the war but 'we have punched big holes in the US's ability to find allies' declared one response from a community activist in Dublin, 'and we have probably made the announced goal of an indefinitely long "war on terror" going after one "rogue state" after another, untenable.' Other national repercussions, in Spain, France and Italy especially, of the new 'organic internationalism' have already been mentioned. Finally, several responses stressed the importance of the impact of the movements and networks on everyday life, producing a pervasive challenge to the model of constant consumption and sustaining ways of life like cultural 'home production'.

WHERE/HOW HAVE WE FAILED?

Some people found the word failure inappropriate, either because: 'movements aim to move, and we are still in movement' or because the achievement of very specific goals is too narrow a basis for assessing success or failure. Others had no hesitation in using the F word: a response from Moscow is stark: 'We have failed. We are outsiders. Unless you break into the system of mainstream politics or/and destroy it altogether strategic change is not possible.'

Others referred to failings which have become clearer as we look back: 'We failed in understanding the meaning of "war for civilisation" from inside, that is: we were fighting against Bush's administration and the war - which is



WHAT WERE THE KEY MOMENTS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS A 'WE'?

One response offered a useful criterion for a key moment 'as one which succeeded in putting a changing movement into a relationship with movements elsewhere and starting a chain reaction'. Although everyone emphasised some moments more than

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AVGI, EPOHI, NICOS, POULANTZAS INSTITUTE (GREECE); CARTA (ITALY); FERAL TRIBUNE (CROATIA); IPROG (RUSSIA); MLADINA (SLOVENIA); MO (BELGIUM); POLITICS (FRANCE); RED PEPPER (UK); TRANSFORM! (ITALIA); TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTE

WHO ARE WE?

right – but we weren't able to fight with the Iraqi people or really act with the Palestinian civil society.

A response from Florence made a general point about the conditions for failure: 'We have failed every time we don't manage to put forward a positive proposal to match the ones we oppose.' But all of 'this is a long process which will depend on our future activities.'

WHAT CONTINUING PROBLEMS DO WE FACE?

In the survey, we listed several that had been raised in discussions amongst partners of Eurotopia: 'internal communication, mobility, accessibility – reaching beyond a movement/activist ghetto, language, democracy, inequalities within the movement' Some responses just said 'all of these!', 'plus', a Russian added, 'the lack of resources (not just financial ones) in the East and the lack of understanding in the West.'

Others spelled out the problems. There was considerable agreement about the problem of reaching out, connecting with 'grassroots popular discontent', going beyond 'our people'. A French respondent: 'we failed to understand what was happening in the suburbs'. And several responses mentioned the problem of reproducing inequalities in terms of difficulties in access to our networks for the migrants, the homeless, the unemployed, for example.

Another response was philosophical: 'We are living through a change of paradigm on a big scale. We are in between. Much depends on our ability to project ourselves and ideas with the next generation where the change will be effective and will be done and recognised as such.'

Another problem that recurred in many of the responses is, as a Greek put it: 'fighting among the political organisations and the way they pursue their own interest. Yet without their presence,' she argued, 'the forum could hardly exist'.

A problem raised by Carta, one of Eurotopia's partners, is 'news circulation

[especially to and from Greece or Portugal or Poland] and the lack of a common political culture. Here we lag behind the EU: they have a common project for the continent, we don't, yet. Others concurred with this in different ways: 'we have not achieved a genuine "europeanness"'. An activist in the Greek Network for Political and Social Rights is emphatic: 'my organisation does not claim another Europe is possible. Another world yes. We try not to recognise ourselves as Europeans but as a hybrid. The old that comes from our national struggles and the new that does not use national identities'.

While in this way there is a tension about how we see our transnational identity, there are also problems in the relations between the international and the local.

WHERE HAVE WE INNOVATED TO OVERCOME THESE PROBLEMS?

Many shared the view that 'we have invented different ways to stay and act together, to establish relations, to find solutions by consensus, but still we don't yet have an adequate new language to communicate in a broader way. It is a work in progress but we have to go faster!'

A response from an Argentinean activist and researcher attending several ESFs summarised these ways of working together: 'the global culture of networking, the new ways to have meetings, to talk, to hear others, to translate, to organise horizontally'. He pointed to the 'techni activism (the creative political use of the new information technologies), the incredible velocity and dynamism'. Several responses also emphasised the new ways of combining research and activism, the new techno-political tools for communication, organisation and the systematisation of knowledge, at the same time reconceptualising the place of 'intellectuals'. (see page 6).

Several responses highlighted the development of alternative systems of information to the mainstream media.

HOW HAVE WE, OURSELVES - OUR WAYS OF ORGANISING, OUR CULTURE, OUR AWARENESS, OUR EXPERIENCE AND OUR HORIZONS - CHANGED?

Not everyone felt we had changed: 'There are still the same power struggles between different groups' was one response. Others were more optimistic: 'we are more open, more tolerant and we are much more able to work together than before.' This sentiment is echoed many times. Some related it directly to new ways of organising: 'through networks we've learnt to be together with people who are different. We've learnt to contaminate ourselves, learning from the cultures and practice and vision of the



world of our travelling companions around the world' was one, almost lyrical response. This didn't mean clear agreement on a single way forward. 'We do not have a clear horizon any longer, but there is a lot of agreement that this horizon is to be built on the process of mobilisation'.

An activist in Florence responded: 'After the defeats of 20th century we've come back to a radical perspective critical of capitalism. We've passed from the defensive to the offensive.'

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE POSED FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ESF OR/AND THE CONFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AT EUROPE PROCESS?

'Our basic problem is expanding,' declares a response from Greece, 'expanding to the east of Europe, expanding in terms of social depth so that we are in contact with the most excluded, the most flexible precarious workers and the migrants, which we are not at present. This is the future of the Forum.'

Many would agree with this. A respondent involved in the first ESF draws out lessons for the future: 'We need to find a more 'human rhythm' for the meetings so that the main energies of social movements are not used up in constructing forums in which we discuss

struggle at the expense of carrying out the struggles.

Writers from Carta present a challenge: 'it has to be more daring: dropping the idea of the national state as a useful tool, and start thinking on a truly continental scale. We need to build a stronger continental consciousness, that's one of the purposes of Eurotopia'.

Others stressed internal difficulties which many felt needed to be addressed, including 'resolving the relationship between libertarian approaches and the methods of the organised left which on several occasions have been disastrous. The aim of excluding the other group is not a realistic one, however complex the solutions needed to involve a way of working together or at least in parallel'.

Another response stresses, 'We have still to face the problem of how to a build permanent space of internal communication which works daily and interacts with local and national conflicts; the crucial need is for a clear decision making process which should be open to everybody and inclusive as much as possible'. There is some anxiety about the amount of energy we spend dealing with groups who operate as a block; others are calmly optimistic about underlying democratic capacity of the ESF process: 'After the failure of the attempt during the London ESF by certain groups to control power inside our movement, we have little to fear on the question of democracy.' An illustration of this resilience given by one respondent was the Galaxy of seven spaces around the London ESF,

combining common action with autonomy.

The last word will be from a Greek: 'We have "invented" the European and international conscious and organising process, but in developing common actions the Forum is diverse and each component thinks differently about the necessary actions. This is a hybrid political and social personality of the forum. And there are no easy answers. Certainly it must be based on an alternative globalisation to avoid nostalgic nationalism. And certainly, we need a renewal'. Perhaps Athens will help to achieve such a renewal.

Contribute to this collective article!!! Go to



Eurotopia web site for a fuller version of this article and insert your point of view.



The challenges of creating a critical transnational media

Speakers include: Tariq Ali (New Left Review, Tele Sud) Kostas Karis (Avgi) Makis Balaouras (Epohi) Haris Golemis (Nicos Poulantzas Institute) Perluigi Sullo (Carta) Hilary Wainwright (Red Pepper and Transnational Institute) Alla Glinchakova (IPROG) and speakers from other partners of Eurotopia. Moderator: Gemma Galdon, Transnational Institute.

Thursday, May 4, 14.30-17.30h, F-08

Young people in France have won a victory for precarious workers across Europe, but young people's living standards continue to be under attack. But just as the attacks deepen, the willingness to resist and fight back increases – but not of quite the sort you might expect!

By Gemma Galdon Clavell

On April 10th 2006, French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin reluctantly agreed to scrap the youth labour law, the *Contrat de Première Embauche*, which allowed a two-year trial period for employees aged under 26, during which bosses could end a contract without explanation, after widespread opposition by students, workers and unions prompted strikes across the country.

Just as in 1994, when then Prime Minister Balladour facing a month of street protests by students and unions had to abandon a plan allowing employers to pay young workers below the legal minimum wage, the refusal by young people to be treated as second-class citizens and workers resounded throughout France. The cry was unanimous: 'we are not disposable'. 'I feel I must be here [demonstrating] because I deserve a future and not just a job where I can be sacked at any time. These contracts are no good: they only promote precarity', said Mark (26) during one of the daily marches that took place over nearly three weeks in most French cities. Most of the demonstrators were university students and graduates who find it harder and harder to find jobs that meet their expectations or qualifications: 'I left university almost two years ago and I'm still looking for a decent job. I can probably find work flogging tires or soap, but I haven't studied for four years to do that', says Chaouki (24).

In France, 22% of people under 25 are unemployed – twice the overall rate of unemployment (9.6%). But unemployment is not the biggest threat facing French youth; what really is affecting the lives, expectations and future of young people is insecurity. The French National Institute of Statistics



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under 18 and two thirds of those under 26 enter active life with a precarious contract (short-term, low-pay), and only 45% of these get permanent jobs within three years. Therefore, most graduates who do find work are caught on an endless treadmill of dreary short-term jobs, interspersed with unemployment. Life is even harder in the banlieues, home of the revolts in late 2005, where youth unemployment reaches 50% and the informal economy is dominant.

A similar picture across Europe

The situation is not much different in Spain, Italy and Greece, with youth unemployment rates of 22, 24 and 27%. In Germany, the existence of an apprenticeship system brings this figure down to 15%, which conceals a reality where precarity, unemployment and unfulfilled expectations are also widespread. Eurostat figures show how the share of employees with temporary contracts in the enlarged EU rises every year. Overall, 14.9% of European workers are currently working with on temporary contracts. This average, however, hides deep disparities by age and country, since young people (15 to 24) are much more likely to have a temporary contract (43.2% do), and rates range from the less than 5% in Estonia, Malta and Ireland to the 20% of Poland and the 34.4% of Spain. According to the Spanish union Comisiones Obreras, though, this figure is really over 57%, and will keep growing, since estimates show nine out of every ten contracts young people sign now in Spain are temporary. 'I've even had 2-hour contracts, when I worked in Iberia. Then I got a permanent contract in another company, but they fired me within the 2-month trial period, without warning and no right to claim unemployment benefits' says Maria. 'Nowadays, even permanent contracts are disguised temporary

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contracts. They say they are permanent to motivate you and get State subsidies, but then they fire you

France, the 'Contratti per Progetto' in Italy and the 'Contrats Actives' in Belgium. The flip side of the coin, though, i.e. job security and access to training or career development opportunities, is yet to be addressed.

The result is a dual workforce with first and second-class workers, divided between security 'haves' and security 'have-nots' – mainly young people, immigrants and women, forced to pursue the treadmill of temporary positions and study courses, to accept dual-wage scales, to work in positions for which they are overqualified, to work as so-called 'independent' contractors, forced, at the end of the day, to give up any kind of social protection.

'Young people are the poor of the 21st century', stated Louis Chauvel in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in August 2005 'I am an architect. I speak three languages and I make less than 1,000 euros a month, without a contract, in a private studio. I have never had a contract, nor holidays, nor a bonus; my car is 15 years old and this month I've had to stop buying the paper every day because I can't afford to spend 30 more euros a month. I rent an apartment with my girlfriend and I don't feel cheated – I feel they are throwing us in the bin.' These are the words of Daniel, a 29-year old from Seville.

According to sociologist Enrique Gil Calvo, 'This generation is already realizing that the future is not like it used to be in the old novels, where the main character would start at the bottom and end up at the top, triumphant. The future is not a straight line anymore. That's why they seem to go around in circles, wandering continuously, unable to find a way out.'

The consequences of job insecurity and precarity spread way beyond the world of work to affect social and family models, since the lack of time,

within the trial period.'

Growing insecurity is also the norm in Eastern Europe, where economic liberalisation put an end to the comprehensive system which allocated graduate students to jobs in the centrally planned economy. Here too unemployment is now disproportionately high amongst young people. 'In my parents' time things were much easier, Yugoslavia was a more or less planned economy in which jobs were almost guaranteed, and once you got it, you had it for life' says Aleksej.

Underlying trends

What changes in the European labour market lie behind these statistics and personal experiences? According to the economist Emilio Faenza, the reasons might be found in the '70s and '80s, 'when the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank promoted the liberalisation of work and capital markets, also precipitating a crisis in the welfare state.'

In the last few years, and despite the language used in the official documents (see Lisbon Agreements), the EU has urged all member states to follow the Danish model of 'flex-security'. Thus, in order to promote flexibility, social benefits have been cut back, pensions have been privatised, firing workers has been made easier and cheaper and new forms of temporary employment have been created, like the 'Contrats Nouvelle Embauche' in

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generation?

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According to Isidro, a 33-year old activist from Ecologistas en Acción in Madrid, all this has immersed young people in an identity crisis, to which the system responds by creating a false sense of fulfilment based on consumption. Gabor, from Hungary, agrees: the 'spell of consumption' is depoliticizing young people.

But is that so?

Resistance - open and beneath the surface

Talking to people involved in the French protests and surfing the Net for the feelings and opinions of young people affected by neoliberalism and the low-wage economy, it is striking to see how many people feel the urge to state that they are not 'militants', but 'normal people'. 'I'm a very normal person, not a "leader" of the movement! Not a revolutionary, a curious student, that's all' wrote Jeff, a student from Nantes (France) on an Italian website, to then sum up the French protests as a way to 'take our place in society! We're not conservative, we know we need reforms and we want them! But not

in this way. We only want a job, a flat and be respected by banks! It's not a utopian thing... so it's a very serious movement (...). We don't want to be a product, to be hired and fired each week.'

Distrust for mainstream 'politics' is widespread, as well as a strong need to make oneself heard: 'We are students and later we want to have jobs, but we see that the situation is getting worse in France on all fronts. We have to come here and make ourselves heard. The vote is not enough; they approve laws without even asking us our opinion. It's not right.' (Anne, 21, Paris).

Surprisingly, and despite all the theorising about young people's apathy, materialism and individualism, it seems that disillusionment and distrust is giving way to a new political culture which is based on direct involvement on one-off issue politics. Studies show that interest in politics among young people is not decreasing at all, but that 'the previously used indicators of voting and participation in political parties are no longer adequate as measures of political engagement'. Young people are willing to demonstrate, sign petitions and strike, as well as get loosely involved in new social movements and new political organizations.

Moreover, beneath the individualist surface it is not difficult to find signs that



the way young people relate to politics and the outside world is producing new identities, new kinds of informal solidarity and transnational connection. If you ask a young East European how they 'resist' or avoid persistent unemployment, their answer is very likely to be 'by getting out': 'If you travel 500 km westwards, you receive five times as much for the same amount of work. And if you don't see any chances to be able to build up your life, that's a tempting option', says Gabor, a 25-year old from Hungary. In Romania alone, two million people have left the country to find jobs in the West. 'Many of my friends already work abroad, although it is usually in seasonal jobs in the tourist industry in Italy. Many people think of emigrating and making a normal life. In Croatia it is almost impossible to live on your own, you always depend on your family' says Aleksej.

However, finding work abroad is not only a popular option in Eastern Europe. More and more young people from Southern and

Western Europe leave their country of origin seeking a better future, mostly to go to the UK and the US. The French population of London, for instance, is now estimated to be as high as 200,000; meanwhile, in the last ten years, 36,000 Italians have chosen to settle in New York, according to the [Metro New York emigration office.]

Of course, this is different from the organized militancy of hundreds and thousands of French students who demonstrated daily against the proposed Contrat de première embauche, but young people are clearly voting with their feet in their search for a future

We can thus see how individualism and consumerism don't necessarily mean political apathy, but they do seem to change the ways people engage with political issues. Young people seem to feel more comfortable expressing their political points of view individually and through their individual choices, be it on the Internet and through blogs where the personal and the political go hand in hand, or painting a wall and leaving a highly personalized political statement or through making political choices in the act of consumption (via boycotts, for instance). A good example is the 'Generazione 1.000 Euro' blog, that tells the story of 27-year-old Claudio, who struggles to achieve an enjoyable lifestyle on a very limited budget. It has been so popular that it has become a meeting point for a whole generation struggling to survive on less than 1,000 euros a month.

Therefore, it looks as though instead of merging their identity in a theory or political party, young people use social and political involvement to express their identities - thus the high level of creativity and play found in the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements, for instance.

The picture that emerges is that of a system that excludes large sections of the population, and especially young people, from a conventional way of life, and thus leaves them outside a political process which has to disempower, has to not deliver. Whether the 'riots of today are just a preface to the serious conflicts which will inevitably break out in many



democratic states', as Boris Kagarlitzky Kagarlitsky says, is yet to be seen, but repression is breeding resistance (even if not in the ways we might be used to) and new social movements are being built on the basis of a strong level of political and social commitment by a whole generation that refuses to hand their lives and their world over to corporate-driven globalisation.

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security and purchasing power has a direct impact on the decision of young people to leave their family homes, have children and lead independent lives. 'We will live with our parents for ever. With these conditions we can't rent an apartment nor buy an old car without their help', says Bo, a student from Paris. According to Quim, a 29-year old from Barcelona with two jobs, 'With such a level of precarity, we can't have long-term personal, family or collective plans.'



The Charter of our common principles of another Europe

The rejection of the constitutional treaty in the French and Dutch referenda in spring 2005 marked a huge opportunity for the movements against neo-liberalism to demonstrate that there is an alternative. This is the purpose of our efforts to draft a Charter of our common principles of another Europe. A new way of being European is emerging, which transcends the old chains of state and national identity and sees Europe as a place in which to construct a multilevel democracy with universal rights and participating institutions; peace and justice between peoples; equality and difference; social rights; rights to and at work; rights to the environment, natural resources and public services, a new universal welfare and multi-level democracy.

Our goal with the Charter is to connect different networks, movements and campaigns working towards a democratic Europe. It will not be a short or easy road, but the European Social Forums have started to build the foundations. We made a real advance in the process of the Charter at an Assembly in Florence in November 2005 after the referenda in France and in Holland. The process has been transparent and will continue to be decided in an open and democratic way, whilst recognizing the need to develop concrete alternatives to answer the attempts of the European elites as they seek to re-launch the Constitutional Treaty.

Our work seeks to embed fundamental rights and environmental sustainability in policies on education, health care, culture, energy, transports, communication, water, housing and social protection.

Public services are crucial to this goal, and they must be socially owned.. In effect, this requires a new kind of socialisation, based not on national or governmental property, but on allowing workers and citizens to take part in the decision-making processes that shape public services.

This same goal of social re-appropriation and citizens' control should be the guiding thread of efforts to meet all social needs..In order to transform the European Union, where States and the market reign, we want to continue and develop a process in which native and non-native citizens can participate in the creation of a constitutional democracy, with the aim of establishing universal rights as the basis of a European citizenship encompassing both natives and migrants, and a supranational public space in which democracy is practiced at many levels.

To take this process forward, we have we have organized in Athens:

- an assembly at 10am on Thursday 4 May to inform people about the Charter process to date;
- seminars on subjects which have not yet been discussed or on which we don't yet have consensus;
- a final meeting at 10am on Saturday 6 May 6 to assess the work done and decide on some next steps.

The following organisations (among others) are involved in the Charter process:

Forum for European constitutional democracy, ARCI, FIOM, Legambiente, Magistratura democratica, Transform! Europe, N. Poulantzas Institut, Transnational Institute, Attac Italia, Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, Scop, Attac France, Coordination working group of the Hungarian Social forum, Cobas, Weekly Worker, CGIL, Fondation Copernic, Euromarches, Espace Marx, Union Syndacal Solidaires, ESK, ASF Südwind, Iprog, Russian Social Forum, Forum donne Prc, Funzione pubblica CGIL.

Franco Rosso



Community resistance

Ten years ago or so when the whole thing started, no-one would ever had a bet on that small valley, a few kilometers from Turin, in the north west of Italy, coming to outside attention. And yet, in autumn 2005, the Susa Valley made headlines and breaking news on TV. Berlusconi's government was forced to send in the carabinieri and riot police in order to get the works for the high speed train started. And they failed. The big project, worth hundreds of millions of euros had to be halted because the whole valley, its mayors, its old and its young people alike, was against it. They all still are. The high speed railway should link Turin with Lyon, in France. Yet still only the plan for the 54km tunnel is definite. The rest of the line is stuck in the project phase.

Carabinieri and polizia escorted heavy machinery to the spot where the first works had to be done. They met peaceful but stubborn resistance by local communities, helped by activists from Turin and from all over Italy. After some days of stand-off, local people used old tracks and paths to retake control of the ground lost to the police. The officers retreated. The winter Olympics brought about an uneasy calm, which lasted till the general election. In the meantime people from the Susa Valley managed to link up with other resisting communities in Italy. They developed a special relationship with the other end of Italy, where people on the coasts of Calabria and Sicily

A vital alliance – if we can maintain it.

Opposition to war, resistance to neo-liberal economics, and defence of a European social model are issues that still unite European trade unions and social movements. During the London ESF this relationship seemed to crack, first over the EU constitution, which many trade unions backed but which most social movements opposed, then over the support of some antiwar groups for Iraqi armed resistance. But since 2004, some significant steps have been made together, most notably over the Bolkestein directive for introducing market forces to essential sectors such as education, health care and national social welfare systems.

The common fight against Bolkestein led to a significant victory; after a 50,000-strong demonstration in Strasbourg this February, the European Parliament decided to cancel the worst part of the directive. "The defeat of this directive shows that the European social model is still strong," said John Monks, general secretary of the European confederation of trade unions (ETUC), "and helps to re-encourage our unions in the struggle against further plans to liberalise services". On the relationship with social movements, Monks was less enthusiastic, stating that they are "good allies and can cooperate from time to time, but trade unions are not NGOs, they have a different role, as they have to deal with companies and make agreements".

However, away from European bureaucracies, union branches have found ESFs to offer unprecedented opportunities for an exchange with social movements, producing a positive cross-fertilisation of ideas and projects. At the Florence Social Forum, for example, branches of CGIL built a network with other institutions, like municipalities and universities. "This network (that



will hold a seminar in Athens) is trying to explore the relation between labour rights and citizenship rights' explained Dino Greco, CGIL secretary of Brescia, northern Italy, 'between public assets and participatory democracy'.

At the ESF 2006, ETUC is officially involved and many European unions gave their support, starting with the Greek confederation of labour (GSEE), one of the main promoters of the forum. They have planned workshops on issues such as collective bargaining at the European level; attempts by governments and corporations to casualise jobs and weaken welfare systems; the role of the UN in defending basic social rights, especially for migrant workers; and the next steps of the European constitution. But other unions decided to leave the forum this year, either because they don't agree with some groups' positions on issues like terrorism, or because they are not so interested in non-labour issues. On the other hand, inside the movements some people fear that

too close a connection with unions might lead to a loss of their autonomy. There is a danger that all the achievements so far could be lost. We need to find a way of building on the success of the campaign against Bolkestein and the very good start of the first ESF in Florence when labour organisations helped to give the antiwar movement a more structured organisation and hence decisive impact on public opinion and, at the same time, unions widened their concerns.

Vittorio Longhi. Il Manifesto and Rassegna Sindicale

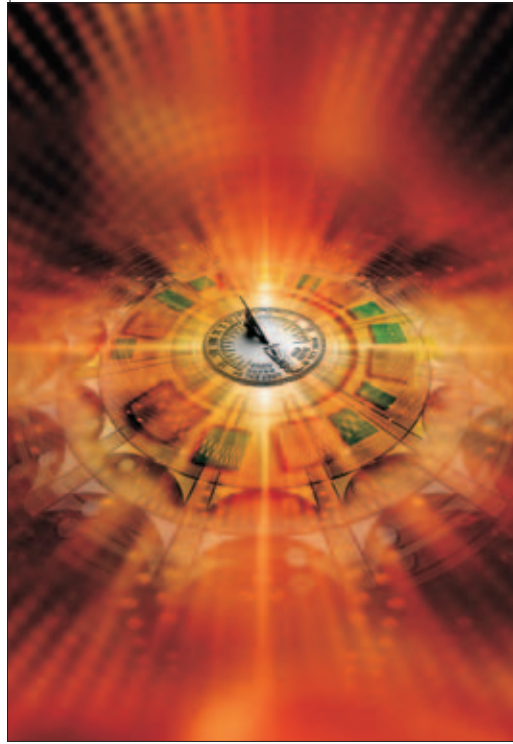
oppose the bridge between continental Italy and Sicily. From these two distant points, marches should set off in late spring, and convene in Rome in mid-July. They will carry the same message: no more land aggression without consulting local communities.

The Susa Valley protest in particular challenges the very idea of 'development' so central to Italy's ruling elite (both left and right) and much of the ruling elite of the EU. This kind of protest is gaining ground, as the landscape and countryside of Italy are under constant stress and threat from a flow of new projects, from highways to natural gas plants. The

new centre-left government has stressed that the high speed train from Turin to Lyon is a priority, but has said it wants to 'convince' Susa Valley people, who, in turn, have repeatedly stated that they do not want any high speed train which some outside advisers regard as useless and too environmentally damaging. Thus, on a small scale, the whole idea of quantity-based growth has been challenged, if only implicitly. The mainstream media were quick to label the valley protesters as acting out of Nimby syndrome, but in a huge forum which was held in the valley in mid-February the participants agreed on a simple truth: a country is a collection of backyards. Not in my backyard, therefore, does not mean in someone else's. It means nowhere.

Enzo Mangini Carta

Use your knowledge!



between collectives and movements. They have been forged during a process of recovering and systematising information generated by the recent cycles of social movements in Europe. They are designed on principles of being open, free, decentralised, and available for many uses. They facilitate a cooperative way of creating knowledge. This new politics of knowledge questions the idea of knowledge as concentrated in a single centre or group of intellectuals. The distinctive emphasis on participatory methods, in contrast to the more hierarchical methods of the past, changes the role and nature of knowledge.

The ESF, with all its networking and debate is generating a huge amount of knowledge. All too often this is lost, an incredible waste of a resource which is vital to the strengthening of our movements. An aspect of the power of social movements is the fact that as they act and organise they are generating knowledge, from below.

Because of the deep and rapid changes in capitalism and the failures of past models of socialism today's movements are engaged in a process of constant experimentation. The Social Forums themselves are essential parts of this process where different kinds of knowledge are combined, communicated and contested. Experimentation implies the need to build into the work of the movements, including the Forums, a process of continuing and critical self-reflection. This requires us to create the capacity to connect action and research in new ways.

We have many resources with which to systematise this knowledge. Research from within the movements or based in Universities, innovative research techniques and also the new rapid technological make this knowledge easily accessible to all. surveys of ESF members shows that around 70% are connected to universities. This fact indicates a problem in terms of the social depth of participation but it is also indicates a resource and potential strength on which we need to build.

The final and perhaps most basic reason why we must take seriously the knowledge we generate is that knowledge - its character, its generation and its social organisation - is itself a decisive field of struggle in contemporary 'cognitive capitalism'. This struggle is over many issues: the public or private ownership of knowledge, what knowledge to produce and for what purpose; the mechanisms of production of knowledge; the question of what knowledge is scientifically valid and what methodologies are used to arrive at this judgement; the role of experts versus forms of popular knowledge in public decisions.

In the past, in spite of the importance of the issue, it has been little discussed in the ESF. This year, however there will be several seminars addressing it.

New efforts to apply techniques of archiving and research to the systematisation of the knowledge of the ESF help us to use it efficiently. In the process we are using the technologies to build what could be called techno-political tools. Let me explain: techno-political tools are tools to help social movement activists to improve their self-organisation, their strategic analysis and the networking

As anyone attending the ESF will know, Babels is a network of volunteer interpreters and translators set up in 2002 in the run up to the first ESF in Florence. Since then, Babels has covered the translation needs of many social forums all over the world. Adhering to the Charter of Principles of Porto Alegre, Babels defines itself as a network of interpreters and translators which plays a role in the globalisation debate, as a linguistic and cultural project and as a tool to reflect on the mechanisms of linguistic and cultural domination (see Babels Charter of Principles).

The Social Forum is not a swanky conference to be organised by a commercial event management company. Rather, it is a process organised by many individuals, non-profit organisations and networks, who try to practise the ideas they promote in the forum discussions. In this context, Babels is an alternative way to organise simultaneous interpretation alongside other networks, organisations and individual volunteers who provide alternative technical equipment, open source media and IT facilities, solidarity housing and local farmers' foods.

The alternative mode of production embodied by Babels is not solely a result of the work being voluntary. The alternative is also rooted in the principle of linguistic diversity and the right of all participants of the Forum to speak in the language of their choice, be it a dominant colonial language such as English, French, or Spanish, or a minority language such as Eastern European languages, Basque, Catalan, Kurdish, etc. Implementing

The Babels network, a political tool of the Social Forum

linguistic diversity is crucial if the whole Social Forum project is genuinely to construct 'another world where many worlds can fit in' - a Zapatista formula which has inspired alter-globalisation. Simultaneous interpretation allows very different people to discuss and debate together. Linguistic diversity is therefore the condition for the democratisation of social forum debates by enlarging the possibilities of participation. This can be illustrated

Examples of the usefulness of the techno-political tools

Do you want to know how many organisations have participated at the last three ESFs?

Do you want to find partners for your projects in Belarus? Do you want to know which region in Europe hosts more feminist or ecologist organisations? Consult the Directory on European organisations, which lists those registered at the Florence, Paris and London ESFs.

Do you want to know the history and development of the campaigns which participate in the ESF? Do you want to find out what networking processes are taking place across Europe? You can search the Directory of European networks and participate in the analysis of the networking process across Europe?

Would you like to contribute your reflections to a shared open analysis of the future of Europe? Would you like to make your articles available? Soon there will be a social movements' E-library, where you can share and find useful texts and materials. This will include a collectively written E-yearbook on social movements across Europe.

Other tools include techniques of visualisation and mapping which help us to have a sense of direction and perspective in the vast sea of information which surrounds us. These techniques also enable us to synthesise this information and understand patterns and processes. For example a map is being developed showing the evolution of international and European mobilisations. Then there is the audio-recording of the ESF activities and an archive of cultural events at the ESF so that people not present at the ESF can follow its activities.

Common project for the ESF memory

These tools are being developed through the framework of a project for the memory of the ESF. It involves activist and academic research centres, centres of social movement documentation, foundations, networks, informal groups and individuals. Its connexions came initially from the creation of a working group by the European Preparatory Assembly for the systematisation of the ESF data. You can contact us at MemoCrea Laboratorio, (Rooms 07 and 08, 1st floor of the central building) during the Athens ESF for experimenting with these and other tools for systematising our knowledge and developing our memory - for the past is before us! See you there!!!

Mayo Fuster i Morell - contact: info@euromovements.info

clearly by the role Babels is playing in the organisation of interpretation for the Athens ESF in 2006. Babels has committed itself to ensuring interpretation of most Eastern European languages as well as Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish. This shows clearly how the politics of language has an influence on who participates in the debates and who cannot, and illustrates the very political role of Babels.

By facilitating volunteer interpretation in the Social Forum and volunteer translation of all emails sent to the European Social Forum discussion lists, Babels allows social movements to communicate across borders and to emancipate themselves from linguistic and cultural restrictions. In that way, Babels inscribes linguistic issues at the heart of the social forum organisational process. As a result, Babels helps to put into practice the very egalitarian and internationalist principles of the good society the alter-globalisation movement calls for.

Lastly, an under-rated element is that Babels involves hundreds of volunteers who were not always previously politically engaged, allowing them to experience new forms of political engagement.

Julie Boéri is a Babels coordinator and a research fellow for the Centre of Translation and Intercultural Studies at the University of Manchester.

Julie Boéri

FACES

I am 30 years old, an English literature graduate and I work as a translator. I grew up in a conservative family in Patras and since 1993 I have lived on my own in Athens. Despite my generally progressive opinions, until recently I had no relation with political or social movements. This changed when I became involved in the preparation of this Forum. After the Athens Preparatory Assembly in February 2004 I assumed, without realizing it, responsibility for the Greek team of Babels. Since then much has changed in my life.



To me, it is very positive that this ESF will take place in a country whose language is not well-known. We have tried and managed to a degree to mobilise interpreters from many countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Greece, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Russia, Hungary, Moldavia, Turkey...). We would have had better results if we had had greater and more timely help from the Greek Coordinating Committee and particularly from some of its components.

For me the success of the 4th ESF in terms both of interpreting work and also of the creation of a serious infrastructure for the future, is related to the social role of translation: the opportunity for many friends to participate in similar events and to express themselves in a language of their choice. I travelled to Romania to look for interpreters. There, as here, my colleagues do a thousand different things in order to survive. Why come to the Forum, they said, why be part of Babels, since you don't pay us for our services and we here have no sure means to live? I tried to explain that this is the exact reason I got involved and I've managed to convince some of them. I say it directly, I belong to Babels much more than to the Forum.

Anastasia Lambropoulou



My name is Natalia Dementeva.

I'm four year Russian student. Studying political sciences. I've been following the events in France with much attention and interest. I strongly support and respect French students: for their courage, for

persistence, for not being afraid to resist. This is the youth, who refuse to accept the unjust actions of government. The French are a people who respect themselves.

What I feel is most important is that they have the right to protest. The opinions of the opposition have a chance to be heard.

The law is cancelled now, the goal achieved, and what is next? Will they go on fighting, creating new conditions or stop and go back to their normal life? History shows that the people who get what they want are those who do not give up. Will we see new demonstrations, and how the government will behave? Time will show.

Natalia Dementeva

FACES



'I spent a long time working for a theatre festival, and I realized that much of the programme could be seen from a queer perspective, which was always overlooked by the public' says Zvonimir Dubrovnik, who went on to establish Queer Zagreb, a festival whose name makes it

impossible to overlook its queer perspective. Queer Zagreb is an international festival that, through a combination of art, theory and activism, questions the narrow limits within which heterosexuality is defined as the only desirable form of sexuality.

Croatia has a very conservative culture, where even heterosexuality is understood within very narrowly defined limits - a single mother is 'queer', for example, let alone a homosexual person. Since discrimination is learned, it can also be unlearned, says Zvonimir. Queers want legal equality and a culture which is crucial for identity creation, self-respect, and overcoming fear, all qualities that help a person reach out for legal mechanisms if rights are violated. The festival has an international character, but the participation of local and regional artists is also very important, as this helps empower queer persons to start creating their own identity and their own future without fear or shame.

This year is the fourth time that the festival is being organized, and since its inception in 2003 it has become the biggest of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe. The growing number of programmes, participants and audience, shows that the atmosphere in the society is changing. The most important is that today you can see a film, performance, exhibition, or similar happening with queer theme without hiding, and I hope it will soon be like that also in other towns in Croatia, and it would certainly be good for the wider region as well, says Zvonimir.

For more on Queer Zagreb visit <http://www.queerzagreb.org/>



EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

The beach beneath the city streets

Florence, Paris, London, Athens. The social forums stir up the long-lasting tradition of cities as places of assembly, freedom, conflict and civilisation; cities as the creation of their people, works of art by human hands. Although today's cities are enmeshed in the swirl of competition, with the hands of neoliberalism destroying their public functions and raising new social, racial and cultural walls, they remain places of memory and perspective - cradles of another possible world. The forums are a microcosm for cities that are open, multicultural, democratic, combative, vivid, everyday and festive, cities of the workers, of both sexes and every age, cities that are tortured but at the same time hopeful and insubordinate.

The European Social Forum in Athens takes place in the old airport, a space removed from the city centre but accommodating multiple, simultaneous activities and enabling fast and direct contact between them all. In parallel, in Athens as a whole, as well as in other Greek cities, art, cultural events, political actions and information campaigns are unfolding for a month in the run-up to the convergence of 4-7 May 2006.

Thousands of men and women will flow through Athens. They will agree and disagree, converge and conflict, but will in any case settle upon common solidarity actions. They will enact the new forms of democracy traced out by the forums: recreating spaces of participation for the expression of the multitude - which today's institutionalised democracy is working to abolish. These new horizontal connections are giving birth to a democratic culture that fleshes out the vision of another feasible world - through which massive global movements, such as the anti-war mobilisations, have already been achieved. The social forum in Athens is created collectively and voluntarily, based on the work of hundreds of volunteer organisers, designers, construction workers, coordinators and speakers, whose collective actions pose a challenge to the selfish individualism of neoliberalism. Its cultural activities are being constructed in the same way. At the time of writing, 52 bands and many more musicians from Greece have confirmed their participation - to be joined there by musicians from across Europe. There will be music all day, with big concerts from 9 o'clock every night. Many bands are already playing preparatory shows of the forum in

neighbourhoods of Athens and its surrounding municipalities. The forum will also be a space for dance and theatre, with numerous groups from Greece and abroad.

The art forum will be a rich collage, exhibiting artists' works from Greece and across the world. There will be 15-20 toposima across the city - constructions that will visually express the contents of the forum. Added to this creative mix, an urban space forum will analyse recent city struggles.

The forum is a small universe where everyone rambling in it is able to discover, with one glance, hundreds of microcosms: we want a world that can contain many worlds. When it will flood in the city in order to demonstrate, the amateur, multicoloured, arty banners of the groups and individuals will create an ephemeral, folk art. The forum will conquer the streets of the city, unearthing a world of new possibilities from the cracks in the dominant culture of the present.

Eleni Portaliou
Greek Social Forum



FACES

SEVGI GOYGE



I was born in Kars-Ardahan of Turkey, a poor city of 15,000 inhabitants near the border with Russia. In the 1970s, when I went to college, there was an upsurge of the radical movement. I then entered the Pedagogical Institute of Erzerum in 1976, where there was a strong movement and continuous clashes with the right wing which was very aggressive towards us. When they killed two students, I decided to take an active part in the revolutionary movement. I was arrested and imprisoned for 6 months. Two years after the military coup of 1980, I was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. When I got out, I married and we went to live in Istanbul. I did every kind of work in small shops and businesses until I won my right to teach in 1996. Since then I have been involved in building the teachers' trade union, Eğitim-Sen, which belongs to KESK, the federation of public servants. I was elected to its leadership in 2001, one of two women. I am responsible for the committee of women's issues.

Over a third of Turkey's 1_ million public servants are in KESK. We fight for the right to negotiate and strike and in 2001 we mobilized one million public servants in protest against government attacks on social security. That year KESK also decided to participate in the Social Forum. I believe working people's organisations must co-ordinate against the globalisation of capital. We also participated in the World March of Women on the basis that there is no possibility for a change in this world without the women, without more equality. Finally, being a woman, all this activity means for me that I have three jobs: one at home, one in the trade union, one in my profession.

