The largest delegations in Frankfurt came from Greece, France, Germany, Italy and Turkey. The attendance from Eastern Europe including Russia has also markedly increased. There were smaller, but active delegations from Austria, the Basque Country, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden, plus a representative from Palestine. The biggest absence was the British, including a complete no show from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

All the major forces in the ESF were present. On the right wing, the European Left Party, the trade union bureaucrats, the NGOs and Attac, there were also the more militant unions like COBAS from Italy.

However, the role of the centre, traditionally played by the centrist forces of the Fourth International (USFI) and the IST-SWP was this time only filled by the FI. All the SWP's sister organisations even Linksruck from Germany boycotted the meeting.

The EPA started on Saturday morning, with a report and balance sheet of the Athens ESF and a discussion on the future for the movement.

There was a general agreement, that Athens was a very vibrant, lively event and had a very large participation from youth and radical working class activists. Also the number of trade unions sending delegations had increased. It had drawn in large numbers from Turkey and increased the participation from Eastern Europe.

That Athens was much more radical, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist did not please everyone. Also the lifting of the ban on political parties was contested. Athens also saw the emergence of an organised opposition to the dominance of reformists and their hangers-on - an Anti-imperialist Space.

Many organisations including the Greek Social Forum itself, the Turkish organisations, immigrant organisations, some of the delegates from Italy, the organisations from the Anti-imperialist Space saw all this as a real achievement.

Others were far from pleased. Judith Dellheim from the German PDS urged the need to go back to the ban on parties, supposedly in order allow their members and leaders to speak freely as individuals. In reality this means freedom from being held responsible for the deeds of their parties such as Rifondazione's participation in a neoliberal and imperialist government.

Likewise representatives from Attac and ARCI (Italy) expressed their concern, that the ESF would narrow its basis and become dominated by anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist forces and communists of all sorts.

Most of the organisations at the ESF saw the main problems of the ESF as lack of efficiency and...
transparency?. Of course, we are far from denying this. But behind these criticisms lies a political struggle, as a speaker of the L5I pointed out.

Whilst there has been a real increase in struggles over the past year or so, the ESF and the EPA have failed to either fully reflect this or have an impact upon these struggles. It is not a question whether or not political parties are welcome as such, but what they stand for? for resistance to the attacks on workers and the oppressed or for carrying out neoliberal austerity measures and imperialist interventions. How can we ignore the fact that parties like RC in Italy are now actively pursuing the latter course? Nor can we ignore the fact that parties like PCF in France or the PDS?Left Party in Germany are heading in this direction. To be silent on these issues is the biggest lack of transparency imaginable. The problem of the ESF therefore is not that it is too radical as Attac had claimed, but because it was and is not radical, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist? enough.

Speakers from the European Confederation of Oppressed Immigrants? or the Turkish newspaper Revolutionary Proletariat? also argued that the ESF (and the EPA) had to become organs to co-ordinate struggles and take them forward rather than remain just talking shops.

An Anti-imperialist Network

Up to now, the more radical forces have worked in isolation from each other. On the Friday before the ESF there was, as usual, a day for network meetings. This time one of them was the Anti-imperialist Network formed out of the anti-imperialist space in Athens. It gathered organisations like the Organisation of Greece Communists, Turkish organisations of Stalinist origin, the PFLP, the Basque nationalist Left and youth, and the League for the Fifth International and the youth organisation Revolution.

Its aim is better to co-ordinate those who want to turn the ESF into a body to mobilise for the struggles of workers, the immigrants, the youth, the nationally and racially oppressed and fight the reformist parties and NGOs who are blocking these steps.

It agreed to call for maximum support for the Beirut International Solidarity Conference (16-19 November) to mobilise together against the G 8 in Heiligendamm (2-8 June 2007), building a mass demonstration and an anti-imperialist/anti-capitalist block on it, to organise its own seminars and workshops within the counter summit.

Also it was agreed to cooperate closely with the anti-repression-network and the anti-war network, which itself agreed on an international weekend of action in support of Palestine on 17-18th April 2007.

Where is the ESF going?

In the plenary meetings of the EPA, once again as so often before, the lightly disguised reformists and the supposed- Trotskyists of the Fourth International and Attac dodged all the burning questions beyond the old calls for more efficiency? and transparency?. They avoided any discussion about the Italian situation and Bertinotti and the RC leaderships? fight against our movement.

Here one could see the real existing balance of forces in the EPAs and ESFs on show. The whole question of transparency is used to avoid political conflict and bore people to death with vacuous debates on method?. So an open preparatory meeting? for the next Preparatory Assembly will take place in January. It will decide the exact date and venue of the EPA. This will meet again at the end of March 2007 to decide on the location of the next European Social Forum. The three candidates for holding its are Austria, Denmark-Sweden and Portugal.
The meeting showed that fears (or hopes in some cases) that ESF/EPS process is dead are still premature. But it does remain in a comatose state – a condition deliberately fostered by its undeclared and informal inner leadership. This is not altogether surprising.

The ESF (and the World Social Forum -WSF) too came into being as a result of capitalist globalisation and as a result of the emergence of a movement fighting against it. But this movement not only combined resistance from different classes and strata – workers, peasants, youth, petit bourgeois and middle classes, it also included different political trajectories – a large part representing petit-bourgeois forces (the NGOs, populists and libertarians) or reformist forces, i.e. bourgeois politics, but from organisations socially rooted in the working class (like trade unions and reformist parties. The latter were impelled towards the anti-capitalist youth after Seattle in 1999 by the resolute march rightwards to full-blown neoliberalism by the big reformist parties – the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, the German Special Democrats.

On the other hand there were more radical organisations, including various more militant unions, worker activists, youth organisation, migrant organisation, national liberation struggles, left wing organisations from a Trotskyist, Maoist or Stalinist origin.

Obviously, a unity between reformism and forces wanting to fight imperialism and capitalism can only be temporary and only on the basis of agreements to undertake serious joint action.

This is particularly so in period of intensifying class struggle.

The problem is that as the crisis for European imperialist project, in part caused by the anti-globalist and anti-capitalist movement, deepens the call has gone out from sections of the European ruling class to co-opt some of the 'left' reformist parties that have played a big role in the ESF. The capitalists support new versions of the popular front – like L'Unione in Italy - and use them to derail, contain or split the resistance and radicalisation of the masses. Obviously, one cannot have a 'united' movement, with one part in government attacking the other part on the street resisting.

That is what we see in the ESF today. Unity in the ESF is only meaningful as unity of struggle against the capitalists and imperialists' attacks. If the ESF is to become a body forging this unity, drawing in real struggles - like the one in the banlieues in France or the fighters against imperialist occupation in the Middle East - all those seeking this have to unite. That is why the League for the Fifth International has joined the Anti-imperialist Network and strongly advises left forces across Europe to do likewise.

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