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**Athens European Social Forum**

# **An Unquestionable Success**

- IV Online magazine - 2006 - IV378 - May 2006 -

Publication date: Sunday 14 May 2006

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**In spite of widespread apprehension beforehand in the global justice movement, the Athens forum did not show that the process of the European Social Forum (ESF) was running out of steam. The ESF, which took place from the 3rd to the 7th of May, was a success both for the Greek organizers and for the European global justice movement.**

With all due respect to *Liberation* or *Le Monde* (French daily newspapers), who are always prompt to proclaim the death of the social forums and the global justice movement, it has to be said that the reality and the experience of the militants who came to participate in the European Social Forum (ESF) in Athens flatly contradicted them. Before the forum we were insisting on the need to "find a second wind" and admitting some difficulties and fears. This Greek edition of the ESF dissipated many of them.

[<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L340xH226/athensesfpic-c995e.jpg>]

In announcing that more than 35,000 had registered (as against 25,000 in London in 2004) the Greek organizers themselves admitted that they were astonished by the numbers. Equally, the massive demonstration on Saturday afternoon showed that there was a contact between the global justice activists and the population of Athens. On Saturday evening the media were announcing 80,000 demonstrators, a record since the anti-war mobilisation on February 15, 2003.

The debates were directly related to the struggles that are taking place in various European countries. The victories won in France against the European Constitutional Treaty and against the CPE were at centre stage. This time, unlike in London, the European and social questions were at the heart of the discussions. Of course the international dimension was not absent, whether it was the risk of imperialist war in Iran or the political situation in Latin America. In addition, many debates dealt with the strategy of the global justice movement on the European and world scale.

Finally, and this is perhaps one of the essential aspects of its success, the Athens ESF enabled different networks to make significant progress from the point of view both of working out policies and of building solidarity and joint campaigns. This was the case in particular for public services, for the solidarity that needs to be built between trade unionists in Eastern and Western Europe and for the fight against job insecurity.

Feminists were also able to renew the links of European cooperation that were initiated at Bobigny in 2003 during the Paris Saint Denis ESF. On all these questions work absolutely has to continue, without waiting for the next central meeting of the whole of the movement, in order to be able to resist step by step the liberal offensives. All that should convince us that the risk of running out of steam can be excluded for the moment and that the usefulness of the process of forums has once again been demonstrated.

Among the questions that were posed in the forum was the participation of political parties in social forums. In London the parties, in particular the British ones, didn't intervene as such in the debates, but occupied an unreasonably large space, provoking general irritation. This time the political parties were able to intervene as such in the main debates, alongside trade unions and associations.

[<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L320xH240/athensfiesf1b-27c42.jpg>]

Up until now the barrier to this came essentially from the French side. It is difficult not to think that this turn, if it is confirmed, is linked to the unitary campaigns conducted over recent months, in particular against the European Constitutional Treaty. All the same, that doesn't mean that the problem has been resolved. We have to think in

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particular about the ways in which parties can intervene and of the limits that have to be set, in particular to avoid some of them using the forums as a platform, or considering them as just an arena of confrontation with rival parties.

But difficulties remain. On the political level the Italian situation weighs heavily. The trade union front seems today to be a bit paralysed. The self-justifying interventions by the majority of the Party of Communist Refoundation - which supports the Union (centre-left coalition) presided over by the ex-President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, who is today heading the government - introduced a "recentred" political tone that we must learn to combat. Furthermore, there remains uncertainty about the place and the date of the next ESF. But after the success of Athens edition, it is certain that the next European assembly in September will give a positive answer to these questions.

The LCR and the Fourth International were very much present in Athens, in particular through the debates in which their representatives took part, along with other political currents, but also with trade unions and associations. These debates dealt with Europe, ecology, the future of the anti-capitalist left, international question and the mobilisation against the CPE. Our visibility was also ensured by a free newspaper that was massively distributed and by a significant presence in the demonstration on Saturday.