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European Social Forum

6th European Social Forum calls for European-wide action

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Fourth International contingent

This year's ESF in Istanbul was a success - not only because some months ago it was still not clear, if it would happen. But also because there were lots of good and intensive discussions going on and because the final assembly called for broad Europe-wide mobilisations against the crisis in the autumn.

Participation

There was a shift of participation eastwards. For the first time there was significant participation from Middle East, Caucasia and even Russia. On the other hand the participation from Western Europe was quite low compared with the previous forums. But even participants from Morocco showed up. Altogether the organisers counted more than 2000 inscriptions from abroad, the number of Turkish participants was just an estimate, but could not have passed 2000.

From the side of the organisations present it was remarkable that the radical left from outside Turkey was almost invisible - with the exception of the Fourth International, which was present with participants from ten countries.

Debates and action

Inside and outside the seminars and workshops the international economic crisis was the main point of discussion. In these debates the big Trade Unions from Western Europe showed up with a mainly neokeynesian and growth-orientated discourse.

The second main point was the ecologic crisis, especially Climate Change, but also the women`s movement and the migration networks were quite active and visible. On Wednesday, before the official opening, a women's assembly and demonstration took place, and the next day the migration network organised a demonstration to the Istanbul refugee prison, where "illegal" migrants are held under unbearable conditions. Not to forget the final demonstration on Saturday evening with several thousand activists to Taksim square - colourful, loud and radical.

Decisions

There was a discussion in the assembly of the social movements as to whether the ESF should call in its final declaration for mobilisations against the crisis. The French CGT opposed, but at least there was a final statement, which was accepted in the final assembly on Sunday. It just contained two points:

- 1) A call for actions on the 29th of September;
- 2) A follow up meeting to decide on the future of the ESF.

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A major discussion during the final assembly was how to relate to the action day called by ETUC (and the demands posed by it) in September. At least a compromise was found: the ESF calls for action on that same day, but without referring to ETUC.

The problem of the future of the ESF was postponed. Until now there is no country showing up to organise the next forum. Because of the renewed interest from Central and Eastern countries, it has been suggested to have the next ESF in one of these. Budapest, Prague and Vienna were mentioned as possibilities. So it was agreed, to make a meeting of the social movements in October in Paris and to discuss there the future of the ESF. This is a small step forward, because until this decision it looked, as if there would be no clear follow up/perspective.

Altogether the forum was a success not only for the Turkish social movements and the left, but also, because the decision, to mobilise was taken and because there will be a follow-up meeting, which opens the opportunity, to continue the ESF as a unique space for an Europe-wide discussion between the movements, The Trade Unions and the left activists of all currents. And it was a success, because there was a considerable extension of participation beyond the European borders.