

Assessing the Anti-Globalisation Movement and the Social Forum Process

Wednesday 2 October 2019, by [ALMPANIS Yannis](#), [BENYIK Matyas](#), [BOLINI Raphaela](#), [DELLHEIM Judith](#), [GOLEMIS Haris](#), [VENTURA Christophe](#) (Date first published: 5 September 2019).

On the twentieth anniversary of the 1999 'Battle of Seattle', the event marking the beginning of the so-called anti-globalisation movement, the Editorial Committee of the transform ! europe yearbook organised a discussion with five activists of the World Social Forum (WSF) and the European Social Forum (ESF) processes, coming from various EU countries. These were Yannis Almpanis (Greece), Mátyás Benyik (Hungary), Raffaella Bolini (Italy), Judith Delheim (Germany), and Christophe Ventura (France). The discussion was moderated by Haris Golemis (transform ! europe)

Haris Golemis : The new form of radical politics which came with the anti- or alter-global movement and the Social Forums process did not fall from the sky. It was created by social movements' activists located in various countries. So, let's start with an examination of the link between the national and the European/world level by reviewing the national organisational forms of participation in this transnational movement. To better understand this link, it would be interesting if you could refer to possible ideological and political differences and/or clashes among the various groups within the national alliances.

Christophe Ventura : The roots of the alter-globalisation movement in France are in the founding of Attac-France in 1998, following a commitment made by Le Monde Diplomatique in late 1997, two years after the big wave of social protests in France in 1995 and during the Asian and the Russian financial crises. Attac was one of the protagonists of the WSF, which in 2001, in Porto Alegre, launched the idea that social movements could organise regional Social Forums in various countries. Following the choice of Paris as the venue of the Second European Social Forum in 2003, Attac proposed to other French organisations a concrete process for organising it. A body called the French Initiative Committee consisting of 350 organisations was established and started formally functioning in December 2002. Apart from Attac-France, the Initiative Committee included trade unions, youth and women's organisations, human-rights organisations, movements of unemployed and precarious workers, and NGOs. For the sake of brevity, I will mention only some that I still remember after many years : a) Solidaires, FSU and SUD, the international department and some federations of the CGT (but not the CGT itself), the CFDT Transport Union, activists from Force Ouvrière (FO), b) Les Amis de la Terre (The Friends of the Earth), c) the left currents of the Catholic organisations Crid and Coordination Sud, d) La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme-LDH (the League of Human Rights), which was very active during the Paris European Social Forum but less so afterwards, h) La Marche des Femmes (the Women's March), and, last but not least, i) the movements of the 'sans' ('without') - 'sans papiers' ('without papers'), 'sans droits' ('without rights'), 'sans logement' ('without shelter', homeless) - which were very active in the movement despite their criticism of some decisions of the Initiative Committee, etc.

The Initiative had an Executive Committee, consisting of 10 to 15 representatives of the main

organisations, which dealt with daily tasks and held regular meetings open to anyone who wanted to participate. This small group was responsible for organising the Initiative's various events in France, for preparing our presence in the WSF and the ESF, and for making proposals on general strategy. As a result of this process, hundreds of local Social Forums were created in several regions, cities, and small towns in France. After the Paris ESF, these Forums – some of which still exist today – played a key role, initially for the reconfiguration of the social movement and later of the radical left in France. This is a very important but not adequately studied phenomenon.

There were many ideological clashes among us at the time. We belonged to organisations, movements, and networks which had different political convictions and belonged to different political traditions. Relations with the activists of political parties were also difficult because, according to the Porto Alegre Charter, parties were 'officially' not allowed to participate in the Social Forum processes. The problem was solved by allowing them to participate in the French Initiative Committee as individuals or members of other entities, but not as members of their parties. This was clearly elegant hypocrisy !

Participants in the alter-global movement in France had to draw up their roadmap, organise and/or participate in events at the French, European, and international levels, and of course take care of the funding of these activities. The responsibility for the participation in events rested with the ESF Assembly, and the level of participation in it was very high. Of course, not all organisations had the time and the money to participate in various preparatory meetings, especially outside France, and as a result the real power in the Initiative and its Executive Committee rested with the groups that could do so : Attac, Solidaires, CGT, FSU, LDH, CRID, and a few others. Within this small group, we managed to build relations of trust despite our differences. Our key principle was consensus in all decisions. While the leadership of the process was in fact composed of representatives of big organisations, those who were not in the 'inner circle' could also influence it, through articles in newspapers, analyses circulating in the internet, local actions, public interventions, etc.

Mátyás Benyik : In Hungary we had decided that the organisational format for our participation in the anti-global process would be similar to that of the WSF and the ESF. So we formed the Hungarian Social Forum (HSF), whose main founding actors belonged to four groups : a) Green organisations, b) activists who were members of, or were connected to, the Workers' Party, i.e., the former Communist Party, c) progressive left organisations like Attac-Hungary, which had many international connections with sister organisations in other countries, mainly in France, and d) progressive trade- unions, like the Metal Workers' Union. The HSF had a Coordination Committee comprised of representatives from the different organisations ; its decisions were made only by consensus.

At the beginning, everything went quite well and all of us were optimistic that the experiment would succeed. Things started to go wrong after the Paris ESF because of the problem, known to all of you, with Simó Endre, a HSF member who at that time was attempting to cooperate with people connected to Fidesz, the Hungarian right-wing populist party. A little later, there was another dispute, with the Greens ; we from Attac tried and managed to keep them in the HSF until the 2006 Athens ESF, after which the movement against neoliberal globalisation weakened.

There were, of course, ideological differences and clashes between the different groups of the HSF. Attac-Hungary had differences with the activists of the Workers Party, some of them very Stalinist, but also with the activists from the Greens who were soft anti-communists and aimed at reforms within the capitalist system. Before going to the WSF and the ESF we made decisions in the HSF on our priorities and strategy for the events, and regarding our representatives in the working groups responsible for the preparation of the Forums. Before the Assemblies of the Movements we also met to prepare for building closer cooperation with activists from other countries with whom we shared

similar ideas regarding the movement.

Raffaella Bolini : In Italy, there were three different periods of the alter- globalist movement, each one with its own organisational model. The first period was before and just after the mobilisation against the G8 Summit in Genoa, in July 2001. We were very fortunate because the beginning of the alter-global movement in Europe was closely connected to the preparation of the Genoa mobilisation. The first organisational model of a common space for diverse Italian groups was the Genoa Social Forum. This coalition was large enough not to coincide with anti-systemic forces ; it was radical but not anti-capitalist. Today, at least in my country, many organisations as well as the people in general know that the system in which we are living is a complete disaster, but at that time, in 2001, globalisation was presented as a wonderful thing. At that time it was extremely radical to take a stand against the 'dream of globalisation'. The Genoa Social Forum was de facto 'anti-systemic', even if within it there were many organisations that were only against the negative aspects of neoliberal globalisation.

The Genoa Social Forum consisted of various progressive and left organisations of civil society, like Arci of which I was a member, Attac, which in Italy was rather small but very dedicated to the movement, and many others. From the trade-union side, the more radical organisations and groups were present : Cobas, Sin-Cobas, and FIOM-CGIL, as well as the radical wings of CGIL, the big leftist confederation. Other participants included the social centres, collectives of the 'disobbedienti', which were very big at the time, as well as some Catholic organisations devoted mainly to the issue of global justice in the Third World. Following a discussion among the social actors, the political party Rifondazione Comunista was accepted into the Forum. The main centre-left party, at that time called the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), not only did not participate but explicitly opposed it. However, many of its members were in Genoa and also took part in the World Social Forum.

The second period runs from the Genoa mobilisations until 2003. It was a period in which many local Social Forums were created in Italy, mainly due to the Genoa events, but also due to the emergence in 2001 of the WSF. Following the second WSF in Porto Alegre and in order to prepare the First European Social Forum in Florence (2002), the Genoa Social Forum was consensually dissolved and a new coalition formed, the Preparatory Committee for the Florence ESF, which included CGIL but also the other moderate trade-union confederations, and a greater number of organisations, as well as political parties. The coalition became even broader in the preparation for the 15 February mobilisation against the war in Iraq, with the participation of peace and anti-war organisations like the Committee 'Fermiamo la guerra', which did a magnificent job.

The third phase was when the movement started to decline. Then, in order to preserve our unity in the international framework we created the Italian Coordination for the World Social Forum, which was active until the 2015 Tunis WSF after which it was dissolved.

Since our coalitions were large and broad there were many differences amongst us, but through all these years we managed to function in a consensual way. Common experiences had created a climate of trust and confidence among the various organisations' activists involved in this adventure. This immeasurably helped us in having a united presence internationally in the great majority of instances.

Judith Dellheim : In Germany, one can also distinguish different phases of the movement with different organisational structures in each one of them. When the WSF process started, there was great interest on the part of many social movements, ecological movements, movements of solidarity with the Third World and with refugees and immigrants, anti-poverty movements, peace organisations, but also some trade unions like the Teachers' Union, and NGOs like ATTAC-Germany which was one of the main participants. At that time in Germany, there was great sympathy for the

alter-globalisation movement, especially after the first ESF in Florence, which was a great success. We managed to form a relatively broad national coalition, which organised three local Social Forums in Germany and prepared our participation in the ESFs and the WSFs.

Interest started to decline when the so called anti-systemic groups and activists joined the process at the Paris and mainly at the London ESFs in 2003 and 2004 respectively. An additional reason for the decline of interest was that during that period another process had started taking place in Germany : the creation of Die LINKE, a party resulting from the fusion of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) with WASG (Labour and Social Justice-The Electoral Alternative), a splinter group from the SPD. This second process also attracted the interest of some Trotskyist groups that had been involved in the Social Forum process since the Florence ESF. Activists from all parties and groups involved in the new social movements became very active in Die LINKE, a development which was good for the new party but which increased scepticism regarding the ESF process on the part of activists from trade-unions and social movements. As a result, the German coalition shrank and lost its initial broad political base, becoming gradually a small group of activists that finally ceased to exist, while the cooperation, and in some cases even communication, among various protagonists vanished. This was very frustrating.

Yannis Almpanis : First of all, I would like to say that a very long time has passed since the events under discussion, and the period that started after the end of the last 2010 Istanbul ESF was so politically dense in Greece that it did not let us reflect on the Social Forum process. Therefore, my short presentation should be considered a retrospective narrative and not a comprehensive analysis.

The organisational instrument through which we took part in the anti- globalisation movement was the Greek Social Forum (GSF). Its main participants were activists from left collectives as well as non-aligned activists. It is interesting to note here that the political forces that comprised the GSF later became the backbone of the party Syriza. In this respect, the GSF was a laboratory for the unification and restructuring of the Greek left. It bridged forces that belonged to very different political traditions of the labour movement. It was also the vehicle for the return to left politics of a great number of progressive citizens who in previous decades had withdrawn into their private spheres as well as for the politicisation of many young people. The Greek left had never previously created an opening that was so movementist and social in character. However, the GSF did not manage to become a broad forum with society-wide appeal.

The Greek Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) participated in the European and World Social Forums, but not in the GSF. Both at the national and the international level our relations with its activists were always tense, due to their rampant sectarianism and patronising attitude. Outside the GSF, other forces of the extra-parliamentary left, such as the New Left Current, which is now linked to the SWP through the coalition of ANTARSYA, as well as of anarchism, including a large and confrontational Black Block connected to similar groups in other countries, also mobilised against globalisation.

Within the GSF, there was a sincere effort on all sides to search for a minimum framework in which everyone could recognise himself or herself. As for us, the Network for Political and Social Rights, we tried to make this minimum as radical as possible, something that was not at all easy. Generally speaking, I think that it is hard to find other examples of good will on the part of political and social forces with such deep ideological differences, which could compare with what the participants in the Greek anti-globalisation movement were able to achieve. Strong and durable ties were forged in the process, like mine with Haris Golemis.

However, I have to say that there were really no substantial political and ideological discussions either in the Greek or in the European and World Social Forums. That is, we never seriously

discussed a radical plan to confront globalised capitalism or a common set of demands that could lend perspective to the movement. In the name of unity we created superficial and declaratory political frameworks, while in the name of action we undervalued the need for a robust analysis of the new conditions.

H.G. : In both the WSF and the ESF there was a difference between those who wanted them to be 'open spaces' for the exchange of views (with the 'movement fundamentalists' of the WSF International Council also insisting on excluding political parties) and those who wanted them to be more political and radical. What was and is your view on this ?

R.B. : In Italy, in the past, before Genoa, we did not have parties in coalitions of social movements. They supported the coalitions, but from outside. In 2001, in Genoa, it was the first time after decades that there was a change in this rule and Rifondazione Comunista was accepted as an equal partner. So, in the Social Forum processes we were not against the presence of political parties - but of course we expected them to adopt a non-hegemonic, non-instrumental approach to the movement and to show full respect for the social protagonists.

Concerning the debate on 'open space/space for decisions', we tried from the outset to convince friends from other countries that we should not endorse either of the two extreme options : that is, we should perceive the Social Forum neither as a totally open space in which participants have endless discussions without any action, nor as a political organisation, a sort of Central Committee of the global movement. We believed that there was a third option, to follow the open-space method without imposing anything on anyone, but at the same time not to prevent some forces from searching for more points of convergence that might lead to common action.

Although it was difficult for the 'extremists' of both sides to accept the Italian proposal, in actual practice the movement tried to find a solution based more or less on this logic. In the WSF this happened through the creation of the so called Assembly of Social Movements, which was a space for those groups which wanted not only to discuss among themselves but also to decide on various common actions through consensus. In the Florence ESF, the final meeting of the Assembly of Social Movements was very important ; it made it possible for us to officially launch the global mobilisation against the war in Iraq, which took place on the 15 February 2003, with 110 million people in the streets. I have vivid memories of Bernard Cassen strongly protesting this method at the time, viewing our decision for the mobilisation as a 'distortion' of the WSF spirit.

For a number of years this arrangement (an open space WSF and an Assembly of Social Movements for reinforced cooperation) worked. However, after a time, despite the efforts made by some delegations, including the Italian one, the experiment ran aground : on the one side, the 'official' WSF (that is, its International Council and the people responsible for the organisation of the event) did not fully adhere to the principle of giving visibility to the agendas of various issue-based assemblies, seminars, and workshops ; on the other side, the Assembly of Social Movements was hijacked by a group of social-movement activists who began using it as if it was their own political space.

J.D. : The WSF was a very innovative instrument, but we were not able to use it. On the one hand, this inability reflects our weaknesses, and, on the other, it explains why the movement eventually declined. The idea of the WSF not as a political force but as a common space for learning, analysing our experiences, discussing alternatives, and agreeing on common activities was the result of rethinking our many past defeats, advantages, and disadvantages. It reflected our need for something new, for a new approach that would allow us to come and act together. Unfortunately, however, in Germany and in Europe, especially in its Western part, the WSF and all other Social Forums were regarded by some forces as spaces to be occupied and used to convince others to think

and act as these forces wished. And this approach was derived from the necessary tactics to be followed at the national level. So, we did not use the Forums to learn and build alliances and in that sense we missed a great opportunity to change ourselves in a constructive way. This, moreover, had a negative influence on the work we were doing in the ESF for the 'Charter of Europe for Another Europe', which was a great idea.

I believed at that time and I still hold the view that as many party members as possible should participate in the Social Forum processes and bring their experiences back to their parties, so that they can be critical and self-critical partners of other broader coalitions. At the same time, I believed that the question was not how radical the forces participating in the WSF and the ESF were but whether they could improve their own political culture and that of the whole left in order to overcome past shortcomings. Since, as I have said, there were groups that did not share this view, clashes could not be avoided. And these clashes prevented the enlargement of the Social Forums and finally led to their decline.

Y.A. : I think that the term 'fundamentalism' for those who opposed the presence of political parties in the WSF and the ESF is too extreme and, in any case, I do not believe that this issue was so important. In my view, the Social Forum activists had to answer two major questions : a) how to give a permanent organisational form to a spontaneous movement mobilised against international summits, such as those in Seattle and in Genoa ; and b) how to form an organisational structure without a territorial reference.

The two issues were intertwined and the Social Forum could not find a solution for either of them. When it was riding the crest of the movement's wave it had some vitality and created events. Seattle gave birth to Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre to Genoa, Genoa to Florence, Florence to the 15 February 2003. Then, things became harder. The Forum was not able to become a 'trade union' of the anti-globalisation movement. At the same time, its global character excluded newcomers from the centres of decision-making or those who belonged to organisations lacking financial resources. It is indicative that the discussions of the International Council concerned, and were intelligible only to, a very small number of people.

Obviously, not all participants were likeable. We should not delude ourselves. Even in the best moments of the movements, idiots remain idiots, careerists remain careerists, and sectarians remain sectarians. But there are also many others who, within the movement, change and improve both as human beings and as political subjects.

M.B. : In both the WSF and the ESF, there were different views regarding their identity as open spaces of dialogue, as well as on the issue of the participation of political parties. Since the process in Hungary began mainly with green and environmental organisations, the preference was for open spaces and for excluding political parties from the Forums, a position I also shared. This changed later because the question was not so much if political parties should be excluded or not, but what type of political parties could be included. Now I am more in favour of the inclusion of radical left political parties in the Social Forum movement, since we cannot deny that they are very important actors. Furthermore, if the parties' activists hide themselves in various organisations they will enter the process in any case, but in a Trojan horse. It is much better if they are present in a direct and transparent way. Of course, this contradicts the Porto Alegre Charter of Principles, but this Charter should be modified and updated. The inclusion of political parties can politicise and radicalise the WSF, something very important mainly in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, seeing as after the systemic change of the 1990s people have been depoliticised and there is an urgent need for political education to help make them aware of the new exploitative situation.

In the CEE countries the main issue of concern for the activists was and still is the advance of the far

right and populist parties and the presence of authoritarian governments and leaders. In this part of Europe leftists have been and still are sensitive on this issue, and fortunately there have been and are movements and activists in the West sharing the same concern. Organisations and groups critical of the system have always been cooperative, while environmental groups could not be because they do not understand the wider political reasons for world grievances. Therefore, a big challenge for us was and still is how to involve these groups in a radical movement. This happened during the mobilisations against the war in Iraq, when we marched together with them and other strata of Hungarian society in a massive demonstration which took place in Budapest.

C.V. : Having been in the foreign affairs committee of Attac in France since the late 1990s along with Bernard Cassen, Christophe Aguiton, Pierre Khalfa, and Sophie Zafari, activists you all know from the alter-global movement, I had the privilege to be present in all World Social Forums except the one in India, but also in all European Social Forums. Due to this experience, I strongly support the view that there were crucial differences between the ESF and the WSF.

The ESF had a political objective : to build a European social movement able to challenge the neoliberal order in Europe in terms of politics and policies, struggling against the political parties, both conservative and social democratic, that were in government at that time in Europe, as well as to challenge the European Union. I believe that the ESF was an attempt to build an entity able to serve this need, to Europeanise the struggles and the movements against the policies of these governments and of the EU institutions. We did not succeed in this aim and we can discuss why, but the ESF had this objective which was completely different from that of the WSF.

But the World Social Forum from its inception has been a space nourished by the Latin American movements. It was a cocktail of initiatives and ideas initially coming from Le Monde Diplomatique, Attac, and the Brazilian Committee and it was born at a conjuncture in which left or centre-left anti-neoliberal forces were either in government in some Latin American countries or were close to achieving this goal, as in Brazil. At the same time, there were in the WSF strong grassroots movements, much stronger than ours in Europe, with ten or fifteen years of powerful struggles behind them, which played a key role in Latin American societies. Progressive governments coming to power in various key countries and strong social movements in all countries of the region was the configuration and the ecosystem of the birth of the WSF. The WSF was a space, a natural space, for the coordination between these movements, connected with specific links to the Latin American left and progressive left governments ; participants in the WSF did not have the objective to turn it into an instrument for the construction of an international political actor. It was more a space to collect and exchange experiences and views. However, on the last day of every WSF a meeting called the Assembly of Social Movements took place in which willing participants debated around preparing a common agenda for mobilisations and campaigns at the international level. This space of action was open to every organisation that wanted to be part of it, and the organisations that did not want to participate were under no obligation to follow the Assemblies' decisions.

From 2005, when the WSF returned to Brazil, some of its founders and a number of eminent intellectuals (Bernard Cassen, Ignacio Ramonet, Samir Amin, François Houtart, Emir Sader, Roberto Savio, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Boaventura da Sousa Santos) thought that the time had come to make the Social Forum process more politically committed and articulated to their regional political contexts. They proposed a 'Porto Alegre Manifesto', which included a set of proposals and strategic orientations (tactical articulations with transformative parties and governments). The idea was to take a step further towards making the WSF something more than a simple space without other perspectives. This initiative led to strong debates within the movements in which each side supported its position with strong arguments, but it did not establish a consensus and so it never came to a conclusion. However, for me it is still relevant, and on this point I agree with Raffaella.

H.G. : What were the reasons for the emergence and the subsequent decline of the anti-globalisation movement and the Social Forum process, and what were its main achievements ? Do you believe that this form of action could or should come back again in the future or should struggles be confined to the national state ?

Y.A. : Movements erupt suddenly and decline gradually. The 'no-global' movement is no exception. It erupted by expressing the global outrage against neoliberalism. It perished because it was unable to give a political perspective. It was born as a cry ; it perished without a word. It certainly marked the politics of an era, but there are no longer many things that remind us of it. Everything we fought against has been imposed even more aggressively because of the crisis. Furthermore, the culture of resistance is very different today. Today it is not possible to stage a mobilisation like a celebration. There is too much rage, hatred, and despair. Nor can there be a mobilisation based on general unity, as divisions are too deep. Greece is the most extreme example, with Syriza implementing a fierce austerity policy. But the situation appears very different also in the international geopolitical field. In the not-so-distant past, the movement was against globalisation. Today this word tends to disappear from public discourse, even though the policies of the Washington Consensus are still with us and in fact have been imposed everywhere. We now live in the era of Trump and Putin, the era of the chaotic war in Syria, the era of memoranda in Europe, in a Europe where we are facing the overwhelming dilemma between globalised financial power and nationalist populism. In the face of this dipole, there is not yet a convincing alternative from the internationalist left. Though it has been demonstrated that a left policy confined to a nation-state cannot succeed, the nation-state remains the only field for the practice of politics. This is the impasse of the left in this era of despair.

M.B. : The Social Forum process died at the 2010 Istanbul ESF. We later tried to renew it (for example through the events of Florence 10+10, in 2012) but it did not work. It is for this reason that other European initiatives emerged, as for example the Alter Summit. In this framework, I would like to draw your attention to Prague Spring 2, our small network which was established right after the 2008 Malmö ESF. This network was initiated by activists in Central and Eastern Europe together with some colleagues from Austria ; it was directed against the populist and far right, which had already started to advance in the CEE region. We concentrated our cooperation around the fight against neo-Nazism and the advance of the far right in Ukraine and in other countries of the eastern part of Europe. The cooperation of CEE movements is very important since in the past European Social Forums the Eastern and Central European movements were underrepresented, with the number of activists participating in them being very small, except at the Forum in Florence and to a certain degree in the Paris ESF. This made us feel that we were not equal partners in the process ; moreover, in some cases we were not treated in a very friendly way.

Prague Spring 2 is still functioning, fighting in the spirit of the old Social Forums mainly against poverty and the advance of the far right. Up to now we have had two events, the first Central and Eastern European Forum (CEESF) in Vienna in 2013 and the second CEESF in Wrocław in 2016. Then, after renaming the CEESF the Assembly of Resistances, we had a regional meeting in Budapest in March 2018. In the Social Forums tradition, we are trying to be active also in the global arena, extending our cooperation to new actors interested in our cause. The Assembly of Resistances, an idea coming from the World Social Forum, is now very lively and interesting for all of us. Presently, we are preparing a regional meeting of the Assemblies of Resistance Movements in Caracas, to project the idea that the key points uniting us are not only relevant in the CEE region, but also in the World South.

The European and international cooperation of movements is very important, especially as regards the burning issues of migration and the far right, whose advance must be halted through international cooperation. We are working very hard to relaunch the anti-war movement aimed at stopping wars which cause great human, economic, and environmental losses. We must fight for

peace but also against poverty, especially in the CEE region, whose problems more closely resemble those of the Third World, especially Latin America and Africa, than those of the core countries of the EU. Activists in a small country like Hungary cannot fight alone. We have to seek out allies with whom to cooperate at the European and international levels.

C.V. : I think in the last fifteen to twenty years, the Social Forums process, mainly the WSF, succeeded in producing what it was able to produce ; it succeeded as a space, as a process, as a dynamic that was able to refresh the critique of neoliberalism and point out new paths for transforming capitalism by articulating social and environmental issues with democracy to help us think about how the left could be refounded and build a new paradigm. The Social Forums have provided the left and the social movements with a new political and organisational culture. This process consisted of the traditional organisations of the labour movement as well as the new social movements, intellectuals, and middle class activists from different sectors going, so to say, to the source and reloading themselves. I think that the alter-global movement succeeded in terms of building a new framework of theories, practices, and strategies for thousands of organisations all over the world, from political structures to trade unions, NGOs, etc. I also believe that the Social Forum process played a significant role in the emergence of the new wave of protest movements in the post 2008 global crisis times, with the 'Occupy' movements in the US, the Arab Spring especially in Tunisia, and the emergence of new left forces in Southern Europe. Without this movement there would not be Podemos in Spain and various other new anti-systemic organisations and movements in Europe. And, independently of what we think about the policies of the Tsipras government, without this movement there would be no Syriza, and many radical and interesting developments in various other countries would not have happened.

For all these reasons I believe that the Social Forum process was a success. It certainly did not succeed in what some of us might have expected from it, that is, in becoming a new political subject or a new international movement able to challenge capitalism at a global level. But maybe we asked too much from this movement, maybe we asked for things it was not able to do during the period in which it emerged. In my view, the alter-global movement should be evaluated within a longer-term trajectory, not only within the short period of less than two decades. And I believe that in the long run it will be shown that it was a very important moment in the historical waves of anti-capitalist, anti-systemic movements. It was a step towards what revolutionary or alternative activists should build in the long term.

My view is that the ESF failed for different reasons. First, we were not able to involve the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in it, mainly because this organisation was so integrated within the EU institutional process that it was not ready to be part of a space too critical towards the EU. Second, we were not able to draw up a strategy of the so-called European movement against the European Union because there were major disagreements among us on this issue and because we were functioning through consensus. We were able to build a discourse based on the well-known slogan 'Another Europe is Possible' or to agree on the need for social and fiscal harmonisation, etc., but we were not able to fight concretely and systematically against the EU institutions and their policies. Certainly, we had difficulties with some small political groups, they played a negative role, but the main problem was that we were not able to offer a common strategy for concrete action at the European level linked to the national level since we were all under pressure from our national agendas. The whole European map was neoliberal, but the rhythms and the levels of resistance were - and still are - different in various countries. They were not, are not, and will not be the same in Hungary, France, England, Belgium, etc. In Europe we can have common adversaries, objectives and strategies, but there are different levels of responses and different tactics which take into account the different national configurations and situations. I think nothing really progressive can happen without the combination of a national rupture (assumed in a cooperative and solidary way with the

other European countries) and social movements throughout Europe and the world. In this context, I think that the nation-state is still the main space of political struggle, but not the only one. A rupture at the national level from one or more EU Member States is needed precisely because the EU is an inter-state system. We must have a mass democratic movement at the national level and at the same time try to build international connections and permanent spaces and tools. This is certainly a difficult and complicated task, but nothing progressive can happen in Europe without a rupture in one or more countries.

The configuration of the World Social Forum process can still contribute to the building of international connections among movements. But it will never again play the central role it did in the past and I am sure that this view is also shared even by members of the International Council itself. That was my conclusion from the last WSF which took place in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, in March 2018 - that the World Social Forum can remain a space where organisations and movements meet and organise common campaigns, etc., but now this is a moment for representatives, for delegations and not for activists and masses. The WSF and its format belong to the pre-2008 world, the world which existed before the crisis. It was built in order to fight against neoliberal hegemony, the pretensions of globalised capitalism, and US imperialist wars at a time when powerful movements were emerging in Latin America, in the US (Seattle), and elsewhere and were constructing their first linkages at the international level. Today we have to build something new for the post-2008 world, a world of uncertainty and instability. We are facing the end of neoliberal illusion and hegemony, a systemic crisis of globalised capitalism, the development of geopolitical tensions and conflicts everywhere in the world. At the same time, there is no clear alternative to the present system proposed by the left and social movements, no global project for an alternative civilisation and no positive visions. Instead, we have contradictions and defeats in Latin America and disillusionment in Europe, which have fragmented and segmented struggles and movements and have nourished rightwing populists in many countries.

What we need is to find and build new organisational forms and a new discourse adapted to a world where everything is characterised by fluidity, uncertainty, and instability, in which cultural issues like the struggle against various types of discrimination have many more victories than the struggles for economic, social, and democratic rights. This is the present challenge of a renewing Social Forum process.

J.D. : First, I would like to say that in the Malmö ESF we created a network of social movements and trade unions, which later founded the Alter Summit (AS). Unfortunately, after the AS meeting in Athens in 2013, many social movements left the process and what we now have is rather a summit of trade unionists. So, I think that there is nothing we can celebrate. Furthermore, when one looks at the actors involved in the Prague Spring 2 Platform, one doubts if one can really pin ones hopes on it. And it is interesting that some of our old friends, like Petre Damo who is still active in Romania, are not participating in it. I am not against the Prague Spring 2 network and it would be very good if it continued to organise events and meetings. However, this is not a reason to see it as a starting point for something more broad, really hopeful, and sustainable. The range of participating actors is small and very traditional, but this of course is connected to our common problem.

I would also like to make another remark on what Christophe said about the reasons why the ESF did not achieve its targets, agreeing that the main reason was our inability to develop a common strategy to fight against the European Union. It is true that we were not able to develop such a strategy, and this was our weakness and the reason for our defeat. But, I also don't think that it would be extremely successful and hopeful to develop a strategy against the EU. Regarding the implicit criticism of Syriza, I haven't heard or read a word of self-criticism for our inability to influence our governments' decisions regarding the Greek crisis, especially the governments of Germany and France, the two big EU countries that could have changed the attitude of the Troika

towards the Tsipras government. In fact, what happened in Greece is mainly our defeat, the result of an absence of political solidarity. I frequently asked my friends if they were and are really interested in organising effective solidarity action with our Greek comrades and I discovered that this readiness did and does not exist. I can tell you frustrating stories about my efforts on this issue with trade unions, social movements, and even my own party. I think that our main problem was that we were unable to really benefit from the Social Forums, which, along with Raffaella, I consider a very useful political tool. As a result of this inadequacy, we were also unable to develop real solidarity among us and with the weakest, the poorest, and our own political friends, like our comrades in Greece. The fact that the Greek Spring did not become a European Spring and was finally defeated was due to our own ineffectiveness. The Greek tragedy of the summer of 2015 is, to a great extent, our own responsibility.

Regarding the evaluation of the ESFs, I agree with the view that we could have achieved results beyond events and demonstrations, which had broad public visibility. A big question is why the ESF died at the moment of the global and European financial crisis and the crisis of the Eurozone, that is, when it was more urgently needed than ever.

It is true that when the ESF was dynamic and vibrant we could have built networks and new fields of cooperation, like the one attempted later by the Alter Summit. Despite my criticism of its development, I believe that it had good intentions and can be used as a starting point for a new modest effort : to try reconnecting the different actors or agencies.

Finally, I believe that for the large EU countries the state is the main space of political struggle. But this space - and hence the popular struggle - is connected with the EU, Europe, and the world, and this should be clear to everybody. Living in Germany, I know that much of what happens in the EU and in Europe depends on German policies, including what has happened in Greece since 2010. But fighting against German policies is not enough. The point is to fight for a change in the balance of power simultaneously at different levels. Nothing important can happen if we are not socially anchored at the local, national and European levels and if we do not forge sustainable links among activists, organisations, and networks at all levels. This demands another approach to the one we took in the past, but it is compatible with the original WSF idea, and it focuses on human dignity, solidarity, peace, social equality, ecology, common goods, that is, the struggle against the main actors and agencies that destroy or even threaten all of these.

R.B. : At the beginning of 2000, the majority of social actors discovered that we were all together in the same boat, having the same enemies and facing the same dangers from the global offensive of the forces of neoliberal globalisation. I believe that at that moment many activists in the movement thought that the national agendas would disappear and be replaced by global agendas, campaigns, and mobilisations. This feeling imparted a lot of strength to, and interest in, the alter-globalisation movement throughout the world ; everybody was searching for global relations and alliances.

Then, mainly after the 2008 crisis, the impact of neoliberal globalisation produced such a strong shock in various countries that the great majority of progressive social and political forces concentrated only on their national terrains in order to prevent a catastrophe for their own societies and fight against the continually rising nationalist forces. That was a big mistake because international solidarity and international alliances are not luxuries for good times ; they are needed mainly in hard times. One of the worst consequences of this national closure was the incapacity to understand how crucial it was for the political developments in Europe and the world to have a European uprising aimed at defending Greece against the shameful attack of the EU institutions. At that time progressive Europe had an opportunity to ignite and lead a revolt against neoliberal Europe aimed at transforming it. Unfortunately nothing substantial happened, despite the attempts by some of us, and now the revolt against neoliberal Europe is led by reactionary forces. You know,

historical opportunities are like trains : one has to catch them at the right time, otherwise one misses them. The European progressive and alternative forces missed the train of history, and now we are all suffering in hard times, with obscurantism growing in Europe.

We are facing a paradox. The movement against neoliberal globalisation was strong at a time when globalisation was considered a positive process, and now, when nobody believes anymore that globalisation can bring us development and well being – which should be seen as a major accomplishment of our movement – this criticism of globalisation is feeding racist and reactionary forces. What happened ? Certainly, we achieved a lot in terms of increasing public awareness of the effects of neoliberal globalisation and introducing a new political culture in the movement through the method of consensus, which for me was the real ‘revolutionary’ element of the Social Forum process. The process itself was a genuine innovation with the mutual recognition of different cultures and approaches, the will to understand the other, the permanent tension and search for what could unite us, the respect for that which is smaller and for the ‘peripheries’ – instead of competition, prevarication, and the use of political force to get the better of the other. It was this method of consensus that initially lent such energy to the WSF and the ESF. And it could strengthen any possible future movement.

However, in most cases in the past we were not able to translate this cultural innovation into political strength. In Italy at least, I believe that we, the movements’ activists made a mistake : we did not understand that times were changing and that we should deal also with the issue of providing political representation to the victims of the crisis. We left this issue to the political parties and confined ourselves to social work. But social work without adequate political representation is like Penelope’s shroud – inadequate political representation can destroy all the beneficial results of good social work. In Greece, in Spain, and elsewhere there have been experiments of a different kind of relation between the social and the political. Many movements in the Balkans and in the East are confronting the same problem and are searching for ways to solve it. But in Italy, where presently the political left has completely disappeared, it seems that the social actors are still afraid to touch the real problem. And I am really terrified about the next European elections : if intra-left competition and drawing the wrong lines of division (pro-Tsipras and anti-Tsipras, for example) prevail, it will be a disaster for everybody, including social actors. At the same time, it seems that the new movements are not able to use the strength of the anti-globalisation culture to send a message which can reach people’s minds, a clear, simple, and courageous message for a real global alternative : de-globalisation and re-localisation against sovereignism and neoliberalism, which go perfectly together as we can see in the case of Trump’s policies. But in order to achieve this the new movements must find a way to overcome the huge problem of fragmentation, which seems to be the rule in the present period. No common space exists anymore in which all the movements and social actors working on different issues can sit together at least to start a dialogue and exchange information. Even on the most crucial issues – migration and racism – there is no unified common space in Europe. There are links, of course, there are relations, one invites others to one’s own events, but there is no common space of convergence. One result of this absence is that we had a lot of ‘European Days of Action’ promoted by several networks – all of them very weak – but up to now we have not had a strong common mobilisation. Of course each generation has to find its own way, and I hope the present one will find its own, very soon. In the recent period, although the situation is steadily worsening, there are also some good signs. An increasing number of real activists in various countries – those who struggle in nitty-gritty everyday reality – who deal with the lives of natives and immigrants, are searching for connections among themselves and understand that they are working towards the same goals. This was evident in the aid given to immigrants when they were trying to reach Europe through the Balkan route, and now it is happening again with the rescuers of immigrants in the Mediterranean Sea or in the Alps. My hope is that out of all those brave people, who every day confront suffering and death, a strong common European revolt will emerge.

I don't think that the WSF and the ESF can be reborn - each historical phase has its own spaces and tools. We, the ones who built the largest and strongest international coalitions of the last decades, could also be helpful in the new period. First of all, by making available some precious tools to those who want them, like the relationships and the links of the WSF mailing lists. Using them, one can send a petition from the North Pole to social actors in Polynesia. Of course these lists are not updated, but nevertheless they might still be useful, and this is an opportunity that should not be wasted. We could also try to better explain to our new comrades the method we used in our best times in order to bring together different actors who, before knowing each other, were mutually suspicious to say the least. Their duty in our times is to protect Europe from becoming racist and fascist again. Despite the difficulties, despite the weaknesses, when the time come one has to fight. If one is weak, one's priority should be to try to increase one's strength, and what is needed to bring this about is radical unity.

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