

# Zagreb-Sarajevo : Resistance in the Balkans as crisis grips the EU

Monday 28 May 2012, by [TOUSSAINT Éric](#) (Date first published: 17 May 2012).

Zagreb (Croatia) is the stage for the 5<sup>th</sup> Subversive Festival being held from 5 to 19 May 2012; this will be followed on 19 and 20 May 2012 by the first "Antifest", set to take place in Sarajevo (Bosnia Herzegovina). Every evening in Zagreb, as the feature meeting of the day gets underway, the main theatre of the cinema hosting the festival is full to overflowing (600 to 700 people, with another 100 standing in the aisles or sitting on the floor). Among the speakers invited for the evening sessions: Michael Hardt, Tariq Ali, Slavoj Žižek, Saskia Sassen, Samir Amin, Bernard Cassen... Each day the various workshops are attended by a hundred or so participants coming mainly from the Balkans: student activists, union organisers, leaders of citizen associations, NGO representatives, journalists from the alternative media, etc. Among the subjects featured: "What's wrong with the EU?" , "Resistance movements in Europe", "Is another Europe possible?", "The role of the European left", "Direct or representative government?", "The long march of protestation: from the Social Forums to the Occupy movement and the Indignados", "In defence of public goods", "The current social situation in the Balkans", "De-industrialisation and worker resistance" [1]. Several films have also been shown, including Catastroika, the latest documentary by Aris Chatzistefanou and Katerina Kitidi, the directors of Debtocracy.

## **All this has been a great success**

The theme of the debt audit and the need to cancel illegitimate public debt stirred up a lively response in the media and the debates.

While 20 years have elapsed since the last European war was fought here, amid the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the restoration of a brutal capitalism, it is encouraging to observe the gradual rebirth of an anti-capitalist movement among Balkan youth and workers - a movement that cultivates internationalism, the refusal of all forms of oppression, the desire to develop different tools for a true democracy, etc. The large majority of organisers - men and women - of this important international meeting are aged between 25 and 40, which is a very good sign.

I spoke on two different panels, one on the theme of the crisis in Europe and the other, in the cinema's main theatre, on "The long march of protestation: from the Social Forums to the Occupy movement and the Indignados" (together with Bernard Cassen and Samir Amin). In particular I spoke about the ideas presented in the document "Indignadas and Indignados of the World, Unite !" [2].

For this 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Subversive Festival, the organising committee placed the proposal to establish a Balkans social forum on the agenda. The last two days were entirely devoted to the matter. During the opening debates a review was made of the shock policies applied in Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Bosnia, and the slightly less brutal ones in Slovenia and Croatia. Greece, another Balkan country well represented at the conference, is currently experiencing what the populations of several countries cited above have already gone through. What is new about the Greek situation is that events there are coinciding with a major crisis in the European Union and that a large segment of the Greek people (its urban population and the young, in particular) has

reacted by voting for the radical left. Shock therapies and resistance are not peculiar to Greece; on the other hand what is happening in Greece constitutes a possible turning point for big capital's European integration agenda. However, one cannot fail to notice the flagrant lack of solidarity between European peoples: the Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and also the Latvians, did not get the international support they should have in facing off the terrible neo-liberal policies being forced upon them (see Damien Millet and Eric Toussaint, AAA, Audit, Annulation Autre politique, Le Seuil, 2012, chapter 6). Actions of solidarity with the Greek people have been more vigorous but remain largely inadequate, and there is not (yet) an authentic European social movement of resistance to neo-liberalism. The European Social Forum has been in a state of crisis since 2008-2009 and is not showing signs of rallying. New initiatives such as the Joint Social Conference (see Résister à la Dictature de la Finance - Reconquérir la Démocratie et les Droits Sociaux !) or the creation of the ICAN network (Citizen Debt Audit Network, see Coordinated efforts in Europe and North Africa to fight against Debt and Austerity) are promising ventures which must be supported and reinforced, but they are very fragile given the neo-liberal offensive and the shock strategy applied in the majority of European countries. It remains to be seen if the Indignados movement which redeployed in Spain on 12 May 2012 will succeed in spreading as it did last year, or if it will take another form. History does not repeat itself, it stammers ... Most importantly, it is vital to react, fight and unite to change the balance of power between the peoples and the dominating 1%. The Subversive Festival and the Antifest are encouraging landmarks in this struggle.

**Eric Toussaint**

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**P.S.**

\* Translated by Judith Harris and Mike Krolikowski.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] see the complete programme on <http://www.subversivefestival.com/uploaded/Subversive%202012-EN.pdf>

[2] See on ESSF (article 25345), [The International Context of Global Outrage](#).