

# **AEPF9: Notes on the present crisis and its implications, on alternatives and bridges**

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**These notes were written for the “Vientiane Nights” discussions held during the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia Europe People’s Forum (AEPF) from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012 in Vientiane, Laos. The analysis of the crisis is focused on Europe and its implications for the Asia-Europe solidarities. Thus, it does not deal with many other issues, like the Arab region upsurges.**

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These notes aim at focusing on some of the issues to be discussed at the occasion of the AEPF Vientiane forum. They do not present a nuanced analysis of ongoing trends (which is also needed), but rather try to pinpoint major changes in the dynamics of the crisis and the new questions [1] we have to find answers to. They build up on previous exchanges in the AEPF process [2], without repeating too much what has been written earlier [3].

**1.** In the past 30 years, we have lived two major turning points in the international situation: in the early 1990s, with the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the drive to neoliberal capitalist globalization; and in the last years with the capitalist crisis centering on Northern countries (US and EU). We are faced with a classical capitalist crisis of overproduction, but within the framework of financial globalisation – and this is new. The typical crises of the globalisation era appeared two decades ago already (1997-1998), but these are now shattering the historical capitalist “centres” – with very new implications. We are not only confronting an intensification of the past crisis, but entering in a new one as well.

**2.** The internal differentiations within the South and within the North are not new. But they have reached a qualitatively different stage with the assertion of new powers (China...) and the social disintegration of some Western European countries (Greece...). Traditional imperialist powers still exist (North America, EU, Japan), but the classical North-South divide is blurred. The end of the face-to-face “East-West Two Blocs” had already radically changed the world geopolitics. We are now facing a regional crisis with a very different framework. The present Senkaku/Diaoyu « territorial crisis » in North-East Asia is only one aspect of the multifaceted “archipelago crisis” in Eastern Asia as a whole, which pits one against the other, involving as many states as China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia the Philippines... But since there are no people living on these archipelagos, neither history nor self-determination can answer the issue of contested “national sovereignty”. This is only an extreme example of the need to project an alternative people’s international security vision to that of the powers, as underlined in the recent call from Japanese pacifists [4].

**3.** The degree of differentiation within the European Union is related to the ongoing developments showing that the original project of the EU has failed – as it was doomed to fail once it was decided

to build it through neoliberal market dictates. One of the conditions for the success of the original project was an (economic) homogenization and integration of the EU space. The contrary has happened. European bourgeoisies are now adapting to this reality, preparing themselves to institutionalize the growing unequal development within the EU. Some states are taking more and more distance from the EU core (UK...). Some others are finding themselves in a structurally subordinate position, bordering sometimes on a situation of being an internal colony (part of Eastern Europe, Greece...). Others are in a process of financial integration, beyond the previous monetary and market one. It is probable that this process of differentiation within the EU is far from ended, and it is still too early to know where it will eventually lead to.

**4.** Another factor showing that the original project of the EU failed is the continuous weakening of the international role of the EU. The goal was to build a “strong” Europe, a “Power Europe” – meaning, to give birth to an integrated imperialist European power able to compete with the US and Japan (and now, as well, with the “emerging powers”). This implied the unification of European bourgeoisies, which did not happen. In such conditions, the European bourgeoisies cannot benefit as much as in the past from super-profits sucked from the South, and have to turn all the more against their own population. This is one of the several reasons for which the attacks against social rights, the welfare state, are so brutal. Class war has been unitarily declared in Europe. This is going to characterise the European scene in the coming period.

**5.** Traditional (“bourgeois”) democracy has been eroded for a long time, even in Europe, with the WTO rules, the notion of “governance” replacing the reference to the democratic must, the top-bottom way the EU was built, etc. We have reached a turning point in this process. Very explicitly, European people are now denied the right to decide their own future [5], with the adoption of the new treaty. The power of the IMF, the European Central Bank, the European Commission and Council to rule over people’s will is fast increasing. The crisis and the financial markets’ blackmail are used to impose a very authoritarian regime in the EU. The aim of a multitude of regulations, of European and international treaties is to render illegal the eventual adoption of anti-neoliberal policies and an alternative program by the people, by any elected Parliament or government; and to justify “sanctions” [6]. If one gives any meaningful content to the words “political democracy”, one can say that political democracy in Europe no longer exists. This is why the fight for “Real Democracy Now” is gaining such a central importance for people’s struggles in many countries.

**6.** Civil liberties are also fast eroding in Europe. A process of criminalisation of popular movements (trade unions, anti-GMO movements, etc.) has been ongoing for a number of years already. In the name of anti-terrorism – or the fight against illegal immigration –, waves of new repressive laws have been adopted one after the other one, which can be turned against popular struggles when needed, in contrary to the juridical European tradition, where whole sectors of the population are now treated as suspects and put under surveillance. Many features of what would have been in the past seen as elements of a state of emergency are now becoming permanent, trivialized. The need to fight for the defence of civil liberties has also become acute in the EU.

**7.** The “divide and rule” policy is playing a decisive role in EU governance, much more than was the case in the previous period: the young against the old (and vice-versa), the employed against the unemployed (and vice-versa), the long-term employed against the part-time ones (and vice-versa), the men against the women, the nationals against the migrants, the oppressed community against the other... In such a framework, sexist, xenophobic, islamophobic, racist, anti-Gipsy, anti-Semite, fundamentalists of various types of movements are on the rise in many European countries. The spectacular development of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece is a warning for all of us. The problem is that in many European countries, progressive forces proved unable to fight efficiently against this deadly policy of “divide and rule”. This is one of the major issues to address.

**9.** There have been impressive movements of protest and resistance in Europe, both on the streets and in elections, most recently in countries severely hit by the social crisis, like in Greece, Spain, Portugal... Many new forms of mobilisations have emerged (the "Occupy" movements...). There is a lot to build on and to give hope. But one should not underestimate the difficulties progressive forces are confronted with in Europe. To a large extent, present political generations hardly address the need to organize in permanence, whether in trade unions, social movements and parties; this may be their main Achilles' heel, beyond their many other qualities (not to be burdened by the defeats of the past as my generation's...). More generally, for most European countries, it is the first time since WWII that progressive forces are facing a crisis of social decomposition. Let us remember that in the 1960s, in a country like France, there was a deep crisis of the regime, but there was no broad structural unemployment. The last revolutionary crisis was in the mid-1970s, in Portugal. This means that progressive forces are unprepared to answer many features of the present situation, simply because they do not have the experience, the know-how. It will take time to learn the new.

**10.** We are not lacking in alternatives. Many demands of yesterday are still valid, and many new demands have been elaborated (for example, on the climate and energy issues). What is still insufficiently worked out is the coherence of our alternatives. The common defence of environment and employment. The common fight against the oil and the nuclear diktats. The common need to a radical change in the energy and transport sectors. The common preconditions to implement any radical alternative policies - to begin with the building of a public financial sector, to break the back of the financial private powers and to give the means to implement democratically-decided public policies. If we do not build bridges among the various fields of struggles, the danger is that some solutions praised in one of them will often prove disastrous in another one. We are faced with a multi-faceted crisis: social, environmental, of established paradigms and cultures... This is why the need to ensure the coherence of our alternatives is vital.

**11.** We also know from where to start social transformation: from the social, the democratic and the environmental needs, as opposed to the starting point of capitalist logic: private profit. The challenge here is for the social sectors to actually be a direct agent of this radical social transformation, in their own field. In the case of the peasantry, a movement as Via Campesina addresses with its program the whole range of transformative issues: defence of peasants' own rights; protection of the social rural fabric (against rural exodus), with a condition to maintain or develop collective services (education, health, etc.); resistance against the dictatorship of agribusiness; defence of peoples' rights (food sovereignty...), protection of the environment; fight against climate change... In the same way, car industry or energy workers could be the agents of both the defence of their own rights (employment, wages, working conditions, health and security...), and actors of the whole transformation of the transport and energy sectors. But this is yet far from the case today. To overcome this situation is certainly not an easy challenge.

**12.** More bridges have also to be built between the North and the South, with continuous changes in the pattern of internationalist, people to people relationships. With neoliberal globalisation, for the first time ever, common policies were implemented the world around. This meant that very similar types of resistance against these policies spread in the North and the South, quite often with common demands. Common, "horizontal" solidarities developed, alongside more traditional North to South solidarities. With the capitalist crisis hitting that hard in significant parts of the North, a new dimension appears: people in (part of) the North are for the first time since WWII facing issues which were previously typical of Southern countries. For example, the response to the debt crisis by European movements has been directly borrowed from the Third World legacy (the articulation between audit, moratorium, cancellation of the debt...). We do have a sector of urban poor populations quickly growing in various countries of the North. The South has a long experience in organizing the urban poor, which we lack. It is not demagoguery to say that popular movements in the

North have today a lot to learn from the South. For sure, there are still deep differences between typical countries of the South and of the North. But maybe we should think afresh at the meaning of South-South and North-South relationships.

**13.** Bridges have also to be built within given sectors. Migrants' rights, for example, are one of the major contemporary issues. The link between the work done in the countries of origin (including the organization of the families of migrants) and in the host countries seems, as a rule, much too weak. Migrants have to be defended as workers, as foreigners facing racism, and also often as women confronted with sexism, as human beings whose dignity is denied... So there is need for a comprehensive policy involving movements at both ends of the migratory process (which can be South-South and not only South-North), the labour movement, anti-racist and anti-sexist movements, human rights organizations... There are probably more coalitions of organizations in Asia able to address the issue of "bridges" between sectoral programs, sets of demands and movements, between issues, than today in Europe.

**14.** The "divide and rule" policy is not specific to Europe, of course. Imperialist policies ("war on terror", "clash of civilisations") are also initiated from the US. Communalisms and conflicting religious fundamentalisms, anti-migrants and xenophobic movements are very much a reality in Asia (and in the rest of the world). The call for tolerance will never be sufficient to roll back such powerful trends. It is necessary to oppose to the "divide and rule" policies, a sense of common struggles for a common future of the toiling masses, beyond community, religious or cultural divides - a fight against exploitive and oppressive social relations, for an emancipatory social transformation. And the revival of a collective hope, which was offered in the past by the socialist perspective.

**15.** Last but not least, the issue is no longer simply "how to resist", but "how to win". The stakes are so high! Nothing significant is being done to put a brake to climate change, whatever the consequences are for humanity. The global ecological crisis is deepening, with disastrous effects on soils, air, waters, biodiversity... More social onslaughts are on the agenda. We are faced with "pure capitalism", imposing the commodification of the planet and of all social relations. But there is no ready-made answer to such a question. In most countries, the reflection on strategies dried up some thirty years ago. Since then, nevertheless, new historical experiences occurred. It is time to start again to think of strategy. Because strategy is the bridge between the present situations of resistance and the conditions to actually open the way to another world that is free from capitalist domination.

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## Footnotes

[1] Or a new framework of old issues.

[2] See in particular Dr. Khush-Hal S. Lagdhyan and Vineet Thakur, "[9<sup>th</sup> AEPF New Delhi preparatory conference on the crisis and people's alternatives: a report](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article26621)", ESSF (article 26621) : <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article26621> and Pierre Rousset "On the European Union's crisis and the dynamics of resistance", ESSF (article 23310), [On the European Union's crisis and the dynamics of resistance](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article23310), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article23310>.

[3] One thing which has to be repeated is that Europe is very diverse. Nothing of what is said here is true for all countries of the EU, or as much true.

[4] See “Japanese Citizens’ Appeal: Stop the Vicious Cycle of Territorial Disputes’, ESSF (article 26585), [Grèce-Allemagne : qui doit à qui ? \(1\) L’annulation de la dette allemande à Londres en 1953, http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article26585](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article26585)

[5] Which does not mean that they really had the power to decide in the past...

[6] I do not mean here that one should no longer fight on the electoral field to gain a majority for an alternative program and break with the neoliberal paradigm, but it is now impossible to substantially change the social and economic policy of a country within the existing legal framework of the EU. Any progressive Parliament and government will have to put in opposition the democratic legitimacy of the people’s will with the illegitimate law of the EU. They will have to denounce existing treaties, which the EU institutions and the IMF will use to try to crush people’s choices.