

Self-Determination and the Future of Europe

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The hundredth anniversary of Poland gaining independence raises many emotions. Over the past two years the right-wing discourse, including on historical and contemporary issues, as well as the future of Poland in a Europe in crisis, has dominated in Poland.

The Social Forum for Exchange of Ideas organised this meeting in Warsaw in objection to this ruling narrative. During this meeting participants attempted to answer the question: is there a right to self-determination in Europe today?

Taking part in the discussion were: **Mickey Brady** – MP from the Irish party Sinn Féin; **Marga Ferré** – Secretary for Political Elaboration of Izquierda Unida, Spain, and member of the transform! europe Board; and **Tomasz Truskawa** – socialist activist in Poland and a member of the board of the Free Speech Association.

The discussion was divided into three parts. During the first section the panellists introduced their opinions about the changes that have occurred in the area of self-determination, with particular reference to the countries from which they are from. In the second part the participants considered the factors influencing the development of separatist tendencies and the difficulties with solving the conflicts behind them. They also discussed the issue of rising authoritarianism, the growth of the far-right and the lack of international solidarity. The final section was focussed on the issue of whether Europe is heading towards integration or disintegration.

The panellists drew attention to the differences within the separatist movements and at how some of these have a left-wing character. This is the case in Ireland, and to some extent in Catalonia and the Basque country. It was noted that in contrast to right-wing movements, these left-wing separatist movements are very egalitarian and alongside demands for independence they campaign on other social and political issues. The discussion centred on matters such as the effect of the economic crisis on separatist movements, the negative policies of national governments and international financial institutions. It was noted how transnational institutions and cartels also have a strong influence on the fate of Europe. The European Union is not favourable towards the formation of new entities of international law, drawing attention to the economic consequences associated with this situation (the best example is its position on the Catalan case).

Attention was also turned to the historical causes of the present situation in which the right to self-determination does not exist and at the relationship between local and European institutions. This led to questions about whether power should be shifted to the European level. In order for this to happen the left would have to be strengthened in European politics and the EU reformed in order that it became an organisation based upon the socialist principles of social fairness. It was discussed how it is difficult to say exactly in which direction the EU is going and that there are tendencies and possibilities of it moving towards disintegration or further integration.

The interventions made by the panellists instigated a number of contributions from other participants in the meeting. This included a number of criticisms of current European Union policy

and the rise of nationalism and the far-right. It was mentioned that there was a need to return the European Union to its citizens and increase the activities of the left within it. A number of times it was mentioned that the left needs to return to its roots in order to rebuild itself.

The meeting took place on 4 February in Warsaw and was jointly staged by transform! europe and the Naprzód Foundation.

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