

# European Social Forum: Document from Lisbon EPA

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**The Lisbon European Preparatory Assembly (EPA) of the ESF took place March 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> - April the 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The process of European Social Forum is in a crucial moment. It needs to move forward.

It bares the risk to fall into repetition. Many difficulties are due to the fact that many issues are very controversial in each country (e.g. the problem raised by the constitutional treaty and the problems raised by the increasing militarization of national and European policies) and some groups and organizations don't even know or refer anymore to this space.

Therefore we need a profound discussion about strategy, because the neo-liberal policies are expanding as quickly as wars and military confrontations and repression does too.

*That's why we urgently need to take up the challenge of the mobilisation of the G8 in Rostock and become the space where to organize in Europe for the Global Day of Action launched by the WSF-IC for 26/27 January 2008. The 1<sup>st</sup> of June in Rostock there will be the Assembly of movements which is going to be prepared in an open and inclusive way the day before.*

Two big and important occasions for the ESF process.

The European Social Forum process is living through the EPA (European Preparatory Assembly), the Assembly of Movements, the network meetings, the communication tools we use as the mailing lists of EPA and network, the websites (\*), the working space. All these spaces are always open to the contribution of individuals, groups and movements and we urge a new enlargement of them involving more subjects.

**General note to improve the European Preparatory Assemblies, the Assembly**

# **of Social Movements, the Networks**

## **1. Assemblies of Social movements**

Given the fact that the ESF from now on will take place every two years, there is a need to dedicate a special space for Assemblies of Social movements in order to discuss strategies, call for action and mobilisations, link the mobilisations in different countries, decide on big common events. These meetings can be called in the same w/e of the EPA or in other specific occasions. During the assembly we need to provide special space in order to discuss common actions or important events (eg. the next Global Day of Action).

## **2. EPA structure**

The question of the relation between ESF and EU institutions was brought up, whether we see ourselves clearly in conflict with them and, as European civil society, alternative to them. This would have implications for choosing venues for EPAs and ESFs e.g. whether they should be at the same venues as EU summits (no consensus in the workgroup)

EPAs have to be structured in order to be more efficient and more attractive to people who want to participate.

During the EPA we should especially invite the local movements from the hosting city/country to present their activities.

We should encourage new countries and towns to host the coming EPAs, especially (as it was decided already in 2003), to organize at least one EPA every year in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the end of every EPA the organizers distribute the list of participating organizations and the number of individuals and how many of them paid fees and raised funds.

At the end of each EPA will be decided the date and the venue of the following one. Every time a rotating group will be in charge of the preparation of the following EPA. The group will be formed (respecting political and other diversities ) by people from the new EPA host country, previous EPA host country, last ESF country, following ESF country, representatives of Eastern European movements, Babel and the Memory group.

This group has to

- Collect minutes, documents, decisions, open problems from the previous EPA and networks and publish them
- Formulate the draft agenda for the coming EPA. The draft will be circulated through the lists for remarks and objections and then the coordination group will publish the final agenda at least 2 months in advance. This could have a mobilizing effect on the local/country movements and increase the discussion inside the different countries.
- Collect proposal linked with the agenda

## **3. Networks**

We need smart crossover discussions in order not to split networks off the general process. More time should be planned for discussions after the reports of the networks, with the possibility of open spaces following in order to let the networks discuss the connecting topics and problems jointly. The coordinating group should facilitate such discussions. Networks should encourage the inclusion of East-European movements and representatives in their meetings.

#### **4. Languages and translation**

We have to encourage people, especially disadvantaged ones (eg. unemployed, homeless, Roma) to come and express themselves. We need to find other financial resources to bring those people in, as well as a better cooperation with Babels in order to enable interpreting in working groups and meetings of networks. We also need to discuss with Babels to open a new campaign in order to increase the number of volunteers for this purpose. This concerns also some other languages as well, eg. Kurdish.

We should ask at the beginning of all meetings for people who would like to intervene and are in need of interpreting (and find the interpreters on the spot). We should also be flexible, not restricting to 3 min people having language problems.

We encourage to use non-commercial practices every time. We support the way of view of "Social territory" as we had decided before the 4<sup>th</sup> ESF in Athens. We propose to the next ESF organizing committee to use BABELS and Alternative Interpretating System (A.L.I.S.) for translation as a political decision.

A working group on the improvement of EPA and ESF has to carry on working.

#### **5. Tools (websites, mailing lists, workspace)**

Tools can help the participants of EPA, Assembly of Social movements and networks to communicate in the time when they are not in contact directly.

- Workspace

In order to address the criticism about the difficulty of using the workspace and the risk that networks will not use it, Pierre George is going to send a very easy guideline for newbies to use this tools. People are asked to use it and feed it with info. In the next EPA, we will evaluate the experience people have done.

- Memory group

In the next EPA there will be a space for the memory group in order to make a presentation of all the website tools connected with the ESF process and take decisions about the tools we are going to use and their accessibility to people in and out the process.

- Official Website

The participants of EPA have to decide about what to do with the ESF official Website (update, money, aim, structure). This discussion must start with a document issued by the website workgroup formed in Frankfurt with the people working on this website and open to all the people who want to participate and are involved in the media scheme. The web site has to become also the space to find information about regional, national struggles.  
websites connected with the ESf process

[www.fse-esf.org](http://www.fse-esf.org) main website of the ESF

[www.euromovements.info/yearbook](http://www.euromovements.info/yearbook) is an open collective multilingual narration about the European Social Forum process and the participants points of view. It is based on wiki so it is open for further developments from the visitors-participants. Around 300 printed pages

[www.workspace.fse-esf.org](http://www.workspace.fse-esf.org) is the ESF working space

[www.openlibrary.info](http://www.openlibrary.info) E-library on and for transformation. Open archive of articles and materials on the ESF

other links in the home page of the main ESF website, click on Memoria

## **6. Decision process and implementation**

A big problem is always not only how to take decision in a very open and inclusive way but also how to implement them. We need rules to gain more efficiency. The facilitators of debates during the EPA should try to allow more people to express themselves. We recommend some general rules:

- a) Nomination of moderators should respect equality (gender, geography, etc.)
- b) The moderators have to come to work informed and prepared.
- c) At the beginning of the process they have to present the rules for consensus.
- d) The plenary debates should be structured according to the agreed agenda.

The proposals from the methodology group and the EPA group is to issue a guideline of decisions that must be updated and available at EPA's and website. The memory group can help to build it. There is no general consensus on this proposals.

### **General note to improve the preparation of the ESF event**

Next ESF will take place in summer 2008 in Scandinavia, in the Oresund region. The process will involve the cities of Malmo and Copenhagen but the main event will take place in one of these places. The common initiative group (which involves people from Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland) is working on establishing the necessary condition for it.

With regard to the participation of political parties the general opinion is that they should neither have a separate space in the ESF nor be among the organisers even if this attitude seems to some "hypocritical". This does not exclude the participation of party members for special sessions of political dialogue, which could be particularly attractive also for the public opinion.

It is not possible for the European Social Forum event to have a unique focus although there should be an emphasis on some important issues like:

1. the European policies: linking together all the experiences of social struggles (trade unions and movements) in response to the neo-liberal policies of the European Union in order to build real alternatives. As far as the relationship with the movements is concerned we should consider the ESF as a space where as many struggles as possible should link to each other. Particular emphasis should be given to the networking and enlargement of the movements from both EU and non-EU parts of Eastern Europe in order to overcome the still dominant Western European culture in all the ESF process.

2. the position and responsibilities of Europe in the world, in order to change the neo-colonial policies towards the countries of the South, for example in Africa. This has been a central point in the discussions during the World Social Forum in Nairobi. That's why opinion leaders and representatives of civil society from the South and from all over the world should be invited and be involved in the next ESF in great number. We should establish a particularly close link between the

ESF and the WSF considering the Social Forum as a process which includes the activities of networks and social movements on every scale (world, continental, national and local).

3. We should focus on searching alternatives to competition, the base of neo-liberal economy, by promoting solidarity as a value as well within Europe as towards the outside.

4. Put a particular emphasis on environmental questions.

## **Methodology proposals for the ESF merging process: to decide seminars, assemblies, workshops at the ESF**

### **1. Merging process**

At least 6 month before ESF, the participants of the open EPA (which is going to take place in Scandinavia in September) have to receive proposals of themes to be included in the program of the next ESF from networks, organisations , groups and individuals

The participants of the next EPA will analyse them and select the general themes for the next ESF through a political discussion, before starting the merging process

Those themes must “speak” to the people and be directly linked with their practical concerns, with struggles and movements

During the merging process, networks will be responsible for the areas they cover facilitating also proposals from groups not involved in the networks. For other themes a specific open program group will be in charge of facilitating the merging.

### **2. Self organized spaces**

At the ESF it will be important to create several self organised spaces dedicated to specific themes. These spaces will have the aim of increasing transversality amongst organisations referring to them but should also promote activities between each other in order to build links between different themes.

### **3. Interlinked seminars**

We have to build an experiment of seminars where transversality is the main focus

### **4. Women participation**

There has already been a discussion in the women network about women day, the assembly, .... Therefore our focus is only on the visibility of women. Women inclusion has to be seen more during the ESF and the whole process. One proposal is to maintain the quota’s rule. Women have to be in the panels (at least 50%) of all the meetings including facilitating assemblies, EPA and network meetings. For the seminar the program group is going to give priority to proposal where the people commit themselves to balance women and men...(this commitment has to be part of the registration process form).

### **5. Diversities balance**

In all seminars it will be important a special commitment by the organizer to include different point of views in the panel to increase the debate by genders, age, geographical and cultural backgrounds,

different abilities and so on

## **6. Funding**

A new working Group to facilitate funding matters was suggested to make proposals with help from people that have participated in previous organizing committees in previous ESFs. There is a proposal for a collection of money made from organizations that participate in the ESF process (with different rates for different regional, finance strength etc organizations) to help the participation of people in need. This can be managed by the working group under the responsibility of the EPA assembly.

## **7. Security and demonstrations**

No one knows better than people from the host country the situation about security during demonstrations. We have to organize our own self defence better and we have to work together in this direction. We propose before any European Demonstration to have a special meeting to inform each other and prepare it sharing responsibilities.

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