

New attempt and old problems

WSF, ESF, ECSA - in search of the right path

With the founding of the 'European Common Space for Alternatives' as a new common platform for Europe's social movements and its first public appearance at the conference in Marseille in March 2024, the question of the causes of the European Social Forum's failure logically arose.

Pierre Khalfa from Paris, a fellow campaigner from the founding days of the European Social Forum at the beginning of the century, has attempted an answer. In a perceptive article, he analyses the contradictions and identifies the many reasons that determined the birth and demise of the ESF. And at the end, he ventures a prognosis for the new attempt called ECSA and gives its founders some advice along the way.

I unanimously agree with his thorough and accurate analysis of an organised movement of the European left in the profound economic and political changes of our first quarter of the century. However, I strongly disagree with my French friend's conclusion.

Khalfa identifies the fundamental contradiction with the claim, inherited from the World Social Forum, to be both an open space for discussion and an alliance for action. He lists the divergent forces and refers to their fragmented fields of interest, which together did not allow for a common strategy and mobilisation. He concludes by detailing how globalisation changed after the 2008 financial crisis. Civil society actors followed the strengthened role of nation states. To resolve the contradiction between discussion and action space, he now recommends that ECSA activists put 'concrete mobilisation at the forefront'.

It is also difficult for me to predict that this new attempt at a left-wing European project will be a resounding success. However, it would be criminal not to try anything at all in the face of the growing extreme right and intensified austerity policies in Europe. Fully aware of the problems described by Pierre, a perceived majority of ECSA activists accept their inability to be the site of common mobilisation at this historic moment.

In an open space for political debate that is well organised in terms of variety and diversity, the first step should be to explore whether, how and under what conditions joint mobilisations are possible. The causes of earlier failures have hardly changed, and the fragmentation of the fields of interest has increased. Whether mobilisation against the extreme right is possible as a unifying project is under discussion, as is the StopReamEurope peace initiative. Without this necessary process of self-understanding, the failure of ECSA would be inevitable with a 'concrete mobilisation at the forefront'.

Hugo Braun