

Input for the Assembly „People united against the troika“ from Austria

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A) Experiences of struggles in your country and movement against the Troika, austerity and the neoliberal policies of economic governance.

- Which campaigns and strategies have you been doing in your country so far?

Last year Attac Austria has done a campaign against the fiscal compact, trying to push members of the Austrian Parliament to vote against it. From the progressive camp, the Green MPs voted against the Fiscal Compact as well as one member of the Social Democratic party. The fiscal compact in the end got the needed majority.

Following this experience Attac Austria has started a campaign in January called „Refounding Europe“, trying to build a broader alliance among progressive groups which oppose the economic governance policies designed and decided at the EU level.

In May 2013 a platform of personalities including persons from social movements, trade unions, academia and political parties (Members of the National Parliament, the European Parliament and provincial parliaments from the Social Democratic and Green Party) has gone public, calling to say no to the competitiveness pact and the „Troika for all“ plans (In Austria: www.europa-geht-anders.eu). The persons engaging in it are working towards informing persons within their organisations/parties, to inform journalists and create a public debate on this issues and like that to build bottom up on the Austrian politicians, in particular the Austrian chancellor. The platform built is not only one in Austria but also personalities in France, Germany and Italy engaged in this process. The platform was launched in parallel in these four countries on May 15.

- What are positive and negative experiences as regards achieving your objectives?

We are slowly managing to build a platform of persons working and active in different institutions and with a strategic action plan on how to create inside organisations discussions about EU policies but also in the public. Because of being critical towards the EU is considered still by many leaders of established organisations (such as Trade Unions for instance) as being against the EU as such, which is the position of the extreme right wing parties in Austria, building a strong platform among organisations is not yet possible. Saying openly NO to the EU austerity plans is still a challenge for many organisations. Given the fact that the „crisis“ is not felt that much in Austria or in many cases impacts such as lower wage increases are not directly associated with these policies, it is also hard to mobilize people in terms of demonstrations for instance.

- What are obstacles and challenges as regards the objectives of your campaign/struggles?

One key obstacle/challenge is that media (journalists) are not very much informed about the next steps and it is also hard to interest them or make sure that critical reporting is done. This is also linked to the above described link – EU criticism = to be against the EU as well as the structure/ownership of Austrian media.

Creating a broader public debate has been difficult so far, we need to develop ideas on how to use more alternative media channels to not be too much dependent on official media.

The other key obstacle is to build a real link between people's everyday life and the EU Economic governance policies as well as to build a story that is not only based on the resistance dimension. The competitiveness pact is a bit easier – as it allows to speak of unemployment. People are to some extent tired of the „Crisis“ discourse and less likely to be motivated to engage in activism and struggle if it is only to „Stop“ something.

We also find it challenging to build our campaign/struggle in the short term against the competitiveness pact (immediate objective is to avoid that this is on the agenda of the June summit), while at the same time build a more longterm campaign/work against economic governance/neoliberal policies in Europe and for a social, ecological and democratic Europe.

B) With a view to strengthening our struggles and to work towards campaigning against these policies united across Europe

- What are concrete ideas and proposals to move in this direction that you would like to bring to Athens and discuss/share with the others?

We are planning/discussing to organise a meeting in Austria in October (after elections to the national parliament which is on the last weekend in September), inviting the first signatories of the call „Europa geht anders“ and others campaigning against the competitiveness pact/economic governance. The idea is to get to know each other, share experiences as regards where we are in our work in the countries and discuss ideas for next steps/strategies.

- What are ideas for strategies?

For countries like Austria – where the crisis is not felt so strongly yet – one key strategy is to build knowledge and resistance within existing key actors such as T.U. but also other groups – e.g. environmental NGOs (expose the links to the ecological question).

Another idea could be to create a communication line in which those who are supporting/advancing the current EU policies are marked as those that are to bury the project of a peaceful, social, democratic Europe.

- What are challenges or obstacles we have to address in your view? What are potential ways of addressing those?

We think it would be good to think of ideas as regards how to work together on better communication strategies/explaining economic governance and its impacts for people. One idea could also be to pick up the experiences of Spanish people sending a message to German people – the basic idea being that people create messages that they send to people in other countries. We need to create tools that touch people (those not informed/interested yet) and that link the struggle against the plans with the vision to struggle for a different/better Europe. The question is if there could be one joint concrete positive demand that we could agree upon. One idea could be e.g. the call for a democratic convention process (based e.g. on the Icelandic model as regards the process).

- What regional and/or local differences for carrying out those strategies do we have to take into consideration?

Crisis is perceived differently in Austria (and e.g. Germany, Scandinavia) – also the role of the state in these countries is seen differently (generally more positively valued). Strong bias in the public debate as regards EU criticism = being against EU = being nationalist/right wing/extreme right.

- What resources are needed for these strategies (communication, money, people, etc.)

- For communication strategy – advise of people good in this and money e.g. for videos/cartoons etc.
- A more continuous dialogue/coordination among groups working on this at the European level – e.g. via conference calls and two strategy meetings per year
- Persons that can follow up on jointly agreed things that are useful for all (this probably also requires than funds for coordination/follow up work)