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European Social Forum

# Preparing for Florence

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**Following the success of the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January of this year, the first European Social Forum (ESF), will take place in Florence, Italy from November 7-10, 2002. The movements involved in its preparation met in Vienna on May 11-12, 2002, with a full agenda.**

The Austrian capital had been chosen to facilitate the presence of participants from Eastern Europe and the Balkans; a choice that proved successful, with around 40 people participating from 12 countries in that region. Overall, the Vienna meeting can be considered as very representative. Among the biggest national delegations were those from France, Britain, Greece and Italy. On the other hand, northern Europe was not too heavily represented.

On the lines of Porto Alegre, the ESF will be an open collective space, a place for meetings, exchanges and convergences of activists. To provide a broader opening to participants who cannot represent an organization, membership will be individual. The ESF will take up the themes of Porto Alegre: resistance and alternatives to neo-liberal policies and the logic of war. Given the evolution of the situation in Europe, it is proposed to add a third theme: the fight against racism and xenophobia.

Another discussion concerned the modalities of the participation of political parties. Under the Charter of the WSF, parties do not constitute a component of the 'process' initiated in Porto Alegre. They are nonetheless involved around the WSF (notably via the Local Authorities Forum, organized by the mayor of Porto Alegre) and inside it (through the Parliamentary Forum). Moreover, in some European countries (like Britain) parties are involved in the coalitions planning for Florence, although this is not generally the case.

The Vienna meeting took some new decisions. The social movements are free to prepare for Florence in each country in whatever forms they wish. However, at the European level, the profile of the WSF should be put forward: as an initiative of the trade union and social movements, NGOs, associations and activist networks. In times of high visibility (central debates, press conferences), parties will not intervene in their own right, but they can be present within the forum. A future meeting will discuss the eventual organization of a dialogue between social movements and political parties.

The Florence meeting is not only being prepared by the national coalitions. International networks are also involved, like the European coordination of the World Women's March. To avoid debates only involving people who feel themselves directly concerned, it is planned to introduce the theme of women's rights in a cross-disciplinary manner in a number of plenaries and workshops, such as those dealing with employment, financial institutions or the debt. Some more specific 'women's' debates are nonetheless planned, on themes like democracy and citizenship, violence and prostitution, trade union action and so on. Finally, phases of 'dialogue' are envisaged, notably between the feminist and anti-globalisation movements.