

Introduction

All of the latest major events in European politics have had a twofold implication. Wherever the challenges grew, the potential for a progressive European civil society also became visible. From austerity politics to free trade negotiations, from the refugee movement to Brexit, from nationalist governments to the rise of far right movements: in all these cases European citizens organised themselves and stood up for a Europe of openness, tolerance and solidarity. But despite these signs of hope, the overall political situation undoubtedly requires much more in terms of coordinated answers from a progressive left. The challenges, with right-wing populism at the top of the list, can only be faced through broad alliances that have the capacity for strategic political thinking and acting. In order to reclaim discourses, streets, parliaments and governments, liberal civil society has to “get out of its comfort zone” as Pia Eberhardt from the Anti-TTIP protests puts it: “Let’s not lecture ourselves on our positions, but let’s focus on what we have in common”.

Therefore the main question of this chapter is: how can existing actors and networks improve their cooperation in order to build capacity and gain political influence? Finding answers to this question, which has often been a struggle for the internationalist left, is now more important than ever with major elections ahead that will set the course for the future of Europe. Which approaches will help stop the paradoxical development of nationalism becoming the most dominant internationalist movement again?

By bringing together some more general thoughts with examples of successful European protests and movements, we hope to not only present important lessons learned from past experiences, but also to outline possible paths for the future. Lorenzo Marsili, co-founder of European Alternatives, opens the chapter with reflections on the need of establishing

democracy beyond the nation-state. It follows with his conversation with Barbara Spinelli, Member of the European Parliament for the European United Left group (GUE/NGL), about fundamental strategic questions concerning the future of the European Union. Dieter Plehwe, senior research fellow at the Berlin Social Sciences Centre, traces back the dominant neoliberal ideology and shows the role political networks played in its path to hegemony. Andreas Karitzis, former member of Syriza, asks which conclusions the left should draw from the case of Syriza and Sophie Bloemen, policy advisor and co-founder of the Commons network, proposes the commons as a unifying political vision and practice. Three interviews follow: Pia Eberhardt presents the case of the Anti-TTIP protest and ideas for what other movements can learn from it. Two new movements from Eastern Europe follow: we talk with Razem (the new political party in Poland) and Demos (a civic coalition in Romania) about their origins and the ways they are organising. The chapter ends with an exciting example of political organisation and culture beyond the nation state, Europe and state-based democracy: The Rojava Revolution that happened in the middle of the Syrian civil war. Jonas Staal, visual artist and scholar, introduces the Revolution and the model of stateless democracy together with Sheruan Hassan, member of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Staal ends the chapter with an interview with Salih Muslim, Co-Chair of PYD, about the fight for democratic autonomy and the concept of democratic confederalism. To illustrate these two contributions from Jonas Staal, we also included a series of his pictures on the construction of the parliamentary assembly in Rojava.