

6th Asia-Europe People's Forum
3-6 September 2006, Helsinki, Finland

Plenary Session on Economic Security and Social Rights (Cluster 2)
(Tuesday 5 September 2006, 9h – 11h)

Since the last Asia-Europe People's Forum (Hanoi 2004) we have witnessed contradictory developments in Asia as well as in Europe: on the one side the continuation of “market opening measures and financial economic considerations predominating over social ones” (Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation), the ongoing process of liberalisation and privatisation, leading to a global restructuring of labour markets with decreasing wages, increasing informal labour and social security, the further withdrawal of the state from providing social services to all people with negative consequences for millions of people. On the other side we are witnessing growing resistance against the current form of globalisation through social movements, NGOs and trade unions all over the world. At the same time we can observe some developments which stay in sharp contrast to the official multilateral credo:

- Great economic powers, the EU among them, try to circumvent the problems of multilateral liberalisation through bilateral Free Trade Agreements (in case of Europe Partnership and Cooperation Agreements), which in many cases allows even more liberalisation than the WTO-agreements
- Endeavours to create regional economic agreements have gained strength, although they differ in Asia and Europe. In Asia “ASEAN + 3” is further developing plans of East Asian Economic cooperation, in Europe the enlargement of the European Union has further developed the economic space.
- At the same time we see in lots of countries a wave of protectionism or “economic patriotism” trying to prevent the buyout of enterprises which are counted as of being of national importance.

Also on the peoples' side we observe contradictory developments: in all countries there are “winners” and “losers” of globalisation. The distribution of economic gains is unequal. Although in some countries there has been progress in poverty reduction, the situation of the poor has been worsening. That does not only describe the situation in Asia. In Europe too, the “welfare state” has been eroding and social insecurity is growing. Today there also the risk of poverty constitutes a major threat for large parts of the population. Within the AEPF-framework the conference provides opportunity for stocktaking of the current developments and for further discussions how we can react on these developments and promote economic and social security, including poverty reduction, health care, education, labour issues, water security etc. Which role do international organisations play in this? What people's organisation in Asia and Europe can do to promote those developments goals, protect the interests of the vulnerable groups, farmers, migrants, people with disabilities etc.?

Plenary speakers:

Surin Pitsuwan (Member of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, Thailand)

Susan George (Chair of the Planning Board, Transnational Institute, France)

and a Finnish speaker (to be confirmed)