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Notes and reflections from my anti-NATO, anti-military days in Strasbourg, April 2-5, 2009

I thought that the police are for protecting people- as they were at a big Women in Black demonstration in Belgrade some time ago when we were a visiting group from Denmark.

OUR GROUP

Luckily we all ended up unhurt and together in the end - perhaps if there is another big demonstration like this, each of us should try to have a list with all our names and mobile phone numbers.

I did feel some effects of tear gas in my eyes and throat when there was suddenly some tumult where some of us were resting on the grass under some trees to the southeast and many black ("Black Block") youngsters came running. Going back between all the cars to the place in front of the tribune I saw that everybody now were at the other end with banners leaving the place through the area where we had entered. But on my way, intending to catch up with the rear of the demonstration, I met Ursula *and we were met by 2 guards in masks telling us to get some, but then they discovered they didn't have any left ! Just after that we got Annelise on the phon : she was standing all alone near the stage -- and where were we? Ursula fetched her and the three of us plus a young man from Holland who also had been 'left behind' walked the littered road after the demonstration. The young man left us for other company waiting at the first of two bridges, still blocked by massive police forces.*

We intended to walk back the way Ursula had come in the morning - but that was also not possible. Luckily our hitchhiking worked in the end. And there is a long and nice story to tell about the young French couple who picked us up and their 3 nice teenage daughters and the pictures from part of the demo they sent us. They were angry with the way 'their' police and Strasbourg were acting and handling this event.

There are some lessons learned from big demonstrations in Copenhagen (Annelise knows) and from Stockholm (Emma and Josefine told) how potential riot situations can be handled in good cooperation between the police and demonstration committee/ trained anti-violence guards - with 'invisible' police on stand-by everywhere, who are only called into action if the turmoil grows too difficult for the civil guards to handle.

We should demand that such policing techniques became a common part of every European police force.

At our table in Illkirch (Congress location) it was a pleasure for me to catch people and have short talks with tens of men and women, who then usually ended up taking some of our papers. BUT I think we should, some of us at least, learn more about display and presentation of better designed folders, books and other papers + also some gadgets to sell or give away, just to catch their eyes. Still, talking with people is best, I keep thinking. And only a few of our leaflets and other stuff were not given out . . .

I agree with Irmgard – we shouldn't always be so modest as to accept such 'grassroots' old conditions for workshops and meetings – new equipment and rooms are needed for good communication now. Was this not a town used to conferences and serious meetings? Well in a way it (the sports center hosting the congress) was charming and the ambience was good.

Future strategy will have to include several communication 'fields':

- where decisions are taken i.e. governments, administrations, parliaments, political parties (not only the left), boards of many kinds, specific persons, local authorities, all sorts of 'money-distribution' points, e.g. banks, pension funds,
- media of all sorts
- ordinary citizens like neighbours, family, colleagues, everyone you are in connection with in your daily life.

Our goals should be constantly learning and training how to express our feminist and non-violent convictions so as to get into a good dialogue going, how to address authorities so as to be taken seriously, how to catch the eye of an already inundated media.

Most of us have some training and experience in handling conflicts, but I find that continuing such training is important - incl. the difficult area involving conflicts among ourselves.

Who among us are trained in training others?

In our own group I think we moved from the usual chaos in the beginning of all female gatherings (like Thursday evening of women coming in and chatting when they should be disciplined to listen...) which allows for accepted consensus in the end without hindering a lot of good ideas and understanding to start growing in most of us, not a glorious endpoint to come down to earth and daily drudgery from, but some days on the road. Thanks (to other participants and organizers) for the papers and the summing up of the themes, and for the quiet and nonhysterical way of getting through the shortcomings of these days.

“..an effective women’s vigil . .” like the one in front of the stage (which was a good place), or several like where we got out of the taxis and stood waiting for the passage of the bridge to open (but of course we couldn’t know how much time we would have), also just across our nearby Pont Kuss and at the end of the day somewhere on the Place de la Gare . . well, it was discussed and decided.

Many of us manage fairly well in several languages, but do we show sufficient patience towards those less fluent in a foreign language? Very few are good interpreters like Cindy’s multilingual ability.

The many papers diligently prepared for our workshop and the no less challenging bundling of them for the presentation are good stuff to work with for the less able like myself. Sure I would like to have taken part in the discussion groups , but I already had plenty of input to make this Strasbourg adventure worthwhile.

Not least meeting you, known and till then unknown, fellow amazons + a lot of young men and women, kind and caring and engaged. This overshadows my memories from these mixed days in and around Strasbourg and has already shown to be contagious to people here in my homecircles.