

DiEM and the movements – Reply to Open Letter by John Malamatinas

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The news is out: DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe – Movement) will be launched in Berlin on 9th February, at the Volksbuehne Theatre in Berlin (pictured above). Before the official announcement and the manifesto saw the light of day, DiEM25 has attracted attention all over Europe. A few days ago, John Malamatinas, wrote an open letter addressed to me regarding DiEM25 in Neues Deutschland. Click [here](#) for the original German version and [here](#) for an English translation. For my reply to John’s open letter...

Dear John,

Your letter is a remarkable source of inspiration and hope for me. It also constitutes a wonderful opportunity to clarify, even within my own thinking, what our new movement, DiEM, is about.

The [Athens Spring](#), and the ruthlessness with which ‘official’ Europe crushed it, shook millions of Europeans out of their complacency. Suddenly, it was impossible for decent folks to carry on pretending that all is well in the best of all feasible Europes. Suddenly, good people who had been lulled into a false sense of TINA (“there is no alternative”) began to realise that the present power structures in Europe are not an option (as they are crumbling all around us) and that, if they continue to do nothing, they will be complicit in the emergence of a postmodern 1930s.

DiEM is being conceived as a movement that will connect these good, recently enraged, Europeans, with the movements that you so eloquently described in your open letter. Of course it would have been absurd to think that I was the first one to come up with the idea of starting a pan-European movement. Civilised

Europe has been shaped by cross-border movements for centuries. No, the idea behind DiEM is to provide an opportunity for this new, hopeful coalescence between (A) the movements and (B) the recently energised/enraged/awakened silent majority. The aim is to use the Athens Spring as a springboard for a new coalition of democrats **demanding that the demos, the people, is put back into democracy.**

Undoubtedly, the questions that DiEM will pose, beginning on 9th February in Berlin, have been posed countless time before by people and movements all over Europe.

- A European party or self organisation across Europe?
- Can the euro be fixed and made compatible with shared prosperity?
- Is the current mélange of EU institutions reformable (even in theory) or should we look beyond it?
- What forms of political action are best suited to the task of democratisation?

As I used to tell my students, the big questions do not change – the interesting answers do.

What DiEM offers is an opportunity of unifying:

(A) all those who have been asking these questions for years, while fighting the good struggles in their cities, communities, workplaces; networking across regions and countries

with

(B) Europeans who had hitherto not left their... couch, or lifted a finger against the establishment, but who are now eager to be part of a movement that restores hope in a Europe that can become decent, sustainable and worth striving for.

In this context, you are precisely right: DiEM must, from the word 'go' (i.e. on 9th February, at the Volksbuehne), prove itself as a movement keen to learn from the accumulated experience and dynamism of (g)local movements like Blockupy. Whenever in the past few years I sought to counter the ultra-nationalist, quasi-fascist elements here in Greece, who tried to use the crisis to turn Greeks against Germans, I would refer to the resistance movements within Germany and to the solidarity of German activists (including the internationalist-networked manifestation of that solidarity across borders). Indeed, it was my hope that such movements would be excited by our choice of the Berliner Volksbuehne (as the site of DiEM's launch) and thus join us more readily.

So, let's get practical.

– I propose that, prior to the launch (at 20.30 of the 9th of February), one of the pre-launch public meetings (earlier in the day) should be dedicated to the question: 'DiEM and the movements?' Many comrades who are at this early stage working towards the inauguration of DiEM25, defining its direction and helping me with the writing of our Manifesto, have been for years or even decades actively participating in various movements – from the World Social Forum to the European Social Forum, from various solidarity campaigns all around Europe to the Altersummit, from Uninomade to Euronomade, from occupations in the Balkans to the struggle of Blockupy, from the Subversive Festival to Transeuropa Festival, from the theatre-scene to many other honest and important initiatives all around Europe and beyond. Their contribution, your contribution, that of movements like Blockupy, together with contributions from other participants [e.g. from Barcelona (led by Ada Culao), Madrid (represented by Miguel Urban Crespo), the UK, Denmark, France etc.] should, in the context of a truly open agenda, help tackle the issues you mentioned in your open letter.

– In addition to the pre-launch event, allow me to extend an invitation for you, or for another of your

comrades, to address the audience during the main event, in the Volksbuehne.

Finally, on a personal note, if I may:

You close your open letter by welcoming me to the “hell of the movements”. My answer to you is: “Glad to be here – even though, in truth, I was never anywhere else!”

While earlier this year I spent a few, brief months in the corridors of ‘power’, and many years in universities as a professor, I have always been an activist:

Beginning with the occupation movement of high school Greek students in 1975-8, the Black Students Alliance in my English university in 1978-80, the steel, printing and coal picket lines against Mrs Thatcher’s neoliberal policies in the early 1980s, CND and pro-ANC campaigns, working as a trades union advocate in Australia in the 1990s, involved in the student occupations of Athens University in the 2000s (when, as their professor, I gave ‘anti-lectures’ on political economics to the occupying students), all the way to the 2011 Syntagma Square occupation (where I participated daily and addressed the crowds, twice) – and finally to the... Eurogroup. Activism as a state of being...

Lastly, you are right in saying that we cannot afford to start from scratch, from the beginning, ignoring all that has been accomplished by current and past movements. This is so. But, at the same time, I think we need a *new beginning*. One that appeals to those that the movements have, so far, left untouched. A *new beginning* to which we all contribute expecting nothing in return, save perhaps for the warm inner glow, when we are terribly old and decrepit, that we were not idle in the face of Europe’s descent into authoritarianism, misanthropy and sadness. That’s the purpose of DiEM.

Looking forward to the 7th of February, where (following your advice) I shall be attending the Blockupy meeting in Berlin, two days before our joint (I hope and trust) launch of DiEM.

In solidarity

Yanis Varoufakis