

10.06.2007

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Press Release

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Summary of the monitoring of demonstrations at the G8 summit

Between 2 and 8 June 2007, critics of the policies of the G8 states met in Rostock and around Heiligendamm. International in nature, and with particularly strong representation from youth movements, they demanded radically different, democratic, humane, environmentally friendly and sustainable politics. They protested against the policies enforced by the rich and powerful states that dominate the world today, which are ruthlessly exploiting people and the environment and are responsible for war and instability and build barriers against those who want to flee this misery. These diverse movements differ in detail, but there is great unity in their orientation towards - and struggles for - a democratic system that respects human rights.

The *Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy* provided 30 observers to monitor the protests.

We tried to be present at numerous locations, both big and small assemblies, and monitor the treatment of the protesters by the police. Unfortunately, it was not possible to be comprehensive and many reports still have to be collected. However, we are able to draw some preliminary conclusions.

From the planning of the protests the police have responded with escalation and by criminalisation. In a revealing statement they announced that demonstrations will no longer be "given a long leash". At the same time, demonstrators made clear that the right to assembly and freedom of expression had to be defended and supported. Infringements of this right are unconstitutional. They have to be understood as fundamental rights and protected as such.

- The criminalisation of protesters started early - police and authorities issued public warnings about terrorist attacks, criminal acts and violent demonstrators with media effective methods. When questioned about the evidence for these claims, the police had to admit that they did not have any. However, this tactic provided the police room to manoeuvre. Moreover, it spread fear amongst the population of Rostock and Heiligendamm and undermined the protest. Only with much time and contact between the protesting youth and the local population, were activists able to diffuse these prejudices.

- Using this background of criminalisation, the local authority was able to pass a general decree aiming to suspend the fundamental rights of assembly and freedom of expression.

Democratic rights were suspended not just within the immediate vicinity of Heiligendamm (which was fenced-off by a 12 km long razor-wire 'technical barrier') protests were banned throughout the wider area around the red zone. This ban was widely criticised, even by the established parties - from the Green Party to the Liberal Party and the Social Democrats.

- Such a broad decree (which was first overturned by the regional administrative court but then supported by the Administrative High Court of the Land Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) was only granted in final instance by the Federal Constitutional Court because the demonstration of 2 June saw violent clashes between the police and - considering the size of the demonstration - a small minority of protesters, who were eager for confrontation with them. Some demonstrators threw stones and bottles from within the group of protesters and thereby threatened the safety of others - not only through their missiles that often hit other demonstrators, but also by way of the police response. The police took the conflict into the midst of the demonstration. In particular, the "arrest and evidence-gathering teams" - and in a similar fashion the various regional state police teams - repeatedly entered the demonstration to arrest individuals or film those who threw stones. They ruthlessly beat bystanders who were in their way during these actions. When individuals are violently snatched from such a large heterogeneous protest - which was able to march peacefully and without police intervention until that point - it has to be expected that such provocation is met with protest and outrage. The mood is fuelled by anger. Furthermore, this strategy contradicts the police's claim that they were following a strategy of de-escalation. Inserting police into a march to prosecute possible criminals is a negligent act; inserting them into a march to merely film stone-throwers in order to arrest them at a later stage is in itself a threat to public order and security.

- The opening demonstration and rally took place on Saturday, 2 June 2007, and was followed by action days of the themes of "Global agriculture", "Flight and Migration" and "Against Militarism, War and Torture - Block the G8, Stop Wars". A broad and entertaining protest developed that publicised the themes through organised actions at symbolic locations. It became evident that the demonstrators had developed a broad and diverse form of de-escalation tactics and actions. Many of these had been applied on Saturday, but remained in the background due to the escalation between a small group of demonstrators dressed in black with balaclavas and a group of police, also with balaclavas and black clothing, predominantly interested in prosecutions and identification of offenders. Groups of clowns and a "clown's army" ensured entertainment and diffused tense situations. Throughout the week of protest, drums, samba bands and music floats contributed to a relaxed atmosphere, entertainment and movement. Sound trucks provided information. On Monday, during the "Flight and Migration" action day in particular, the protesters' patience was tested by police attempts to misinform and destabilise the demonstration. Most people had already become accustomed to the regular bag checks on arriving at assembly points - in this case the rally in front of the Satowerstraße refugee camp. Some of the larger groups were even successful in demanding uncontrolled entry. Even the continued arrests of people from the larger groups, which repeatedly took place after the Saturday demonstration, did not lead to escalation on the part of the demonstrators. It did, however, create anger and fear amongst those arrested as many were convinced that neither they, nor friends who were arrested, had not committed any crime.

- Police escalation tactics: when on Monday, 4 June 2007, the demonstration (which had received permission from the authorities) started forming, with several thousand participants preparing to walk from the refugee camp to the centre of town; they were stopped by an armada of heavily-armed police and five water cannons. For more than an hour the demonstration was refused permission to leave. Information - let alone justification - was

rarely provided by police and when it was it was contradictory. None of the reasons given would have passed legal scrutiny – in one instance, the police claimed that 500 demonstrators had not been searched, then they conjured up an external threat or they claimed thousands of violent offenders were suspected to be part of the peaceful demonstration. Despite these bullying tactics and the consequent tensions, the demonstrators created a relaxed atmosphere with entertainment and information. After more than an hour of waiting, the march was allowed to walk along a section of the planned route. Because the police had refused to let the activists walk the final part of the demonstration towards the city centre, and failed to offer an alternative route, the organisers had to officially call an end to the protest. The main explanation offered by police for its stalling tactic was that the demonstration was larger than the expected number given by the organisers. They said that 10,000 people – an exceptionally rare example of the police exaggerating upwards the numbers participating in a demonstration - could not be allowed into the city. Police told some journalists that the demonstration was harbouring large numbers of potentially violent offenders. Despite police threats to carry out checks and arrests, a small spontaneous demonstration formed to finish the march peacefully at the final rally in Rostock harbour.

- Citizens exercise their right to assembly: Wednesday and Thursday (6 and 7 June 2007) were blockade days and demonstrated the discipline, conviction and determination that the protests were able to muster. People entered the designated zone where demonstrations had been banned, but they stopped at the fence. The aim appeared not to be its destruction but a visible protest at a publicly inaccessible zone. Through physically demanding routes through fields and forests, police barriers were avoided by groups of people who constantly split up and reformed. Police repeatedly used water cannon and even tear gas against these demonstrators, who had nothing to defend themselves with except their bodies and minds. Dogs were also introduced into the fields. When they reached the streets they were often able to block them by sitting down – these protests were sometimes intercepted by unannounced and menacing police interventions.

- Bans, intervention with force or toleration, depending on the police's discretion: the police allowed two blockades to take place on Thursday and it was possible to reach them without interference. Access roads and the security fence were secured by only a small number of police. This showed how small a police force was necessary when demonstrations were permitted. In contrast, the police at the West Gate prepared for armed conflict. They had occupied the streets forcing demonstrators to stand in an adjacent field. Without warning nine water canons were used against the 1,000 demonstrators, causing a series of injuries. The police announcement that came after repeated water cannon charges: "Stay calm, we are only making a bit of space" is cynical. The fact that people responded to this by throwing bottles – predominantly plastic – towards the police, was again to justify videotaping activists so as to be able to snatch them out of the crowd at a later state. The result, further escalation.

- The police sometimes treated journalists according to their profession. At least in calmer situations they were able to do their job without interference. In other scenarios, however, they covered their lenses and stopped filming. During the day of action on global agriculture on Sunday, 3 June 2007, a journalist who took a picture during a small protest action that the police thought could be used as evidence was asked to hand it over to them. This could only be prevented by strong protests against the confiscation. On Thursday, media representatives who were present on the field next to the West Gate were asked to leave the area. The police announced they had one last chance to leave through police cordons, otherwise they would endanger themselves and the police's work! Such a blatant threat - which borders on coercion - towards journalists who want to carry out their job of reporting highlights how openly and the police attempted to prevent any public scrutiny of their actions.

Many more observations will be collected in the coming weeks in order to present a more detailed picture of the events of the week. Much still has to be researched, e.g. the police operation on Saturday and especially the deployment of armed forces inland, which is unconstitutional in peace times. The research will have to focus in particular on the precise nature of rights violations and injuries, the nature of the charges against those arrested and how these charges are backed up by evidence. On the basis of these insights we will present a more comprehensive report.

Already, it can be observed that police behaviour stimulated escalation, which received little response only because of the restrained behaviour of the majority of peaceful protesters.

With the Federal Crime Police and interior security service the police force is increasingly acting on its own accord, a frightening development considering the constitution, the legally protected fundamental rights and the rule of democracy. By spreading false information and carrying out operations in violation of fundamental rights, the police are creating a situation in which they declare an emergency in order to be able to act according to emergency rules – e.g. on one hand deciding independently to allow blockades at one point and violently attacking assemblies with water cannons without warning at another. Any control over the police executive authority threatens to be lost in such emergency situations. The precondition for these “emergencies” is media spin that diffuses certain police or secret service claims without requiring the evidence to verify them. Such an example is the media coverage of 10 severely injured policemen after the riots of Saturday, 2 June 2007. Only later, after the Federal Constitutional Court had confirmed the ban of the 7 June demonstration, were these claims retracted when official sources revealed that only two police officers were ‘severely injured’, meaning that they required hospital treatment - they were released from hospital after two days. This type of media reporting creates – we were able to confirm this in many talks we had with police officers – an atmosphere within police circles which increases the willingness of individual officers to use violence. Moreover, the public is systematically lied to when, for example, it is reported that the “Flight and Migration“ day rally included violent activists. Also the claim that the Clown’s Army had mixed acid with water in its water pistols could only be revoked by research: two police officers had had allergic reactions to the soap bubbles the clowns blew over police lines. This misinformation is paralleled by a lack of information when it comes to communicating with the demonstrators. The latter were often not informed about police demands and measures, but were faced with silent, choreographed violence of which one never knew if and when it would be put into operation. When a blockade is asked to let police vans stuck in it through with the announcement: “please stay calm, we are not planning to carry out actions against you” (Thursday, 7 June 2007 on the road between the West Gate and Steffenshagen), and if this willingness to cooperate is then exploited by attacking the blockade in return, one should not be surprised if the youth then learns only one thing: if the police communicate with you, do not trust them.

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