

ENERGY POLICY AND RESOURCE EXTRACTIVISM

Resistances and Alternatives

Report of the seminar in Tunis, 24–26 March 2013

This report aims at outlining the main contributions and discussions of the tri-continental seminar “Energy policy and Resource Extractivism” organised by the Brussels Office of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in the run-up to the World Social Forum (in cooperation with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung North Africa Department and Ulrich Brand, Vienna University). This report reflects the structure of the event by summarising both given presentations and reflecting on the discussions inspired by these contributions.

Main issues of the seminar where: discussing extractivism as a development model; the ambivalent role of the state; the search for a strategic vintage point to discuss, struggle for and politically implement alternatives to a global energy regime currently based on capitalisation of both natural resources and human beings.



The following people attended:

Arconada, Santiago, Universidad Indígena de Venezuela
Ashley, Brian, Campaign One million Climate Jobs, South Africa
Ayeb, Dr. Habib, Tunisian Geographer, Associate Professor at Paris 8 University in France and American University in Cairo, Egypt
Bacher, Daniel, Dreikönigsaktion (DKA) Austria
Baldé, Alpha Oumar, CNTG, Guinea-Conakry
Becker, Sören, IRS Erkner, Germany
Brand, Ulrich, Professor at Vienna University, Austria, currently Fellow at Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
Camara, Many, Association des Ressortissants et des Amis de la Commune de Faléa (ARACF), Bamako, Mali
Ceceña, Ana Esther, Latin American Observatory on Geopolitics, UNAM Mexico
Charitsis, Alexis, SYRIZA energy department, Greece
Cheikhrouhou, Amel, RLS Tunis
Ciccaglione, Bruno, S2B-Network, Austria
Combes, Maxime, Attac France
Gensler, Marlis, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels
Knottnerus, Roeline, Trade policy advisor for the Dutch “Fair, Green and Global Alliance programme” with SOMO, TNI and Bothends, The Netherlands
Köhler, Bettina, Vienna University, Austria
Kucharz, Tom, Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
Lander, Edgardo, University of Caracas and Transnational Institute, Venezuela
Leon, Joan, Project manager, RLS Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Mhinda, Amani Mustafa, Haki Madini, Tanzania
Müller, Tazio, Institute for Social Analysis, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Berlin
Nzuzi, Victor, GRAPR, République démocratique du Congo
Omar, Sidi Mohamed, Member of the Interuniversity Institute of Social Development and Peace (IUDESP), Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, Spain
Schäfer, Peter, RLS Tunis
Strickner, Alexandra, Attac Austria
Sühl, Klaus, Head of office, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels
Thiam, Dr. El Hadji Ibrahima Sakho, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Dakar, Sénégal
Thimmel, Stefan, RLS Berlin
Tricarico, Antonio, Re:common, Italy
Velegakis, Giorgos, Marie Curie fellow, PhD researcher Harokopio University Athens, European Network of Political Ecology (ENTITLE), Greece

Opening and introduction of the seminar

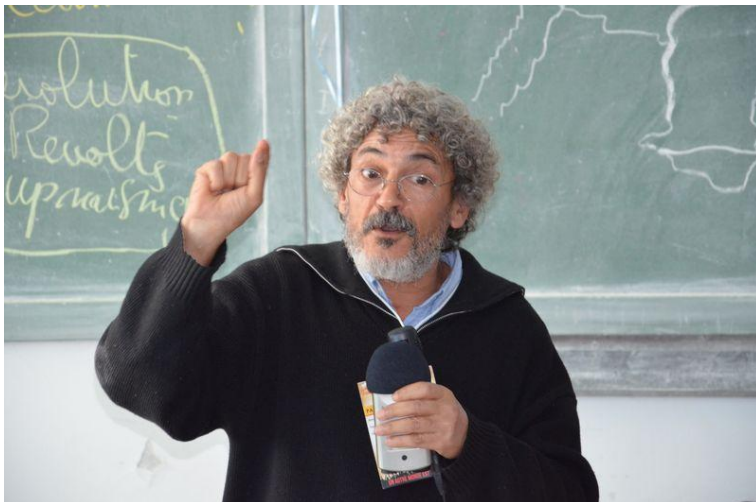
The opening and introduction by **Klaus Sühl** and **Ulrich Brand** aimed at laying out the agenda for the two days to come. It also embeds the schedule within the wider process of meeting, seminars and conferences on issues of energy and natural resources organised by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. So Ulrich Brand picked up the notion of extractivism as a “development model” as one of the results of the precedent bi-continental 2012 conference in Vienna.



In his brief introductory note **Brand** touched upon energy and resource extraction as “conflict fields”. He proposed an understanding of both energy and resource extraction as a social relation that is structured and produced by wider contexts and processes like the global division of labour and a still self-transforming global capitalism. Talking of a social relation entails both thinking about things, resources and technology; and also considering social orientations ascribed like income and growth. Against this background, the outlined understanding of energy as social relation links social and ecological crises. Extractivism, then, has become a development model in so far, as there is a widespread affection connected to the idea of extracting wealth from natural resources. Extractivism seems to be the hegemonic model of development and wealth creation, as in “positive” examples (e.g. Norway), and as in critical areas involving transnational investors (e.g. Saharan uranium extraction in Niger). Protests against extractivism are mainly local and rarely questioning its systemic nature. From this configuration, Ulrich Brand derived conflictive issues that should prove relevant to the coming discussions of the seminar: 1) Is this kind of resource nationalism expelling international investors that is promoted

by governments, e.g. in Venezuela or Ecuador, an answer or merely part of the problem? 2) How can we deal with the more and more powerful model of green capitalism? 3) Which role should be attributed to the state – can it play a proactive role in solving socio-ecological crises, or is it – again – part of the problem? 4) Against this background, would it be better to pursue a nation-state or an internationalist class perspective in critical analysis? 5) And finally, what are the commonalities in diverse struggles in the field of energy and resource extractivism – can they justifiably be subsumed under the heading of a socio-ecological transformation?

As a normative standpoint, Ulrich Brand, additionally, made clear that any conversion could not work without addressing the people – grounded in local political activity, not in a “naive cosmopolitan” manner.



Energy policy and resource extractivism in Africa – recent developments

In the initial contribution to the situation of energy and extractivism on the African continent, **Habib Ayeb** linked the events of the Tunisian revolution with the issue of extractivism and the uneven geographies of a country situated in a post-colonial context. His main issue was the derivation of ground water from the country's interior to vast sites of export-oriented olive growing. By referring to David Harvey's term “accumulation by dispossession”, he sketched out Tunisia as a deeply divided country regarding the access to water and social wealth. To him, it was no surprise that the revolution starting with the self-burning of a young man in Sidi Bouzid. That site is, firstly, one of the centres of external capital investment in Tunisia's agricul-

ture sector. Secondly, the Sidi Bouzid region is characterised by sharp small-scale disparities with a local population merely not benefiting from jobs, produced goods and profits created there. In such a way, the Tunisian model of water/agricultural extractivism produces new socio-spatial inequalities.

Speaking of resistances, Ayeb pointed to a longer history of strikes and struggles against dispossession and extractivism in the Tunisian hinterland. These movements, however, lacked the capacity to form larger alliances due to a modernist discourse that is also well rooted in the thinking of the same leftist elites that were to become the driving forces of the Tunisian revolution. In fact, local strikes in the hinterland areas of the country were brought down by those factions of the military now close to the inner circle of Tunisian government. In this constellation, the question in how far the post-revolutionary Tunisian state could find a different approach to water extractivism and export agriculture remains open, if not foreclosed.



The second African input was made by **Brian Ashley** from South Africa. He introduced the campaign “One Million Climate Jobs” as an interesting attempt to creating alternatives. It is a joint campaign by the environmentalist movement and trade-unions. The campaign is set in the context of a still industrialising country that features a long history of mineral extraction organised by a mineral-energy-finance-complex, a relatively high output of greenhouse gas emissions and persisting social inequalities. The Climate Jobs campaign aims at linking the social and the ecological crisis in demanding state driven jobs ensuring decent work conditions in climate-friendly industries. This issue should be approached by also focussing on “black” business empowerment. The campaign draws from joint considerations of

the key issues that affect the South African population. In this vein, it was assessed that it was difficult to put pure ecological issues at the forefront while the struggle for daily survival is what really concerns the people. As a result the campaign attempts to link an ecological transformation with the social necessities of jobs, housing and access to affordable energy. Interestingly, the campaign also tries to capture workers engaged in wild strikes without trade union approval.



The third contribution to this opening block was made by **Sidi Mohamed Omar**. He spoke about the phenomenon of extractivism under occupation in the West Sahara Territory. In doing so he touched upon the well-known problems of this area, namely the extraction of phosphor by Moroccan enterprise for export and local population's endangered fishing rights as big European leagues trawl in the coastal areas on the legal basis of an EU-Moroccan treaty – a situation due to the lack of state power and legislation on this issue. Additionally, the prospects for protest are difficult as there is only a weak civil society restricted by the occupant laws of Morocco. While there are quite some tensions within the West Saharan population, there is no or very little scope for collective self-organisation.

The subsequent discussion already brought up some topics and tensions that should be central to the following debates within the seminar, most significantly the reference to the ambivalent role of the state in extractivist societies. Also in postcolonial, not only African, contexts state action can be seen as entwined with capital accumulation interests. State and business together generate an extractivist model of resource use. Interestingly, they are also joined by the main trade unions that are either close to the centres of economic and political power, or have their strong

member constituencies in labour intense extractivist industries. Instead of questions of economic democracy, they tend to remain concerned with a job-focussed perspective, thus, hostile to ideas of socio-ecological transformation. Drawing from this analysis it was debated if trade unions could become a partner in socio-ecological endeavours as indicated in the South African case. The same could be said of many left-leaning governments and politicians in the concerned countries. On the other hand, the state – though admittedly shaped by different circumstance in different countries – remains a very resourceful actor that is crucial to be involved in any attempts of large-scale transformation.



Energy policies and resource extractivism in Europe – recent developments

This section was devoted to a critical discussion of European energy, trade and resource policies, and also featured some information on extractivism in Greece induced by European austerity policies. The first speaker, **Roeline Knottnerus** from Traidcraft and the S2B-Network introduced the strategic foundations and practices of external European resource policy and their link to the African continent. She highlighted the grand importance of raw materials as the EU uses relatively more imported raw materials than any other region in the world. The European Raw Materials Initiative (RMI) is the core of European raw materials policy. It seeks to preserve some strategic edge for European states in the fierce competition for resources with emergent economies, as Brazil, India and – especially in the African context – China. The RMI is based on three pillars, namely undistorted access to

raw materials on global markets, a sustainable supply from EU sources and the aim of an over-all reduction of raw material consumption within the EU member states. Trade negotiations both on the multi- and the bilateral level served as a main vehicle of this strategy in the international terrain. In these negotiations, the EU pursued the strategy by mainly insisting on free, “undistorted” raw materials trade. Especially bilateral investment treaties formed an important tool in the EU agenda, as they were set up to break down protectionist or interventionist policies in extracting states. With regards to Africa these treaties were accompanied by Economic Partnership Agreements that foreclosed export restrictions and taxes. As the outcome of these negotiations was characterised by unequal power relations between the single African states and the EU as a major economic block, Knoettnerus suggested a collective re-negotiation attempt to open up more developmental policy-space for African states. This should be accompanied by a re-politicisation of this issue in the European public, driven by extra-parliamentarian protest.



Antonio Tricario from Re:common Italy deepened her analysis of European resource policies. He argued that the new EU approach to resources constituted a policy shift from limiting external vulnerabilities to a more offensive take on ensuring resource availability from external countries. The geo-political re-orientation, for him, would not only materialise as a physical grab for raw materials, but as a market grab targeting the “market infrastructure”. This is possible by defining the conditions of trade. Secondly, he linked this development to the wider of trend of financialization eminent in international resource and energy markets. This does not only become obvious in resource-related speculation, but as well in large consortia directed at the establishment of large scale infrastructure projects. Together these re-

orientations would form a basis for new financial instruments leading to tax evasion and capital flight in the long run. So forms of extractivism are linked to the general process of financialization. Further, energy and resource markets are built to add to the list of possible terrains of financialization. This physical resource and institutional market grab is met by a third, an accumulation grab in the financial sphere.

These analyses of European external resource policies were complemented by an introduction to the political-economic circumstances of Greece under austerity rule by **Alexis Charitsis** from Syriza party. There, the troika of European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund have installed a policy package mainly consisting of the following three points: a lowering of the wage level, an extended privatisation of public services and fast-track opportunities for development projects. Derived from the notion that Greece is a resource-rich, but a cash-poor and indebted state, these policies have been rolled out with a “there is no alternative” style of argumentation. In the end, they result in a large-scale neo-liberal transformation of Greek state and society under austerity rule. Special legislation and the introduction of fast-track investment procedures bypassing former environmental and social constraints have led to an economic policy mainly oriented to serve capital interests. As a consequence, they open up an unprecedented evolution of extractivist practices in the post-war European context. While a narrative of “green development” was also mobilised to construct societal consensus, the harsh social and environmental impacts of the policies rolled out speak a different language. However, differing discourse was suppressed and, if taken to the street, answered by police violence. Charitsis spoke of an “emergency state” in institutional terms. Greece, in his eyes, was converted to a special economic zone by the EU within their own territory.



Although these three contributions were rather analytic in scope, the following debate was concerned with normative thought. While the concept of resource security pursued by the European Union was rejected as a concept of strength creating dependencies, the notion of resource nationalism required further elaboration. It was questioned whether resource nationalism could be an alternative development model opposed to dependency from imposed free-trade agreements. The counter-position stated that resource nationalism only meant that state enterprise was extracting resources, replacing multi-national corporations without altering business practices and impact. Especially for the affected population in sites of extraction, there might not be much of a change in terms of living conditions and environmental quality. Additionally, some examples have shown that public enterprises do not foreclose privatisation, but with a change in government these could be sold to gain short-term revenue. Rather, resource democracy and resource sovereignty were seen as more suitable concepts, though both of them encounter the difficulty that the demos of the project would require further definition. A third position generally called into question the need for a model or grand term for an alternative development. Instead, change should reside in the practices of a mode of living. That would entail changing the individual ways of living and consumption to alter society's relation with nature. With a de-marketization, a de-globalisation and a de-financialization through local arrangements of production and consumption, the self-determination of people could be achieved. The scalar dilemma between small, voluntary approaches and a systems perspective, yet, could be overcome in this section.



Extractivism – experiences and resistances

After macro-political analyses in the precedent part of the seminar, the discussion now turned back to exemplar cases focussing on experiences and resistances. The first speaker, **Many Camara** from Bamako University in Mali, spoke about the West Malian region of Falea, which is rich in various natural resources, above all uranium. As the central government of Mali has granted exploration rights to a Canadian mining consortium, local social movements have engaged in a process of resistance building. They have organised public consultations and education events to counter the threats of dispossession and relocation of the population concurring with the plans of uranium exploitation. However, the outcome of these processes remains unsure. On a more general level, Camara confirmed the suspicion the French military intervention in Mali, prevalent at the time of the seminar, was led by French and European interests to secure access to the resources of the Sahel area and Mali in particular.

The second speaker, **Alpha Oumar Baldé**, a trade unionist from West African Guinea, talked about trade union policies in a country characterised by gross contrast between rich and poor. He has laid out three main strategies Guinean trade unions follow. These are 1) exposing irregular government behaviour, above all corruption; 2) problematizing the issue of ownership, which does not exclude to critically engage with trade union notabilities; and 3) fighting for equity and justice also beyond the narrow realm of industrial relations.

After that, **Mustafa Amani Mhinda**, a mineworker's activist and long-standing partner of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung from Tanzania, depicted the importance of and challenges to small-scale mining in the East African country. Mining in general is important for both the Tanzanian economy as a source of foreign exchange and as a source of income for the population. A special feature of Tanzania is the high ratio of small-scale mining businesses, people that dig on their own right to create an income. While the small-scale structure of the mining business has quite a history and has fed up to 1.5 million people, the opening up of the country to foreign investors has led to a major conflict on how to deal those miners. In fact, with the onset of international investors, small-scale miners have been criminalised in many cases. The subsequent erosion of a core economic branch has also coincided with changes with a weakening of social movements. Unfortunately, as trade unions and political do not account for the interests of expropriated small-scale miners; it is small NGOs and communities of self-help that are left to represent their cause.



The fourth speaker in this session redirected attention to Greece. **Georgio Velegrakis** deepened the assessment of Alexis Charitsis by referring to two case studies: gold mining on Khalkidhiki peninsula and the prospection of deep-sea mining for oil and natural gas. His analysis showed that there existed a hegemonic bloc of media, political and business elites that pursue the legitimisation of the extractivist project in Greece. In fact, under austerity rule there was a virtual rush for new possible mining sites. Velegrakis stated laconically that, before the crisis in Greece, nobody knew how many resources there were under Greek soil (and water). The new legal provisions also entail a reduction of labour costs and environmental and social regulations. These developments disclose a logic of “the poor selling cheap” and open space for an investor quest for new sites of extraction. This “El-Dorado corporatism” was officially justified with the need for new jobs. Velegrakis argued for calling into question this argument by local, even militant, protest that highlights the divided character of Greek society and scandalises the social and environmental consequences of new extractivism in Greece.

The following short debate was centred on the political-economic analyses of these processes. It was put forward that, especially in weakening states, multinational corporations have a stronger leverage to pursue their interest and oppose restrictive policies. While stable states like Canada and Norway might utilise extractivist policies for social and economic development, the “negative cases” of extractivism often concur with an asymmetric terrain between state and business. Against this background, the discussion also touched upon the conditions for resistance and organisation. This was identified as a gap for further research. The same could be said of concrete forms of effective international solidarity bridging different struggles. The politicisation of value chains, for example, would only shed light on sec-

toral dependency. Against this, there should be established a vision of intersectional solidarity.



Debates and practices of alternatives and a “post-extractivist” development model

After gathering information on the examples of struggles, strategies and shortcomings in terms of understanding and tackling extractivism, the next day should be devoted to a discussion of alternatives. When energy is understood as a social relation, characterised by specific forms of organisation that derive from power struggles, there also is the question whether an alternative normative framework could contribute to both analysing and possibly changing these forms of organisation. So the next part of the seminar was engaged with the exploration of an alternative framework.

The first contribution to this task was made by **Ana Esther Ceceña** from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Her topic was the idea of “buen vivir” contemporary popular in Latin America, more specifically, how it could be connected to an analysis of relations of labour and of nature in capitalism. For her, capitalism is an ever-expanding social system that realises itself in heterogeneous territorialities. That means that the expansion of capitalism is carried out by appropriation, or expropriation, by dispossession, but simultaneously by an alignment with existing social values and behaviours in a process of colonisation. In effect, capitalism is assembled regionally, leading to a complexity of different varieties of capitalism. In her view, that even means that there is a regional difference in the forms of

appropriation of both nature and labour power. Against these specific capitalist modalities that matter in their own right, there is a need for an alternative imagination to tackle capitalist relations with nature and labour. Yet, a thick meaning of “buen vivir” would not only need to entail an anti-capitalist component, but also a perspective of de-colonisation that makes visible a way out of the domination of people and nature. Reversely, the idea of buen vivir could be strong, if it reflected cultural diversities and would be translated itself to different cultures.



In contrast to this rather structure-oriented perspective, the next input by **Sören Becker**, Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning Erkner, Germany, took the forms of specific forms organisation as a starting point. He laid out an approach to “energy democracy” that was inspired by the recent spread of collective energy projects in Europe. While he acknowledges that they challenge the narrative that energy should be provided by private corporate and market actors, he argues that energy democracy should mean more than a higher number of owners. Instead, when thinking of democracy other topics have to be considered, too. In fact, democracy in terms of energy can be divided into various sub-dimensions which are: 1) an effective democratisation in terms of an involvement to decision-making by those people affected with energy generation or resource extraction facilities; 2) this should be accompanied by a democratisation of property and ownership rights to institutionally secure decision-making powers; 3) a democratisation of work environments alluding not only to changed ownership structures but also to a fair and decent working conditions; 4) the integration of ecology and sufficiency in order to democratise impacts of energy generation; and 5) the integration into a broader emancipatory project that renders any energy transition a part of

virtually political endeavour. However, while these are normative criteria for the analysis of organisations in the energy sector, the latter, in reality, also feature shortcomings that are related to their mainly localist orientation. The question was raised whether local collective energy projects in Europe, how emancipatory they ever may be, could actually challenge extractivism within a globalised world economy.



Concluding discussion

Of course, these normative inputs provoked a lively debate on the nature of the concepts in use to grasp and understand alternatives. It was discussed if a notion of justice would not exceed the applicability of the term democracy, especially in post-colonial contexts. Again, there was debate on whether a development model was needed as an analytical and a political tool. Consensus could be established concerning the requirements of any alternative perspective on energy and extractivism, in general: It should problematize who gains (and who loses) by what kind of conditions or within which process. An in-depth understanding developed in critical science could then be problematized in social movement and left party activity.

On a more applied level, it appeared somewhat difficult to draw generalizable conclusions, or even to point out commonalities and differences. One common aspect in the discussion across the different countries and cases was the obvious integration of resources and energy infrastructures into the world-market. Both the exploitation of ever new raw material deposits in the Global South or waves of privatisation and commodification of formerly public goods in the North can be seen as a

process of commodification. The examples from the Global South and Greece also showed features of accumulation by dispossession.

Extractivism itself was conceived more visible in those countries where extractive industries are actually located. Therefore, it might be easier to politicise it in the respective countries. Yet, still extractivism is embedded in and an expression of a system of international interdependency. Thus, the conception of the imperial mode of living should not be dropped after all, although the concept does not seem to lean for massive mobilisation. Contrastingly, it could be an angle to consider alternative relations with nature in a globalised, embedded economic context.



The question of deeply understanding what conditions could lead to what kind of struggles and alternatives could not be answered in a seminar that short. The presence of certain actor groups that could carry out political campaigns and research was seen a key factor influencing the scope for political action is the. Yet, these could be trade unions, social movements, environmentalist NGOs, or even emancipatory government projects. It was argued that the multiple types of actors could still be embraced as an international network of various local, national and international struggles. From this perspective, a political task would be to strengthen the ties and linkages between these different organisations and struggles.

However, this evaluation of the political status-quo could neither finally respond to the conceived necessity of an alternative narrative, nor could it actually generalise on the role of the state in the various struggles. The contradictory role of the state was finally discussed from the perspective of domination. In various Latin American

post-colonial contexts, the state could play an active role in an emancipatory project while, for instance, in Greece its institutions were just a tool in the neo-liberal restructuring of a crisis-ridden society. As state policies are varied, the debate focussed on underlying concepts of particular political orientations. Most prominently, the discussion of resource nationalism crystallised the contradictions of state projects as such. The critical points in debate were 1) configuration of the particular state: resource nationalism could be fatal in a kleptocratic African regime, while in another setting the revenue from nationalised resource extraction could finance welfare services, 2) the scalar question whether a nationalisation of resource extraction would necessarily entail more power for those locally affected and 3) the political edge of this concept which draws on a dated conceptualisation of nationalism and blurry understanding of the popular.

Against these considerations, justice and sovereignty were seen as a normative answer to possibly bridge the different national and regional constellations. The combination of justice and sovereignty was seen as a possible antidote to domination. This undeniably opens the question who should be the subject of sovereignty. Here, it was reasoned that the contrast between complexification and simplifying should be dissolved by directly including those affected, by thinking and arguing with the people. This could be a viable approach to defining the spatial constituencies of sovereignty.



Beyond these conceptual reflections, the seminar also surfaced some political challenges that should not be overlooked in this report. Any attempts to challenging extractivism would have to account for the varied actor constellations in their search

for social basis of their protest. In this line, it might be helpful to form alliances with worker struggles or the movement against large infrastructures. One could also try to identify strategic objects or arenas where a built-up of pressure is efficient, i.e. ports. Another major challenge is the growing financialization of all accumulation in the global centres and beyond. In all of these areas, the task is not only to gather strategic and analytic knowledge, but also construct a suitable and emancipatory narrative to unite all these different perspectives and struggles. Steps in this direction should provide an understanding of extractivism as an expression of a bigger problematic constellation. This could possibly integrate the practical and theoretical contestation of extractivism into a political project of imagining and implementing suited alternatives – to development and the mode of living.

Sören Becker, IRS Erkner, Germany

Contact:
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels Office
Marlis Gensler
11, Ave. Michel-Ange, B- 1000 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2738 7663
Fax: +32 (0)2738 7669
gensler@rosalux-europa.info
www.rosalux-europa.info

