

Founding of the new Cologne Organization: STARK! im Kölner Norden

Sunday, October 18th 2015 saw the founding of the new broad-based organization "STARK!" or STRONG in the Northern boroughs of the city of Cologne, Germany. The organization has 30 founding member groups including Catholic and Protestant churches, mosques belonging to several national associations, cultural and social organizations of diverse backgrounds. The founding assembly, with 800 leaders participating, was held in the "Flora," a traditional venue for meetings of Cologne's movers and shakers set within the city's botanical garden. On a day when the city was reeling from the prior day's assault on one of its mayoral candidates that was motivated by anti-immigrant sentiment, the assembly sent a clear signal for a non-partisan politics crossing lines of heritage, race and religion with the power to address key issues in the city, rejecting both violence and exclusion. Later on the day of the founding the wounded candidate was declared the winner of the election by a clear majority, yet with only about 40% of the electorate participating, the lowest turnout since the start of direct mayoral voting.

The organization was built over the last two and one half years through the work of Tobias Meier as organizer, accompanied by Leo Penta, the Director of the German Institute for Community Organizing (DICO), an affiliate of the IAF. Jonathan Lange from the staff of the IAF provided additional support and mentoring. The funding for the sponsoring committee phase was provided by a funders group composed mainly of corporate donors along with the Catholic Church in Cologne. Jonathan Lange, representing the IAF and Jonathan Cox, representing Citizens UK, brought greetings to the Assembly. The new organization is poised to begin work on issues involving housing, infrastructure and schools before year's end.

The website of the organization, including pictures from the assembly, can be found at www.stark-koeln.org. One can follow on twitter: @stark_koeln. For a short video of the founding go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5kp0eMtBYs>

