

CITIZEN MEDIA COVERAGE
PRODUCED BY GLOBAL VOICES (2011-2012)



Europe In Crisis

Citizen Media coverage produced by Global Voices (2011-2012)

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GlobalVoices BOOKS

Sharing citizen media for the future

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Introduction

Since December 2007, a recession has been affecting the world economy along with national political and social structures. This global recession took a particularly sharp downward turn in September 2008, particularly in the US market, where persistent high unemployment remains, along with low consumer confidence, the continuing decline in home values and increase in foreclosures and personal bankruptcies, an escalating federal debt crisis, inflation, and rising petroleum and food prices. Among others, a report released by Bloomberg in 2009 stated that US \$14.5 trillion (or 33 percent) of value of global companies has been erased since the crisis began.

As expected, this recession spilled over to most of European countries), reflecting the assessment that the global financial crisis presents a serious threat to international stability. Until September 2008, European policy measures were limited to a small number of countries (Greece, Spain and Italy), while the European Commission proposed a 200 Euro billion stimulus plan to be implemented at the European level by the countries. The G-20 countries met in a summit held on November 2008 in Washington to address the economic cri-

sis. Followed by another G-20 summit held in London on April 2009. Despite various intervention measures implemented in October 2011 and February 2012, several EU countries are still unable to re-finance their government debt without the assistance of third parties.

Now, Europe is moving into a slow growth phase while it attempts to adjust away from what it considers to be unsustainable debt. To support the transition while keeping the Eurozone together, EU leaders have put together a 3 part package to save Greece, the country in the most dire situation, while also re-capitalising banks and providing a stability mechanism for countries that run into trouble. But the latest news for many of the 17 member nations does not look good at all in that regard. Today even the stability of the Euro currency is at risk and unrest is mounting throughout Europe – particularly in the streets of Greek and Spanish cities.

While mainstream media, politicians and experts propose a variety of viewpoints and scramble for possible solutions, citizens are voicing their pent-up frustrations in countries making bailout agreements. Many protests held across Europe throughout 2011 became evidence of broader discontent with the handling of such economic crisis. With the widespread use of Internet access, social media and citizen

journalism platforms are becoming a center stage for people trying to make sense of what future awaits the Eurozone.

In particular, since the rise of the *acampadas* and *indignados* movement in Spain and Greece in May 2011, digital storytelling has increasingly been conquering new territory for individuals who are moved by the urgency of not silencing their stories of everyday life in a Europe under the *economic crisis*.

Global Voices Online special coverage on Europe in Crisis launched in Spring 2011 and aims at giving voice to ordinary people living with the social, political and financial consequences of Europe's financial bailouts. We are and will continue to cover Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and other European countries affected by the banking crisis and Euro crisis through the lens of participatory online media. Up to July 2012, our dedicated team of about 80 volunteers produced over 80 post in English, most of them translated in various languages. This e-book proposes only a small selection to cover most EU countries and is intended as a flexible tool for further dissemination and discussion about these on-going issues.

While mainstream media have often highlighted EU weaknesses or established powers, our coverage aims at nurtur-

ing solidarity and understanding across European nations. Our goal is to capture the on-going breadth of reflection and debate provoked by the European bailouts, featuring new ideas and alternative responses. By way of translation and through international teamwork, Global Voices curatorial coverage of citizen media on Europe in Crisis hopes to build bridges of understanding between the citizens, international media representatives, activists, scholars and the youth of nations affected by economic crisis today and tomorrow. Including its broader linkage with other regions, including several African countries.

The focus here is on citizen media showing how individuals who go beyond the use of social media as a megaphone for individual reflection online, naturally do get involved in the pioneering process of collective creation. Online and mobile tools have also brought new momentum to citizens' re-use of information – no matter their age – and to experimental labs of *Do It Yourself democracy*.

In order to have a broader dissemination of these voices and to create some sort of historical memory, this Global Voices first e-book, *Europe in Crisis*, is collecting the best from the wealth of social conversation, participation and mobilization boosted by citizens going through the tough times

of austerity in the Old Continent and beyond. Let's see what they will become.

The GV 'Europe in crisis' editorial team



What we do: Global Voices Online is a non-profit organization and community of more than 500 bloggers from around the world, who report on how citizens use the Internet and social media to make their voices heard. Volunteer authors and translators work together to amplify the online conversation, bridging different blogging communities by working across languages and cultures. Global Voices receives around 500,000 visitors a month across websites in more than 20 different languages (see our Lingua Project).

Launched at Harvard University in early 2005, we rely on grants, sponsorships, editorial commissions, and donations to cover our costs. Our international team of volunteer authors and part-time editors are active participants in local online spaces trying to redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens' media. We believe in free speech, and in bridging the gulfs that divide people, culture, languages.

While initially focused mostly on non-Western countries and issues, recently our online coverage has been building interest among a range of European countries as well. We publish posts in English drawing on the language of the relevant country, which are then translated by volunteers into many other languages, including French, Spanish, Portuguese Greek, Italian, Catalan, and more.

For updates and latest news on *Europe in Crisis*, check our special coverage page, follow us on Twitter @GVEuropeCrisis and/or subscribe to our RSS feed.

For comments, discussion and more resources, visit our dedicated page on the Global Voices Books website.

Here is a list of all authors and translators who contributed to articles selected for this e-book. For a more complete list of GV contributors variously involved in the 'EU in crisis' coverage, please check our [special coverage page](#).

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Reactions to the Greek Financial Crisis and the IMF from the Africansphere

The challenges facing the Greek economy and the ensuing intervention from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), look familiar to many African bloggers. During previous crisis, the IMF was involved in proposing structural adjustments to struggling African economies, with various outcomes.

Their reactions range from cautionary tales from past experiences to lessons that ought to be learned for their own regions.

Written by Lova Rakotomalala. Posted 15 May 2010 20:26 GMT

The challenges facing the Greek economy and the ensuing intervention from the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) to help withstand further damages from the fall-out look familiar to many African bloggers. During previous crisis, the IMF was involved in proposing structural adjustments to struggling African economies, with various outcomes.

Reactions from African bloggers range from cautionary tales from past experiences to lessons that ought to be learned for their own regions.

Le petit nègre notices that Europe was reluctant to ask the IMF to step in during the Greek crisis. He is wondering why asking the IMF for help was such a hard decision for a European country when it seemed to be rather common event not so long ago in Africa. Here is why he thinks European countries are worried about an IMF prescription for Greece:

Le twist dans le cas grec et que, comme on ne peut pas dévaluer l'Euro comme on a jadis dévalué le Franc CFA, les dirigeants européens se retrouvent contraints et forcés d'aider d'une manière ou d'une autre la Grèce

In the case of Greece, the issue is that there is a strong resistance to devalue the Euro currency as fast as it has been done before for the CFA (African Financial Community). Therefore, the European leaders find themselves cornered and forced to help Greece, one way or the other.

Similarly, Lambert Mbela also argues that given the level of the budget deficits in many European countries beside Greece, substantial devaluation should be considered for the Euro:

Reactions to the Greek Financial Crisis and the IMF from the Africansphere

Admettons quand même que les situations sont similaires : déficit budgétaire, endettement public, taux de chômage élevé, balance commerciale déficitaire, mauvaise gestion des finances publiques, avec comme cerise sur le gâteau, fricotage des données publiques !!! Sérieux, si c'avait été le Mexique, l'Argentine ou le Burkina-Faso qui présentait de tels manquements, Monseigneur FMI préconiserait déjà une dévaluation « compétitive » et des programmes d'ajustement structurel afin de rétablir les finances publiques.

At least, let's agree that the conditions are eerily similar: budget deficit, public debt, high unemployment, commercial balance in the red, bad management of public finances and top it all, tempered public data !! Seriously, if this was Mexico, Argentina or Burkina-Faso, the mighty IMF would have already prescribed competitive devaluation and structural adjustment to help the public finances.

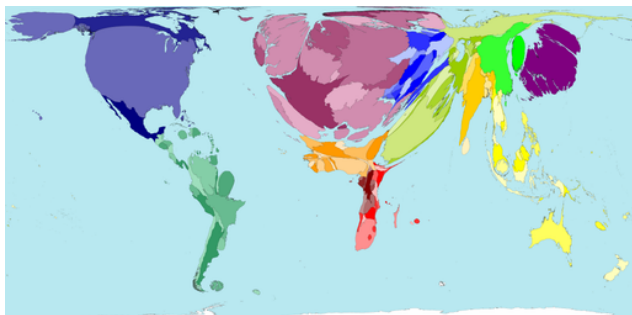
Éric Toussaint explains that the seemingly odd provision of IMF interventions according to regions might be a direct consequence of the fact that southern countries do not have much of a say in the decision process at the IMF:

l'Afrique subsaharienne occupe une place égale à la France alors qu'elle compte 10 fois plus d'habitants. L'Afrique au Sud du Sahara

Reactions to the Greek Financial Crisis and the IMF from the Africansphere

ne dispose que de deux membres au sein du Conseil d'administration du FMI et ces deux membres doivent exprimer le point de vue de 48 pays [...] Vous imaginez la difficulté des 48 pays africains à se faire entendre si seuls 2 administrateurs les représentent.

Although the Sub-Saharan African region has 10 times the number of inhabitants of France, they have the same weight inside the IMF. The region has only two representatives on the IMF board of governors and they have to voice the opinion of 48 countries [...] One can imagine the difficulty of getting 48 countries heard when they only have 2 representatives.



Map of Vote at IMF by territory in 2006, by World Mapper (CC-license)

Musengeshi Katata at *Forum Realisance* investigates further into the reasons why the Greek crisis has gone unnoticed for

so long. Although the IMF recently published an optimistic report on the state of the Sub-Saharan African region, many are still skeptical because the emphasis was put on economic growth, leaving many issues still unspoken.

Finally, Paul Bara at AfriqueRedaction is pessimistic about a sustainable solution to the global crisis:

Notre modèle de croissance basé, sur la séquence : crédit - consommation - dette, est obsolète. En second lieu parce que les systèmes politiques et les gouvernements semblent incapables de jeter les bases d'un nouveau modèle de développement [...] Un Krach paraît donc inévitable en 2010 puisque comme l'explique Kenneth Rogoff, la défaillance d'un état (ou de plusieurs) paraît inévitable : se posera alors de manière aiguë le problème d'un modèle de croissance totalement inadapté (crise systémique).

Our current growth model based on the following sequence: credit- consumption- debt is obsolete. It is not helped by political systems and governments that are seemingly incapable of posing the foundations of a new development model [...] Therefore a crash in 2010 seems inevitable because, as Kenneth Rogoff explains, the failure of another state (or several others), seems unavoidable: the problem of this systemic crisis of unfit growth model will soon become more acutely apparent.

Portugal: A Protest Generation, Foolish and Scraping By

Today the “Scraping-by Generation” takes it to the streets in Portugal and beyond, protesting the high unemployment and underemployment rates. Armed with an anthem and an anti-conformism attitude, is this Generation really that foolish?

Original Portuguese post by Ana Vasquez. English translation by Sara Moreira. Posted 12 March 2011 13:20 GMT

Hostilities have commenced. On March 12, in many cities across the country and outside Portuguese delegations throughout the European Union, youth are taking to the streets. According to the organization, the *Geração à Rasca* [The Scraping-By Generation] Protest is a non-partisan, secular and peaceful protest, aiming to strengthen participatory democracy in the country. It emerged as a spontaneous event on Facebook and, in less than a month it has gathered more than 64,600 intentions to participate:

*Nós, desempregados, quinhentoseuristas e outros mal remunerados,
escravos disfarçados, subcontratados, contratados a prazo, falsos*

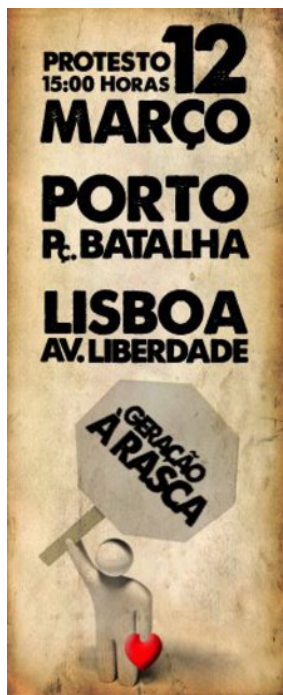
Portugal: A Protest Generation, Foolish and Scraping By

trabalhadores independentes, trabalhadores intermitentes, estagiários, bolsiros, trabalhadores-estudantes, estudantes, mães, pais e filhos de Portugal. Protestamos:

- Pelo direito ao emprego! Pelo direito à educação!*
- Pela... melhoria das condições de trabalho e o fim da precariedade!*
- Pelo reconhecimento das qualificações, competência e experiência, espelhado em salários e contratos dignos!*

We, the unemployed, the five-hundred-euro-ists [referring to monthly wage] and others, poorly paid, disguised slaves, subcontracted, temps, supposed independent workers [hired as such by employers to avoid Social Security payments], intermittent workers, interns, fellows, student workers, students, mothers, fathers and children of Portugal. We protest:

- For the right to employment! For the right to education!*
- For the improvement of working conditions and for the end of labor precariousness!*
- For the recognition of [our] qualifications, competence and experience, reflected in dignified salaries and contracts!*



Poster for the "Scraping By" Generation Protest from the event created on Facebook

Underemployment in context

Last December, TSF Radio News broadcaster reported on a data set from INE (National Institute of Statistics) which pointed out that *more than 300,000 young people have no [economic] activity*. In its website, the same radio broadcaster said, on February 24, that 23 percent of the youth is unemployed, 720,000 have short-term contracts, and there is a further 14 percent increase in use of recibos verdes [workers earning in self-employed tax regime] recorded in the last three months.

On the blog *Epígrafe* (Epigraph), Ricardo Salabert, from FERVE Movement (BOIL, an acronym for Sick of these Recibos Verdes), explains this kind of relationship to labor markets:

Os recibos verdes são um modelo de facturação aplicável aos trabalhadores independentes, i.e., às pessoas que prestam serviços ocasionais para entidades várias (empresas ou

particulares). São exemplo disso os médicos, os arquitectos (entre outros) que podem passar recibos verdes aos seus clientes, não tendo de se estabelecer como empresa.

Recibos verdes is an invoicing model applicable to the self-employed, ie, people who provide occasional services for several entities (companies or individuals). One example is doctors, architects (among others) that can use them to invoice their customers, without having to establish themselves as a company.

And so grows the share of workers who lack any kind of social protection (in sickness, pregnancy, death of relatives), without any holidays or other types of subsidy. These workers can be sent off by the employer at any time since, by law, they have no ties with the enterprise. There are tens of thousands of Portuguese, from all generations, with the status of *false recibos verdes* who are providing services to companies under the same conditions of those with an Employment Contract, as laid out in the Labor Code (article 12), that keeps them *precarious*.

Music fueling action

Some might call them the *Neither-Nor Generation*, as Rui Rocha explains, on the blog *Delito de Opinião* (Crime Opinion):

Nem estudam, nem trabalham. (...) Tipicamente, esta é uma geração potencialmente melhor preparada do que as que a precederam e, aparentemente, muito segura de si. São, todavia, presa fácil da degradação do mercado laboral e não conseguem encontrar uma saída airosa, nem combater este estado de coisas. Os sociólogos identificam uma característica muito comum neste grupo: a inexistência de qualquer projecto de vida. As manifestações mais evidentes são a apatia e a indolência.

They neither study nor work. (...) Typically, this generation is potentially better prepared than its predecessors and it is apparently very self-assured. They are, however, easy prey to the degradation of the labor market and they cannot find a graceful way out, nor fight against this state of affairs. Sociologists identify a very common feature in this group: the absence of any life plan. The most obvious manifestations are apathy and indolence.

Around the end of January, the musical group Deolinda presented in its tour an unreleased piece that came to stir up

emotion, giving a name and a voice to what has become, thereafter, known as the Foolish Generation.



*Sou da geração sem remuneração
E nem me incomoda esta condição
Que parva que eu sou!
Porque isto está mau e vai continuar
Já é uma sorte eu poder estagiar
Que parva que eu sou!
E fico a pensar,
Que mundo tão parvo
Onde para ser escravo é preciso estudar...*

*I am from the generation without remuneration
And it doesn't even bother me this condition
What a fool I am!
Because things are bad and it will continue
Yet I am lucky I have an internship
What a fool I am!
And then I wonder,
Such a foolish world
Where, to become a slave, one must study ...*

Deolinda's song, with an increasing number of 345,000 views on YouTube, spontaneously became a hymn to the (now) foolish generation.

A few days after, the editorial of a free daily newspaper in Portugal, in the words of its director, Isabel Stilwell, said that *if they studied and they are slaves, they are fools indeed. Fools for having spent their parents' money and our taxes to study and ending up not learning a thing.* In response she received thousands of comments, multiplying across social media.

The hymn then became the gunpowder that ignited the fuse for everyone who feels is paying for mistakes made by the generation that came before.

Many problems, few solutions

If on one hand this has brought some together in common resistance, on the other hand many others have distanced themselves. It has awoken some semi-dormant debates.

While the blog *O Jumento* (Jackass) reflects on the inter-generational solidarity (or the lack of it), Helena Matos, on the blog *Blasfémias* (Blasphemy), questions the legitimacy of this generation to claim the same rights as their parents:

Preparam-se agora os ditos membros da geração à rasca não para exigir que os mais velhos mudem de vida mas sim que também eles possam manter esse tipo de vida. Quem vier depois que se amanhe. A prosseguirmos, dentro de alguns anos, assistiremos a protestos de gerações que se dirão bem pior do que à rasca.

The so-called members of the scraping-by generation are now getting ready not to urge older people to change their lives but to demand that they too can also maintain that kind of life.

**"Porque se estudaram
e são escravos, são
parvos de facto"**

Isabel Stilwell

coordenadora de administração: António Silvestre Zêzê; Francisco Rita Fernandes; Catarina Sousa Dias; Luísa Maria Santos; Luísa Santos



**we're not well,
we're not still.**



Satire to Isabel Stilwell's article, on the Facebook page "artº 21" (of Portuguese Constitution which refers to the right to resist)

Those who come after will manage. Down the line, within a few years, we will see protests by the generations that will describe themselves as much worse than scraping by.

Luis Novaes Tito appeals for a change to the status quo, on the blog *A Barbearia do Senhor Luis* (Mr. Luis Barber Shop), making a warning though regarding the conflict of generations:

Concordo que, em vez de chorarem pelos cantos embalados pelo faducho do já não posso mais, vão para a rua gritar que é tempo de mudar, antes que os mandem embalar a trouxa e zarpar.

I agree that instead of crying in the corners wrapped up in a Fado-like I cannot go on anymore, just go onto the streets screaming that it's time to change, before they send you packing and fleeing.

From posts and comments, to editorials and opinion pieces in traditional media, there are also those who keep trying to push society to the heart of the problem: causes and solutions (knowing that it is easier to agree on causes than solutions). So the discussion has extended to the role of the State

and the legislator, and also to Universities and institutions of higher education.

And so goes Portugal, *a country of mild manners*, whose basket of conformism may have filled up once and for all. Far from finding a platform for consultation between the political class, civil society and the very Generation in question, the movement that grew and spread against the odds now seeks the path to maturity. Today is its first major test to go through, and, given the fragility of counting on numbers from social networks, we will only know the true extent of this generation's will to change a country when the hour comes. And we wait. Anxiously.

Spain: Yes We Camp, Mobilizing on the Streets and the Internet

Expanding on the protest wave launched on May 15, the 'indignatos' are now organizing in decentralized and horizontal networks, while employing social media tools to share and spread information, tell their stories, and collaborate on ideas, proposals and initiatives.

Photos by Julio Albarrán, from his Flickr stream, under a Creative Commons license. Written by Leila Nachawati Rego. Posted 20 May 2011 15:26 GMT

Since May 15, people in Spain have taken the streets to demand democracy in advance the upcoming elections, with thousands camping out in different cities. On May 18, as protests made headlines in the international press, the *Madrid Election Board* banned the 15-M movement, but organizers defied them by converging on Puerta del Sol square for the third day, in spite of the rain.

According to the *Madrid Election Board* there are no special or serious reasons for the urgent call for mass demonstrations. These declarations show the gap between the official discourse and citizen demands, and has swelled opposition against the two main political parties.

Spain: Yes We Camp, Mobilizing on the Streets and the Internet



Midnight at Puerta del Sol. Madrid, May 19.
(Image source: Mikel el Prádanos, used with permission)

Protests have spread across the country and the Internet, with hundreds of thousands demonstrating in different cities like Málaga, Granada and Tenerife, and users sharing updates and supporting each other through social media, especially Twitter:

*#acampadasol Mojándose por la democracia y por unos derechos y unos deberes más justos. Mucho Ánimo desde #acampadasegovia
#nonosvamos*

#acampadasol Getting wet for democracy and for more equitable rights and duties. Much Encouragement from *#acampadasegovia* *#nonosvamos*

Events in solidarity with Spain have also been organized, mainly through Facebook and Twitter, in front of Spanish embassies in different cities like London or Jerusalem.

@Anon_Leakspin: At 19:00 a camp at Spanish embassy at London (UK) will start. #spanishrevolution #europeanrevolution #yeswecamp #acampadasol"

Citizens have organized efficiently into legal, communications, cleaning, food, health, and even music committees. There was so much food brought to the camps out that organizers had to look for somewhere to store it. Also, dozens continue to volunteer to translate documents and the committee's decisions into English, French, Arabic and sign language.

Spain: Yes We Camp, Mobilizing on the Streets and the Internet



Protesters in Madrid, Spain. Photo by Julio Albarrán, (CC License)

With hashtags rapidly appearing, changing, and replacing one another on Twitter, it's hard for both the media and the main political parties to keep up: #democraciarealya, #spanishrevolution, #acampadasol, #nonosvamos, #yeswecamp, #notenemosmiedo, #juntaelectoralfacts, #esunaopcion, #tomalaplaza, #pijamabloc, coexist with the tags for local camps, one for each city: #acampadavalencia, #acampadalgn, #acampadabcn...

*@LaKylaB: Cuántos decían que no era posible un cambio? Cuántos creían que siempre viviríamos así? Cuántos? . Esto es solo el comienzo.
#acampadabcn*

@LaKylaB: How many said that change was impossible? How many believed we would always live like this? How many? This is just the beginning. #acampadabcn

Dozens of tags have turned this protest, ironically, into a movement that is hard to pin down. With no visible leaders and a decentralized communications system, mobilizations in Spain are becoming another manifestation of a global movement that traditional structures have a hard time interpreting.



Protesters in Madrid, Spain. Photo by Julio Albarrán (CC License)

People are not only using social media to organize and share updates, but they're also making a very effective use of digital collaborative tools. Their goals and demands can be read on the Real Democracy Now website. There is also a wiki where users include information and materials, online documents with legal advice on the right to association and reunion, an urgent petition to demand an end to the ban against the camp, and one blog post published on the same day by several activists from the #nolesvotes (don't vote for them) movement, among many other initiatives resulting from online collaborative work: #nolesvotes: for a responsible vote

Colaboración distribuida: Te invitamos a copiar este texto y construir páginas de enlaces que referencien todos los sitios que dan apoyo a la iniciativa. De igual modo, invitamos a los demás colectivos que comparten nuestra propuesta a que lleven a cabo acciones similares. La fuerza de la red reside en la distribución y colaboración entre sus nodos.

Distributed collaboration: We invite you to copy this text and build pages that reference links to all the sites that support the initiative. Similarly, we invite other groups that share our proposal to carry out similar actions. The strength of the

network lies in the distribution and collaboration between its nodes.



Camp site at Puerta del Sol, Madrid, Spain. Photo by Julio Albarrán (CC License)

Some media outlets and political leaders have accused the movement for lacking a defined structure. But citizens, young and not so young, are organizing, in different and innovative ways. They are occupying public spaces, both on the streets and the Internet, and are employing digital tools to organize, share, and build their own stories. A *silent scream* is planned for today, May 20, at midnight, and it

seems a quite powerful metaphor for this communication gap.

For updates and latest news on *Europe in Crisis*, check our special coverage page, follow us on Twitter @GVEuropeCrisis and/or subscribe to our RSS feed.

For comments, discussion and more resources, visit our dedicated page on the Global Voices Books website.

Portugal: Citizens Ask Icelanders About Democracy

Portuguese bloggers and activists are getting inspired by Iceland's practice of direct democracy in response to the crisis faced in April. An overview of thoughts and opinions posted online.

Written by Sara Moreira. Posted 9 September 2011 16:23 GMT

In the same week in April that former Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates announced the need for an international financial bailout to pay for its public debt of 80 billion Euros, Icelanders went to the polls to reject tax payers participation in the Icesave bank bailout deal.

Though Iceland's practice of direct democracy, renunciation of an international bailout and economic recovery in two years has not been properly covered by the Portuguese mainstream media, bloggers are analysing and getting inspired by the story.

Clavis Prophetarum [pseudonymn], from the blog *Quintus*, tells why he thinks Iceland's *brave resistance to the political-financial complex that ad democratically rules the European Union nowadays* is being ignored:

Portugal: Citizens Ask Icelanders About Democracy

A opção islandesa não serviu os interesses dos bancos europeus, logo estes têm todo o interesse em que se não fale dela nem que esta possível via chegue aos ouvidos dos cidadãos.

Quando em 2007, a Islândia foi o primeiro país europeus a soçobrar perante a crise mundial, declarando bancarrota por causa da falência do seu maior banco muitos desconsideraram o impacto de tal crise alegando que se tratava apenas de um pequeno país com pouco mais de meio milhão de habitantes e que seria facilmente socorrido por um empréstimo do FMI. O problema foi que na Islândia a ajuda do FMI foi levada a referendo e... derrotada.

The Icelandic option did not serve the interests of European banks, so they have vested interests in this option not being mentioned and that the possibility of such a path never becomes known to citizens.

When in 2007, Iceland was the first European country to sink in face of the global crisis by declaring bankruptcy because of the collapse of its largest bank, many overlooked the impact of this crisis and claimed that it was only a small country with just over half a million people and it would be easily rescued by an IMF loan. The problem was that in Iceland the help of the IMF was taken to referendum and... it was defeated.

Portugal: Citizens Ask Icelanders About Democracy



Reykjavik Protest, 2008. Photo by Kristine Lowe on Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 license)

He adds that in Portugal also, *the solution for the current crisis cannot rely on ten years of severe budget restrictions to keep the banks that have greedily and unbridledly lent us money.*

The national ballot is just one of the *lessons* for Portugal and the rest of the European countries to learn from Iceland, as the online news platform *ionline reports*. The people have also organized sit-ins in front of the Parliament demanding

the fall of the conservative government, have taken those responsible for the crisis to justice - including the former Prime Minister Geir Haarde whose trial started last Monday, September 5 - and a new crowdsourced constitution is in the works.

Do you think that we in Portugal should do the same that you do?

In a video by Miguel Marques, a group of Portuguese citizens ask Icelanders about their social mobilization:



How did the unions in Iceland took [sic] position and saw [sic] themselves as players in the movements of the resistance against the debt crisis in Iceland and all over europe? (...)

Portugal: Citizens Ask Icelanders About Democracy

How are you Icelanders organizing yourselves to make a better future for you?

(...) What's happening now? What are you still doing? What are you struggling for and what do you think is worth fighting for, like the constitution? Is this constitution really separating the powers - economical, political, religious? How do you think it will help? What things do you want the constitution to help change? (...)

What are you doing now? The popular movements... are you still gathering? Are you organized in small groups? Did people split like the four of them who were elected? Do you have small groups of interests?

(...) Whether you people in Europe, and us here in the south, if we could find a way to get together and get what's wrong with the whole of the system, capitalist system of course? How can we actually create a network of help in which we could actually propose a whole new system for Europe and beyond? Go Iceland people!

For Miguel Madeira, from the blog Vias de Facto, the relative Icelandic success is more the result of popular mobilization than of new governments. In a comment to his post, Fernando Ribeiro starts by highlighting the fact that in Iceland there was no need for violent clashes and considers that whereas in Greece, Ireland and Portugal the political class didn't - and will not - consult the voters it represents when making such important decisions as falling back on the European fund. It is important to:

Portugal: Citizens Ask Icelanders About Democracy

requerer abertamente mais democracia na hora das tomadas de decisão fundamentais, e ultrapassar o argumento caduco da democracia liberal em que a democracia representativa funciona assim mesmo.

openly demand more democracy at the time of fundamental decision-making, and to overcome the obsolete argument of liberal democracy which says that representative democracy works just this way.

Icelanders are not only demanding more democracy but also taking part in *the ultimate affirmation of participatory democracy*. (...) Democracy 2.0, through a new crowdsourced constitution to be debated in the Parliament in October. Paula Thomaz from Carta Capital sums up the process:

a discussão para a nova [constituição] islandesa se dá através de vídeos do YouTube em tempo real, que mostram os debates do Conselho; fotos no Flickr; pequenas frases no Twitter; no site oficial dos temas (em islandês e em inglês); e no Facebook é que as ideias estão abertas para discussão.

The discussion for the new Icelandic [constitution] is taking place through YouTube videos in real time, that show the

debates of the Council; photos on Flickr; short sentences on Twitter; on the official website of the themes (in Icelandic and English); and on Facebook is where ideas are open for discussion.

To wrap up a thorough analysis on Iceland's response to the crisis, in an opinion article originally published in the website *Noticias do Douro* and widely shared online, engineer and public servant Fernando Gouveia, writes:

Se isto servir para esclarecer uma única pessoa que seja deste pobre país aqui plantado no fundo da Europa, que por cá anda sem eira nem beira ao sabor dos acordos milionários que os seus governantes acertam com o capital internacional, e onde os seus cidadãos passam fome para que as contas dos corruptos se encham até abarrotar, já posso dar por bem empregue o tempo que levei a escrever este artigo.

If this clears things up for at least one person from this poor country stuck right at the end of Europe, a person that wanders around here without a penny to taste the millionaire agreements that his or her government leaders reach with international capital, and where citizens go hungry so that the accounts of the corrupt are filled to the brim, I can consider the time it has taken me to write this article as well spent.

Spain: The October 15 Protests and Mass Media Coverage

The global October 15 protest favoring the exercise of real democracy and against the corruption of elite financial corporations was truly massive in Spain. An overview of coverage produced by some traditional media outlets and related online comments.

Original Spanish post by [Chris Moya](#). English translation by [Marianna Breytman](#). Posted 22 October 2011 22:30 GMT

During the global protests in over 1000 cities and 82 countries this October 15, people gathered under the motto *United for global change* to demand their rights and a true democracy. The Internet was flooded with videos calling upon the thousands of citizens that disagree with the policies of social cuts and the submissiveness of the governments to the market and financial corporations.

Spain: The October 15 Protests and Mass Media Coverage

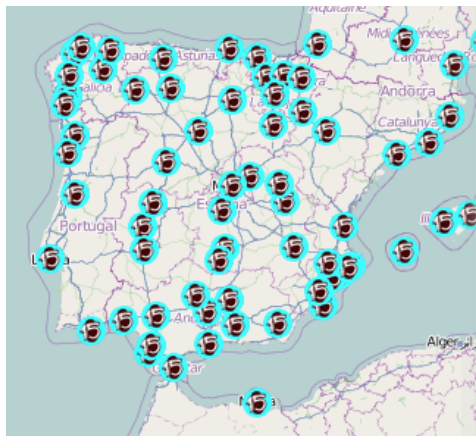


@democraciareal: ¿Piensas quedarte en casa y leer lo que ha sucedido en los libros de historia? ¿o quieres ser partícipe y vivirlo?

@democraciareal: Do you think you'll stay at home and read about what happened in history textbooks? or do you want to participate and live it?

In Spain's particular case, the list of meeting spots was quite extensive, as seen in the following image:

Spain: The October 15 Protests and Mass Media Coverage



#150 meeting points in Spain

In the first cities throughout the country, the influx of people was extremely large, reaching 500,000 in Madrid and 350,000 in Barcelona. The streets in these called-upon cities filled with posters, ideas and people outraged by neoliberal measures. Both demonstrations took place peacefully and the plazas came to harbor the feeling of union for global change, a change of mentality.

Spain: The October 15 Protests and Mass Media Coverage



The country's more conservative media, which has been misinforming readers from the moment the #15O movement began, took to the streets with the following front page:

Spain: The October 15 Protests and Mass Media Coverage



ABC's front page, 16 Oct. 2011

The indignant demonstrators *celebrate* their global protest.

[illegible]

*@MikelSB: Acabo de ver la portada de #ABCbit.ly/nAqieS
¡Lamentable manipulación! Sacan la única manifestación con
incidentes del #15o*

@MikelSB: I just saw #ABC's front page. A terrible manipulation! They take the only #15o demonstration that had violent incidents

The head of the newspaper El Mundo, Pedro J. Ramírez, conducted a poll on Twitter that suggests the position the conservative media wants to give the global movement for change; they either place 15M in the extreme left, portray them as violent, or completely belittle the thousands of people who took to the streets.

@pedroj_ramirez: Q opináis? a) El 15M generará nuevo partido de izdas. b) El 15M derivará en violencia antiRajoy. c) El 15M seguirá lúdico e irrelevante.

@pedroj_ramirez: What do you think? a) 15M will generate a new leftist party. b) 15M will result in anti-Rajoy violence. c) 15M will continue to be recreational and irrelevant.



The front page of La Razón did not highlight the massive protests.

As seen on front pages the following day, on October 16, not all newspapers share the same headlines nor partake in informational censorship in the least, unlike some cited previously.

Greek Financial Crisis and Anti-Austerity Protests: The Story So Far

After a slow-down during the summer, the Greek indignant movement appears to be picking up steam again in September – at the imposition of yet another round of austerity measures.

Written by [Asteris Masouras](#). Posted [28 October 2011 17:24 GMT](#)

After a year and a half of desperate rescue negotiations and bailout tranches doled out by the *International Monetary Fund*, the *European Central Bank* and the European Union, the intractable and increasingly ineffective austerity measures imposed by the *troika* (three) on Greece's socialist government, have been met with unrelenting protests. The drama of the European sovereign debt crisis with Greece in its center is coming to a head, as politicians desperately seek options to disentangle the European Union from mounting debt.

The Greek indignant movement, inspired by the *Arab Spring* uprisings and the European revolution movement that be-

gan in Spain, is centered mainly around sit-ins in public squares in Athens and Thessaloniki.



Runner statue mocked up as a rioter. Photo courtesy of the Athens indignant's multimedia team (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 license)

It seemingly foundered during the summer, after a series of violent police crackdowns, but appeared to be picking up steam again in September, as collective anger began boiling at the imposition of yet another round of austerity measures following the bailout agreed at the emergency Euro-zone summit in July.

The effects of austerity

With youth unemployment at over 40% and uncertainty hovering over diminishing work prospects at home, continuous austerity has engendered a new immigration wave, this time of Greece's brightest youth, compounding the drag on the economy by a forced and elective retirement rush brought on by downsizing and raised retirement age.

Austerity itself may constitute a human rights violation, as a United Nations expert noted in July. The relentless cascade of austerity measures is taking a toll on the everyday life of Greeks, with social services being curtailed and even the affordability of basic goods taking a hit due to staggered VAT increases and salary, pension and benefit cuts. A recent publication in the Lancet medical journal claims that the crisis is also incurring adverse health effects on the populace, while suicides and criminality are reportedly mounting.

Creative Greeks are affected by the austerity as well, using blogs and social media to vent their frustrations. Published blogger and copywriter Constantina Delimitrou paints a



Mass 'Indignant' protest in Athens. Image by endiaferon, copyright Demotix (29/05/2011).

glum picture of the financial insecurity gripping the minds and bodies of Greeks:

Οι περισσότεροι είμαστε με μόνιμες τανάλλες στα στομάχια για το περισσότερο μέρος της ημέρας και της νύχτας. Ένα βλαμμένο συνοθύλευμα από φόβους, αγωνίες, εικόνες τρομακτικές που δε θες αλλά σου σφηνώνονται στο κεφάλι και δε σ' αφήνουν να πάρεις ανάσα. [...] ακούς να ρωτάνε πόσα μακαρόνια να βάλουν στην άκρη για μια ώρα ανάγκης, πώς θα πάνε στη δουλειά χωρίς φράγκο και πόσο νερό άραγε να θέλει ένα μποστάνι στο μπαλκόνι. Και εκείνη η κυρία ένα βράδυ στο μετρό. Που έκλαιγε για δέκα ευρώ στο τηλέφωνο. Τα παιδιά της στο νοσοκομείο και δεν έβρισκε δέκα ευρώ να ταΐσει τα εγγόνια. Και αυτός που μιλούσε δεν είχε να της δώσει. Και δεν είχα ούτε εγώ. Αλλά και να 'χα, πώς να πλησιάσεις τον άλλο να τον βοηθήσεις;

Most of us have permanent pliers gripping our bellies for most of the day and night. A stupid mess of fears, anxieties, terrifying images that stick in your head unwittingly and won't let you breathe. [...] you hear them wondering how much spaghetti to shelve for an hour of need, how to go to work penniless, how much water does a balcony plot need. And that lady, that night at the subway. Crying over ten euros on the phone. Had her children in a hospital, and she couldn't find ten euros to feed her grandchildren. The listener didn't

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have any to give her. Neither did I. And even if I did, how do you approach somebody to offer help?



Athens indignant's general assembly, 29/5/2011.

Photo by Cyberela (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 license)

Web designer Cyberela dryly comments on her prospects as a chronic hemangioma sufferer:

Greek Financial Crisis and Anti-Austerity Protests: The Story So Far

@Cyberela: Φυσικά τις θεραπείες που κάνω τώρα δεν μπορεί να μου τις πληρώσει η ασφάλιση. Ο κόσμος με αιμαγγειωμα είναι καταδικασμένος στην Ελλάδα.

@Cyberela: Naturally, my social security can't cover my treatments. Hemangioma sufferers in Greece are doomed.

And actor Haris Attonis tweeted a laconic observation on migration:

@hartonis: Οι μισοί γνωστοί μου μετακόμισαν στο εξωτερικό. Οι άλλοι μισοί, μέσα τους.

@hartonis: Half my friends emigrated abroad. The other half, within themselves

Police clashes

Rampant police violence is exacerbating the social pressures. The most serious incidents occurred when unprecedented police violence against protesters at Syntagma square in Athens on June 28-29, was denounced by international human rights organizations, who noted the massive

use of teargas and urged the Greek police to refrain from using excessive force.

Indignant sit-ins, already depopulated due to summer vacations, were raided by police at night and dismantled, with restrictions reportedly placed in some cases to prevent future gatherings, as happened later to sit-ins in Spain and the United States. The customary prime minister's opening speech at the *Thessaloniki International Trade Fair* in September was greeted with angry protests and clashes, as disparate groups converged on the heavily policed square outside, while another emergency property tax was being announced.

Social media usage



Protest at Syntagma Square, 25/5/2011.

Photo courtesy of the Athens indignants (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 license)

Twitter has emerged as a mainstay platform for citizen journalism and activism in Greece, since the riots over the police killing of a minor in 2008. Several activist news curators used tweet aggregation tools to chronicle the anti-austerity protests, producing an impressive body of work.

Theodora Economides (@IrateGreek on Twitter) used Chirp-story to curate chronicles of most of the major protest events in Athens, while Antonis Gazakis (@gazakas on Twitter) posted daily livetweeted minutes of the Thessaloniki indignants' general assembly on Storify.

Myrto Orfanoudaki Simic collected videos of June 29 police brutality. Meanwhile 31,000 users liked the Facebook page of the Athens indignants, while 5,000 users have liked the Thessaloniki indignants Facebook profile. Dozens of photographers have been posting Greek protest photoreportage work on Demotix since early 2009, while thousands of photos and dozens of videos by activists and citizen journalists have been posted on the blog of the multimedia team of the Athens indignants in Syntagma Square under a Creative Commons license since these protests began.

On a humorous note, Theodora also started the #GreekPoliticianManual hashtag, based on Iyad El Baghdadi's Arab Tyrant Manual, to poke fun at the ethics and practices of politicians. The Angry Greeks vs. Angry Birds spoof, created by ToonPosers video art team, has garnered 105,000 hits on YouTube.

Greek Financial Crisis and Anti-Austerity Protests: The Story So Far



For updates and latest news on *Europe in Crisis*, check our [special coverage page](#), follow us on Twitter [@GVEuropeCrisis](#) and/or subscribe to our [RSS feed](#).

For comments, discussion and more resources, visit our [dedicated page](#) on the Global Voices Books website.

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

A newspaper has revealed that some public hospitals in Greece have refused treatment to women in labour, because they could not afford the hospital fees of 950 euro. Netizens are quick to comment and relate it to the harsh economic situation.

Written by Veroniki Krikoni. Posted 8 December 2011 15:18 GMT

Feelings of revulsion and anger were caused by news published in *Eleftherotypia* (Freedom of Press) newspaper on December 5, 2011, which revealed some public hospitals in Greece have refused treatment to women in labour, because they did not have the money to pay hospital fees of 950 euro. The incidents took place in November 2011, at public hospitals in Athens, Thessaloniki, Rhodes and Rethymnon. In these cases the cost of *integrated unified hospital treatment* according to Ministry of Health price list, came in at 950 euro for natural childbirth and 1,500 euro for birth by Caesarean section. Pregnant women pay the money in advance and afterwards the costs are offset with the labour allowance.

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

After several days delay, the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity intervened with a circular, stating that no advance payment of this amount will be required in future, leaving however the issue of price difference between the official price list and the provided labour allowance still open to question.



Birth. Photograph by Flickr user riqfy (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 license).

Two women's rights organizations, the *Women's Initiative Against Debt and Austerity Measures* and the *Independent Women's Movement*, have started to raise awareness of these incidents:

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

Giving birth is not a privilege of the rich! We demand free childbirth, we demand that the bailout funds go directly to health sector...

The news was shared and commented on throughout various social media channels by Greek netizens.

Dimitris Oikonomou expresses his shame about the event:

@d_oikon: ΝΤΡΟΠΗΗΗΗ...! Που φτάσαμε γαμώτο!! [Έδιωξαν από νοσοκομεία ετοιμόγεννες που δεν είχαν χρήματα...]

@d_oikon: WHAT A SHAMEEEEE...! What the heck, how did we end up here? [Women in labour were cast off by hospitals because they had no money...]

While user Gangelakis adds, in the spirit of the seasonal celebrations:

@Gangelakis: Και ο Χριστός σε σπηλιά γεννήθηκε: Δημόσια νοσοκομεία αρνήθηκαν α περιθάλψουν ετοιμόγεννες, επειδή δεν είχαν ν πληρώσουν

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

@Gangelakis: Jesus Christ himself was born in a cave: Public hospitals refused treatment to women in labour, because they had no money to pay

User Nemi V1 commented via her Facebook status update:

Ένα ένα τα διαβάζω σήμερα, σκάνε σαν χαστούκια...

Reading news today one at a time... each feels like a slap in the face...

User Lector stresses the very essence of this incident in a discussion forum:

Δεν κοιτάζαν την ταυτότητα αλλά το πορτοφολι.

They didn't look at the identity card, they looked at the wallet.

In the same forum, user simonbolivar makes a comparison with the American health care system:

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

*Η ΑΠΟΛΥΤΗ ΞΕΦΤΙΛΑ!
Ο ΔΙΑΣΥΡΜΟΣ ΕΝΟΣ ΣΥΣΤΗΜΑΤΟΣ,ΚΑΙ ΜΙΑΣ ΚΥΒΕΡΝΗΣΗΣ!
Μας κανανε Αμερικη,οπου αν δεν εχεις καλη ασφαλιση εισαι
τελειωμενος!*

*A COMPLETE HUMILIATION!
THE VILIFICATION OF A MECHANISM AND A GOVERNMENT!
They turned us into America, where you are finished if you
don't have any good insurance!*

While, in the same vein, user Isis adds irony to the mix in a different forum:

*Συγκίνηση, γινόμαστε Αμερική.
Ακούς εκεί να ξεγεννάνε δωρεάν τα δημόσια νοσοκομεία.
Κατάργηση και του επιδόματος τοκετού ΤΩΡΑ.*

*I am touched, we are becoming America.
Giving birth for free in public hospitals? Impossible. Wipe out
childbirth allowance NOW as well.*

In a news portal where the news were shared, user Harry expresses his anger in a comment under the original post about the hospital expenses and the dealing with maternity:

Από όλες τις επιθέσεις που έχω δεχτεί από το κράτος (χαράτσια, ΔΕΗ, φόροι) πρέπει να πω ότι η μεγαλύτερη οργή μου προκαλείται από το πως αντιμετωπίζει την έγκυο γυναίκα μου. Η ασφάλειά μου δεν καλύπτει τίποτα πλέον (ΤΕΒΕ) και το νοσοκομείο είναι πανάκριβο και για κλάμματα. Κάθε κράτος στηρίζει την μητρότητα εκτός από την Ελλάδα. Αν συνεχίσει αυτή η κατάσταση θα μεταναστεύσουμε σε άλλη χώρα οικογενειακώς.

Among all the attacks I have faced by the state (heavy taxation, electricity, additional taxes), I have to say I am most furious about the treatment my pregnant wife faces. My insurance no longer covers anything (Fund for Independent Professionals and Craftsmen) and the hospital is very expensive and its service is outrageous. Every country supports maternity except for Greece. If this situation continues, I will take my whole family and we will go abroad as immigrants.

Twitter user Jordi criticizes the ones responsible:

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

@jorjito73: Έδιωξαν από νοσοκομεία ετοιμόγεννες που δεν είχαν χρήματα... Όχι δεν φτάει ο Λοβέρδος, οι ανάλγητες διοικήσεις...

Women in labour were cast off by hospitals, because they had no money... Loverdos' [Minister of Health] fault? Of course not, blame the cruel administration...

The discussion then moved to completely different subject about the future of the country and its future citizens:

@katerinas_diary: @jorjito73 επεμβαίνουν και στο μέλλον της φυλής δηλαδή.. Αν οι άνεργες κλπ ετοιμόγεννες δεν θα γίνονται δεκτές στα δημόσια νοσοκομεία!!!

@katerinas_diary: @jorjito73 They interfere to the future of the race, that is... If unemployed women who want to give birth are not admitted in public hospitals!!!

@jorjito73: @katerinas_diary Είναι μια αρχή κι αυτή για να διαμορφώσουν οριστικά & αμετάκλητα το εκλογικό σώμα τα επόμενα χρόνια... Αίσχος και κατάντια

Greece: Giving Birth is Not a Privilege of the Rich!

@jorjito73: @katerinas_diary It's the beginning of forming the electorate during the following years, once and for all...Shame and abjection.

Births in Greece appear to have decreased by 15% during the last year, as the harsh economic situation is forcing many couples to delay having their first or second child.

Eurozone Crisis: 2011 Citizen Media Responses

The year 2011 will be remembered for the European debt crisis and its impact on the global economy, but also for its hard consequences on everyday lives.

An overview of citizen media responses from several EU countries.

Written by Paola D'Orazio. Posted 7 January 2012 18:21 GMT

The year 2011 will be remembered for the European debt crisis and its impact on the global economy, but also for its hard consequences on everyday life. The crisis began in 2007 and is without precedent in post-war economic history. Europe is living its darkest economic days since the 1930s.

Due to the growing importance of the topic and due to the diffusion of social media platforms, in recent months there has been a proliferation of *economic blogging* (and tweeting). Opinion, thoughts and reactions abound online trying to make sense of what future awaits the Eurozone.

Considering VAT increases, along with salary, pension and benefit cuts, some basic goods are becoming less affordable. Indian blogger Deepankar Basu wrote on the indian economic website Sanhati:

These [austerity] measures reduce expenditure and increase taxes in order to reduce government deficits. Cutbacks in government spending and increases in taxes, at this particular moment, however, amount to the worst possible policy stance, reducing aggregate demand even further, and pushing the economies deeper into recession.

Sovereign debts, junk ratings: protests take to the street

The crisis is perceived to have started within three countries - Ireland, Greece and Portugal - but quickly spread to Spain and Italy.

Since the international rating agencies gave their assessments (ratings) for each national solvency (the ability to pay public debt) it seemed they *held the wand* over the Eurozone's future. This power over the fate of each state provoked strong debates all over Europe, with many questioning the legitimacy of their analysis.

In Portugal, for example, there was a strong commotion and reaction when the independent American financial analysis firm Moody's called Portuguese debt *junk debt*.

But the core of the protests occurred in May. It all started in Spain with the 15M movement, mainly coordinated by the youth organization Democracia Real Ya, which was extremely active online and organized massive demonstrations against

corruption, unemployment, and a political structure allegedly favouring a two-party system.

The acampadas born in Plaza del Sol in Madrid quickly infected other Spanish cities, such as Barcelona, Sevilla and Malaga. In a few weeks other movements became active in other European Countries and globally, later the Occupy Wall Street movement.



"#campmap for "#worldrevolution" - More than 600 demonstrations and camp outs were ignited in solidarity with Spanish protesters by the end of May, 2011.

Some, including mainstream media, soon made connections between the the so-called Spanish Revolution and the Arab Spring.

Como si se tratara de la plaza Tahrir, en Egipto, escenario de las protestas populares[es]. El caldo de cultivo del derrocamiento de

*Hosni Mubarak. Esto es distinto pero puede ser el embrión de algo.
Quién sabe.*

As if we were in Tahrir square, in Egypt, the scenario for popular uprisings, and the path towards overthrowing Mubarak. This is different, but it may be the seed of something. Who knows.



Solidarity to the Spanish movement came soon from Greece, which has been the first European Union country to taste the sting of IMF/ECB austerity since 2010. Particularly in Greece the anti-austerity protests have been strongest. In June there were peaceful protests and gatherings at Syntagma (Constitution) Square, and when protesters planned

to surround the House of the Parliament the day for which the vote for the Mid-Term Austerity Programme had been scheduled, there were violent clashes with the police.

Protests and demonstrations continued over the summer especially in Spain and Greece. But only the big reforms and the austerity plans widely adopted in *PIIGS* countries (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) late in the autumn marked a turning point of the European debt crisis.

Blood and Tears: the austerity recipe

The pressure of the financial markets and recommendations coming from European Commission urged some governments to adopt so-called austerity measures aimed at eliminating unsustainable budget deficits. Recipes seem to have some common traits across countries: cuts on social spending and social services, additional taxes, VAT increases and salary cuts with citizens paying for the crisis.

In Spain the intense social debate over the economic recovery plan led to new protest in September when the #refor-mazo (#bigreform) was announced. Spain, and later Italy, decided to introduce constitutional changes to limit public spending (budgetary stability). In turn, there were protests throughout the country organized by the assemblies of Puer-ta del Sol and by the entire 15M movement against what *Real Democracy Now!* has called the Financial Coup D'État.

In Greece in October there was an unprecedented protest during the Ochi Day (No Day) Parade since Greeks were angry for the relentless and ineffective austerity measures, culminating in the *haircut* deal negotiated by banks and European politicians, which many fear signifies the beginning of a new foreign *occupation* of the country.

The impact of the austerity recipes have been particularly severe in Greece where suicides and criminality are mounting, and where social and health assistance is becoming more and more expensive. The reportedly high cost (that can reach 1,000 euros) for childbirth in public hospitals is only one example of adverse social impacts of the current crisis.

But there are also chronicles of the victims of the explosive cocktail of the housing bubble, the financial crisis, and high unemployment rates. Thousands of families are now without homes. A large campaign started in Spain against housing speculation, to stop evictions and relocate families to unused buildings.

Mobilizing on the streets and the Internet

Apart from economic issues and their implications for the people of European countries, democratic participation and citizenship rights occupy the public debate. The massive participation in protests and demonstrations against auster-

ity measures - both online and in the streets - was something new on the European political scene.

Many, such as in Portugal, have pointed out there was an alternative to the top-down measures imposed by EC, IMF and ECB so that the Iceland's practice of direct democracy became a model. Since Iceland refused an international bailout, many argued that there could be a different solution for the current crisis than ten years of severe budget restrictions to bail out bondholders.

But there was also another issue that emerged in recent months, since there have been crucial changes of government in three European countries. While in Spain the change was due to early elections, the new prime ministers in Greece and in Italy were chosen by the head of state, without any popular approval.

The resignation of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy was particularly important not only for the country, but for the whole European Union, since the country needed to calm financial markets in order to keep interest rates on sovereign debt under control. After the *Party for Berlusconi's resignation* soon Italians and Europeans involved in the crisis had to face the ugly reality they have to live with.

As Europe's financial woes intensify, austerity reigns, the crisis deepens and economists are forecasting an (unprecedented?) recession, maybe 2011 will be remembered as a *lost year* of the European economic history.

Italy: More Protests Against Austerity and Information Deficit

The austerity measures being implemented in EU countries are still drawing popular opposition. Especially in a country like Italy, already strained by years of government mismanagement and budget issues -- not to mention a relevant information deficit.

Original Italian post and English translation by Ylenia Gostoli. Posted 7 February 2012 11:25 GMT

The many protest movements that followed the implementation of austerity measures in a number of European countries dealing with the sovereign debt crisis, should have taught us that when a national economy is left at the mercy of interest rates and financial markets, sooner or later you can expect its people to express their discontent. Especially in a country, like Italy, already strained by years of government mismanagement, and where to the budget and democratic deficits, an information deficit needs to be added to the equation.

Since mid-January, Italy has been swept by a wave of protests, which began in Sicily with the mobilisation of farmers, truck drivers and fishermen, mostly small business owners, later joined by the Sicilian population at large, including waged workers, students and the unemployed. The movement goes by the name of *Forza d'Urto* ("shock force"), better known as *the Pitchforks Movement*.

From January 16, trucks brought the island's roads and motorways to a standstill for six days through at least 26 blockades, disrupting the circulation of goods and bringing business to a halt, with long cues for petrol and empty supermarket shelves.

The protests later spread to other regions, with strikes and blockades all over Italy. In Rome, during a fishermen demonstration in front of the Chamber of Deputies, three demonstrators were reported injured. A mass mobilisation against the austerity package implemented by Prime Minister Mario Monti and his cabinet, lamenting especially the steep rise in the price of petrol. However, during the first few days of the protests, the Italian media was largely silent, except for a few local newspapers, as Marco Cedolin points out in his blog Il Corrosivo:

I media mainstream in queste stesse ore tacciono, reputando (e lasciando intendere) che in Sicilia non stia accadendo nulla che meriti attenzione, tutto tranquillo e nessun problema.

Italy: More Protests Against Austerity and Information Deficit

Davvero la protesta in questione è una vicenda d'importanza ed incidenza così minimale da non meritare neppure un servizietto di 50 secondi, di quelli che comunemente vengono dedicati perfino al nuovo tatuaggio sfoggiato dal vip di turno?

Mainstream media are currently silent on the issue, judging (and implying) that nothing worth of attention is happening in Sicily right now, everything is calm and there's no problem. Is the protest of such marginal importance that it doesn't even deserve a 50-second report, one of those that are usually reserved to discussing the latest tattoo sported by some random celebrity?

The sectors on strike are protesting against the government liberalisation package, but are also united by a sense of disenfranchisement from the whole of the *political caste*: fishermen who claim to be no longer able to sustain the costs of running their business because of excise tax; truckers who can't afford to transport goods at the low fee determined by open market competition because of rising petrol costs. Because of this, the mobilisation was met with a lot of skepticism and accusations that it merely represents a set of narrow interests.

On Fuori Onda Blog David Incamicia reflects this position, which tends to criticise the movement for putting all the

blame on the current government, which last November inherited from Berlusconi a country with a broken economy and a shattered international reputation:

Le piazze in rivolta avevano certamente motivo d'essere fino a qualche settimana fa, quando l'irresponsabilità di un sol uomo al comando e la sua ostinata resistenza al potere hanno finito per rendere ancor più dura e di difficile risoluzione la pesante situazione sociale del Paese (...)

Ma oggi, proprio per evitare il tracollo definitivo, occorre che tutti giochino nella stessa squadra (...) Gli egoismi vanno rimossi senza se e senza ma. Così come l'ancora poderosa demagogia che arringa a destra e a manca.

Those taking to the squares certainly had every reason to do so until a few weeks ago, when the irresponsibility of a one man-leadership and his stubborn refusal to give up power only made a resolution even more difficult for the country's already tense social fabric.

But today, precisely in order to avoid an irreversible downfall, everyone needs to play in the same team (...) Selfish interests need to be removed with no ifs and no buts. The same goes for the strong demagogic discourse coming from right and left.

While those keen to seize the opportunity to voice criticism of the current government (like the far-right party *Lega Nord*, now at the opposition) seem to ignore that the farmers movement (or *Pitchforks Movement*) was actually born last summer, and that fishermen have been organising strikes since 2008, there persists an inability (or lack of willpower?) to define the nature of the movement, which paves the way to confusion and exploitation for different political ends.

During the strikes, mainstream media focused on alleged mafia infiltrations and the death of a trucker in Asti, while on Facebook the pages devoted to or associated with the movement proliferated, revealing, among other things, a number of links with the neofascist movement *Forza Nuova*, which supports the Pitchforks. Commonly used hash tags on Twitter were #fermosicilia, #forzadurto e #forconi.

The following comment by Veneti stufi on what labels itself the movement's official Facebook page is representative of this confusion:

Non capisco più nulla, pagine colme di rabbia e non di vera indignazione/protesta, ma quali sono i VERI FORCONI? Il sito non è attivo, ognuno in rete dice tutto ed il contrario di tutto, USATE la rete e coinvolgete le persone, non date modo di strumentalizzarvi.

I don't understand, I see pages full of rage rather than real indignation/protest, who are the REAL PITCHFORKS? The website is inactive, online everyone says everything and the opposite of everything, USE the web and get people involved, don't give anyone the chance to exploit you.

However, at the various marches organised in various cities around Sicily, including Gela (as shown in the video below) and Palermo, there were students, the unemployed and young people with all kinds of political affiliations, as demonstrated by the following press release signed by the Studentato Autogestito Anomalia e dal Laboratorio Vittorio Arigoni, two of the city's main social centres:

La protesta popolare che si sta diffondendo in Sicilia come tutte le proteste di questo tipo sono complesse, di massa e contraddittorie, ma di sicuro parlano il linguaggio della lotta contro la globalizzazione, contro equitalia e lo strozzinaggio legalizzato che sta mettendo in miseria larghe fasce della societa' siciliana , contro la casta politica di destra e di sinistra (...)

Noi, militanti di centri sociali e di spazi occupati della citta' di Palermo, sosterremo la lotta di forconi e autotrasportatori perchè frutto di una giusta battaglia e perchè ricca di positive e incompatibili energie; per questo, come sempre, saremo al fianco di chi lotta contro la crisi e questo intollerabile sistema.

Sicily's popular uprising, as every protest of this kind, is a complex and contradictory mass mobilisation, but it surely speaks the language of the fight against globalisation, against Equitalia (the government body responsible for tax collection) and its legalised usury, which is reducing large chunks of Italian society to poverty, against the political caste of both the Left and the Right (...)

We, militants of the social centres and of Palermo's occupied spaces, will support the struggle of Pitchforks and truckers because is it the result of a just battle and because it is full of positive and incompatible energies; because of this, as always, we will side with those who struggle against the crisis and against this intolerable system.

Italy: More Protests Against Austerity and Information Deficit



According to Marco Cedolin, the protest deserves attention because it tries to go beyond the ideological divide:

Non so quanta fortuna avrà la protesta dei Forconi che sta paralizzando la Sicilia, così come non conosco le prospettive di una movimentazione che sembra manifestarsi (per la prima volta in Italia) realmente trasversale, abiurando i partiti e tentando di mettere nel cassetto le divisioni settarie fra rossi e neri che da sempre minano alla radice qualsiasi battaglia in questo disgraziato paese, conducendola ogni volta sul binario morto della diffidenza e dei distinguo.

I don't know what will be of the Pitchfork protest that has been paralysing Sicily, as well as I'm not sure about what to expect from a movement that (for the first time in Italy) seems to represent diverse political interests, rejecting political parties and attempting to set aside sectarian divisions between red shirts and black shirts that have always undermined every struggle from its very start in this wretched country, mutual suspicion and differences leading each time to a dead end.

The failure of public opinion to comprehend the nature of the protests is also, and perhaps especially, the failure of the mass media to tell the story, another legacy of the Berlusconi years (Italy is 61st in Reporters Without Borders' world press freedom index 2011-12, and one which politicians still hesitate dealing with). For Davide Grasso, writing on the blog Quiete o Tempesta, the Pitchfork protest was:

*l'ennesimo successo a metà del sistema italiano dell'informazione.
Successo nel combattere le aspirazioni dei soggetti sociali che
scelgono la strada della protesta ma fallimento (opposto e speculare)
nel comprendere e riportare un rilevante fenomeno sociale.*

yet another half-baked success of the Italian information system. Success in repressing the aspirations of those who choose the path of resistance, but failure (its opposite mirror image) in comprehending and reporting such an important social phenomenon.

Lastly, Nicola Spinella writes on Agoravox:

Il celebre motto divide et impera rivela ancora oggi, dopo due millenni, la propria immortalità: è bastato agitare davanti al popolo il fantasma della mafia infiltrata nelle fila degli autotrasportatori, assimilarli a sigle dell'estrema destra, per ridurre la protesta ad un fuoco di paglia. Difficile pronosticare uno scenario futuro per tutta un'Italia scossa dal salasso Monti e da un ventennio di malgoverno berlusconiano.

The famous maxim divide and rule has today revealed, after two millennia, its timelessness: drawing people's attention to mafia characters infiltrated among the ranks of the truckers, and associating them with far-right acronyms was enough to reduce the protest to a flash in the pan. It is difficult to predict what the future holds for a country drained by Monti and twenty years of mismanagement under Berlusconi.

The dialogue between the government and the movement appears to have reached a standstill, and a new wave of protests was due to start on Monday 6 February, with sit-ins in a number of sicilian towns and cities. A few of these have been reported, but it looks like the planned occupation of seaports and oil refineries has been postponed. Long queues at petrol stations in Messina were reported on Saturday 4 February, allegedly in preparation for the strikes.

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Greece: Public Suicide of 77 Year Old Man in Athens Square

All Greece was shocked this morning by the news that Dimitris Christoulas, aged 77, shot himself in the head, in full view of passersby in Syntagma Square, Athens, across from the Parliament building. He reportedly shouted that he didn't want to leave any debts to his children.

Written by [Veroniki Krikoni](#). Posted 4 April 2012 15:01 GMT

All Greece was shocked this morning by the news that Dimitris Christoulas, aged 77, shot himself in the head around 9 am, in full view of passersby in Syntagma square, Athens, across from the Parliament building.

The man is reported to have been a retired pharmacist, who sold his pharmacy in 1994. Before the shot, he reportedly shouted that he *didn't want to leave any debts to his children*.

A Facebook event calls for a gathering to Syntagma square today evening: *Everyone at Syntagma. Let's not get used to death*. Global Voices author Asteris Masouras created a collection of posts and media on Storify.

Greece: Public Suicide of 77 Year Old Man in Athens Square



Poster from a Facebook event for this evening in Syntagma square. It reads: *It wasn't a suicide. It was a murder. LET'S NOT GET USED TO DEATH.*

Greek Twitter-sphere has been buzzing all day with mixed comments and reactions on this tragic event:

@YanniKouts: Suicide of a 77-year old man this morning in Syntagma Sq shocks #Greece. It's the only way for a dignified end, I can't eat from garbage.

User Arkoudos makes a wish for all those left behind:

Greece: Public Suicide of 77 Year Old Man in Athens Square

*@arkoudos: Μακάρι να μη φύγεις. Μακάρι να μείνεις, να παλέψεις.
Κι άλλο. Μακάρι. Μακάρι να μη ντρέπεσαι. Μακάρι να ντραπούμε,
πρώτα, εμείς.*

*@arkoudos: I wish you didn't leave. I wish you stayed, to fight.
More. I wish. I wish you didn't feel ashamed. I wish we will be
the ones to get ashamed first.*



Syntagma Square, Athens, Greece.

Image by Flickr user YanniKouts (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 license).

User Magica underlines the shame both sides share on this controversial issue:

*@magicasland: είναι ντροπή αυτο που κανει το κράτος στο λαό του.
αλλά είναι και ντροπή να αυτοκτονείς ενώ επιβίωσε με πεισμα
τόσος κοσμος επι κατοχής*

@magicasland: It's a shame what the country does to its people, but it's also shame to commit suicide, while all these people stubbornly survived during the Nazi occupation [of World War Two]

Online debate went political, apart from its unquestionable humanitarian aspect. Journalist Aris Chatzistefanou drew parallels to the Bouazizi suicide in Tunisia:

@xstefanou: Η Ελλάδα έχει το δικό της Μπουαζίζι. Πρέπει να δείξει αν έχει και λαό ισάξιο της Τυνησίας και της Αιγύπτου η μόνο ψηφοφόρους ΠΑΣΟΚ -ΝΔ-ΛΑΟΣ.

@xstefanou: Greece has its own Bouazizi. It has to prove if its people is as worthy as Tunisia's and Egypt's, instead of having only voters of PASOK-ND-LAOS. [PASOK and ND have been the

main political parties in Greece during the last two decades, LAOS is the prominent right-wing party].

User Elikas seeks justice:

*@Elikas: Κάποια στιγμή πρέπει να δικάσουν και οι ηθικοί
αυτουργοί για όλες αυτές τις αυτοκτονίες. Που στην
πραγματικότητα είναι δολοφονίες.*

*@Elikas: Some time, the accomplices must go to the court for
all these suicides. [These suicides] in fact are murders.*

Sara Firth criticizes the European methods for Greek rescue:

*@SaraFirth_RT: Europes [sic] methods for 'saving Greece' are now
literally killing the Greek people. The syntagma suicide should never
have happened #greece*

Athens News reports about a suicide note found on the victim, where reportedly he compared the present Greek government to wartime collaborationists:

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The Tsolakoglou government has annihilated all traces for my survival. And since I cannot find justice, I cannot find another means to react besides putting a decent end [to my life], before I start searching the garbage for food.

Georgios Tsolakoglou was a Greek military officer who became the first prime minister of the Greek collaborationist government during the Axis Occupation in 1941-1942. The reference is obviously seen as a comparison between the wartime government and the current government of Lucas Papademos.

PenelopeD10, mocking Athens Mayor Giorgos Kaminis for his decision last summer to oust tents protesters off Syntagma square, because it was a bad image for Athens tourists, says ironically:

*@PenelopeD10: Μη βγάλει κι άλλο φιρμάνι ο Καμίνης
απαγορεύονται οι αυτοκτονίες στο κέντρο γιατί βλάπτουν τον
τουρισμό...*

*@PenelopeD10: I wish Kaminis won't issue another decree
suicides forbidden in [Athens city] center because they harm
tourism...*

Many also accused people that tried to politically exploit and use a simple person's death for politics or their own interests:

@dianalizia: shameless! karatzaferis opportunistically uses man's suicide this morning to criticize corrupt politicians & system (he is a part of)

@mindstripper: Οι δημοσιογράφοι πανηγυρίζουν, οι πολιτικοί παπαγαλίζουν κι εμείς στις εκλογές θα κάψουμε γι άλλη μία φορά τη χώρα. Καλό ταξίδι στον άνθρωπο.

@mindstripper: Journalists triumph, politicians parrot and we will burn this country one more time at national elections. Farewell to this man.

Apart from any political interpretation or exploitation of this tragic incident, Serk01 brings on the simple truth of human existence:

@serk01: κανε ενά βήμα 'πίσω' και σκέψου τι σημαίνει να αυτοκτονεί ένας άνθρωπος.

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@serk01: Take a step back and think what it means that a human being commits suicide.

Switzerland: An Initiative to Establish Basic Income for All

An initiative to establish a new federal law that would give a basic monthly income to all citizens, regardless of employment status, was formally introduced in Switzerland in April. Selection of comments and opinions online. Original French post by Stanislas Jourdan. English translation by Vivienne Griffiths. Posted 7 May 2012 20:42 GMT

An initiative to establish a new federal law known as For an unconditional basic income was formally introduced in Switzerland in April. The idea, which consists quite simply of giving a monthly income to all citizens that is neither means-tested nor work-related, has generated commentary throughout the Swiss blogosphere.

The Swiss referendum process is a system of direct democracy that enables citizens to call for legislative change at the federal or constitutional level.

If the initiative to introduce a basic income gathers more than 100,000 signatures before October 11, 2013, the Federal Assembly is required to look into it and can call a referendum if the initiative is judged to be credible.

On his blog, Pascal Holenweg explains what it's all about:

L'initiative populaire pour un revenu de base inconditionnel propose d'inscrire dans la constitution fédérale l'instauration d'une allocation universelle versée sans conditions devant permettre à l'ensemble de la population de mener une existence digne et de participer à la vie publique.

La loi réglerait le financement et fixerait le montant de cette allocation (les initiants la situent à 2000-2500 francs par mois, soit, grosso modo, le montant maximum de l'aide sociale actuelle, mais n'inscrivent pas ce montant dans le texte de l'initiative). Le revenu de base est inconditionnel : il n'est subordonné à aucune contre-prestation. Il est universel (tout le monde le touche) et égalitaire (tout le monde touche le même montant). Il est individuel (il est versé aux individus, pas aux ménages).

Il n'est pas un revenu de substitution à un revenu ou un salaire perdu. En revanche, il remplace tous les revenus de substitution (assurance chômage, retraite, allocations familiales, allocations d'étude, rentes invalidité) qui lui sont inférieurs. Comment le financer? Par l'impôt direct sur le revenu et la fortune, par l'impôt indirect sur la consommation (la TVA), par un impôt sur les transactions financières, et surtout par le transfert des ressources consacrées au financement de l'AVS, de l'AI, de l'aide sociale et des



Swiss Francs by Flickr user Jim (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 license).

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autres revenus de substitution inférieurs au montant du revenu de base.

The grassroots initiative for an unconditional basic income proposes that the establishment of an unconditional universal benefit be written into the federal constitution which would allow the entire population to lead a dignified existence and participate in public life. The law will address financing and set the amount of the benefit (the proposers suggest around 2,000-2,500 Swiss francs per month (or 2,200-2,700 US dollars per month), which is about the same as the maximum current social security payment, but they have not written this into the text of the initiative). The basic income does not come with any conditions attached: it is not subject to any means testing. It is universal (everyone will receive it) and egalitarian (everyone will receive the same amount). It is also personal (it is paid out to individuals, not households). It is not income to replace a lost salary. Rather, it replaces all inferior income support (unemployment benefit, pensions, family allowance, student grants, disability payments). How will it be financed? Through direct taxation of income and wealth, indirect taxation on consumption (VAT), taxing financial transactions, and most especially through the reallocation of resources currently allotted to financing state pensions and

unemployment payouts, social security and other welfare payments lower than the amount of the basic income.

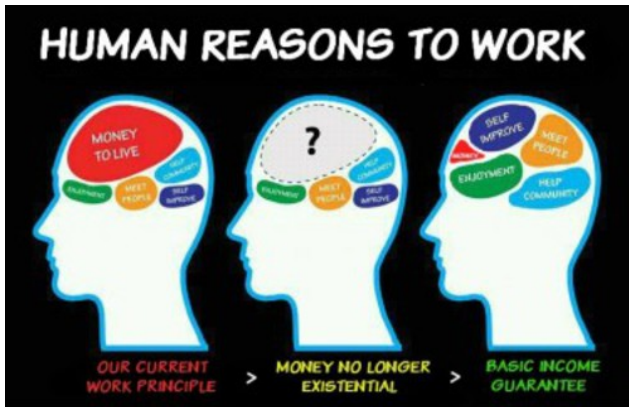
On his blog, Fred Hubleur makes the point:

Le truc important, c'est que ce revenu est fixé pour toutes et tous sans qu'il n'y ait de contrepartie de travail ; oui, un revenu sans emploi. Cela peut choquer. Mais dans le fond c'est une idée parfaitement défendable. D'une part, on lutte ainsi contre la pauvreté et la précarité, plus besoins d'aides sociales en complément de revenus autres et des dizaines d'aides différentes et complexes à mettre en œuvre. Ce revenu inconditionnel est également un bon point pour l'innovation et la création. (...) On est aussi dans un nouveau paradigme qui peut effrayer les capitalistes acharnés : libérer l'Homme du travail et lui rendre son statut d'homo sapiens prévalant à celui d'homo travaillus qui a tellement cours dans notre société.

The important thing is that this revenue is fixed for everyone without there being a requirement to work; that's right, it is income without employment. This might seem shocking. But at its heart it is an entirely defensible idea. On the one hand, we are fighting against poverty and insecurity, there will no longer be a need for social security to bolster other incomes, and dozens of different and unwieldy benefits. This

unconditional income is equally good news for innovation and creativity. (...) We have also made a paradigm shift that dyed-in-the-wool capitalists might find alarming: the liberation of working man, returning him to his status as homo sapiens over that of homo travailus [Homo travailus is a play on word to describe the working man] which holds such sway in our society.

Martouf sets out a number of arguments in favour of a basic income, as illustrated here:



Human reason to work by freeworldcharter.org via active rain and adapted by Martouf in French with permission to repost

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This new world vision has most notably been explored in the Swiss-German film *Basic Income: A Cultural Impetus*, by Ennon Schmidt and Daniel Hani, two of eight Swiss founders of the initiative:



And what would you do with a basic income?

On the website of *BIEN_Switzerland*, the Swiss branch of the global network calling for a basic income, Internet users were asked the following question:

Voilà, ça y est, vous l'avez. Chaque mois vous recevez 2500 francs sans condition. Dites-nous en quoi votre vie a changé. Dites-nous ce que vous faites de votre temps. A quoi vous consacrez votre vie ?

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So here it is. You receive 2,500 Swiss francs every month no strings attached. Tell us how your life would change. Tell us how you would spend your time. What would you devote your life to?



A poster from the *revenu de base inconditionnel* initiative

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The responses were varied. Antoine would set up a restaurant. Gaetane a farm. Renaud would devote himself to music:

Mon premier projet serait de finir et de tenter de produire un instrument de musique que je suis en train de créer. Parallèlement à ça je proposerais des cours d'utilisation de mon instrument de musique préféré et peu connu dans la région

My first project would be to finish a musical instrument that I am in the process of creating and attempting to put it into production. At the same time I would offer lessons on how to play my favourite musical instrument, one which is not well known in this region.

User herfou70 would prioritise his family:

Je suis Père de famille (3 enfants - 6-11-14 ans) et suis le seul salairé de la famille. Disposer d'une revenu de base me permettrait de consacrer plus temps à mes enfants. Mon épouse pourrait également avoir une activité autre que celle qu'elle occupe dans le foyer, ce qui lui permettrait de plus s'épanouir

I am a father (3 children - 6, 11 and 14 years old) and I am the family's only earner. To have a basic income would allow me

to devote more time to my children. My wife would also be able to do something outside of looking after our home, allowing her to grow and develop.

On Facebook, supporters of the basic income initiative have launched a competition called *star for life*. Visitors to the site are invited to take a photo of themselves as if they were sentenced to life.

A basic income will do more harm than good

But not everyone is convinced by the idea. According to Jean Christophe Schwaab, a member of Switzerland's lower house of representatives, socialists must not support the proposition, which he judges will *do more harm than good and be a disaster for employees*. He gave the following explanation on his blog:

Les partisans du revenu de base prétendent que ce revenu doit «libérer de l'obligation de gagner sa vie» et entraînerait la disparition des emplois précaires ou mal payés, car, puisque le revenu de base garantit le minimum vital, plus personnes ne voudra de ces emplois.

Or, c'est probablement le contraire qui se produirait. Comme ces faibles montants ne suffiront pas à atteindre le premier objectif de l'initiative, à savoir garantir des conditions de vie décentes, leurs bénéficiaires seront obligés de travailler quand même, malgré le

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revenu de base. La pression d'accepter n'importe quel emploi ne disparaîtra donc pas.

Supporters of a basic income claim that it must free people from the obligation of earning a living and lead to the disappearance of unstable or poorly paid employment, because, as this basic income guarantees a minimum living wage, no one will want these jobs. Now, it's more than likely to produce the opposite effect. As the low level of the payouts will not be sufficient to satisfy the initiative's primary objective, namely ensure a decent standard of living, the beneficiaries will be obliged to work anyway, despite the basic income. The pressure to accept any available job will not go away.

He added:

Enfin, le revenu de base inconditionnel aurait pour grave défaut d'exclure définitivement bon nombre de travailleurs du marché du travail (dont on nierait alors le droit au travail): ceux dont on ne jugerait pas la capacité de gain suffisante (p. ex. en raison d'un handicap, de maladie ou de faibles qualifications) n'auraient qu'à se contenter du revenu de base.

Lastly, an unconditional basic income would, worst of all, permanently exclude a good number of workers from the job market (by denying their right to work): those who are judged to have insufficient earning potential (e.g. due to disability, illness or lack of qualifications) will just have to content themselves with the basic income.

His analysis is controversial, as can be seen from the comments thread under his post. From a French perspective, Jeff Renault explained why the left are dead set against an unconditional basic income:

La gauche de la fin du 19^e et du 20^e siècle s'est forgée autour de la valeur travail et la défense des travailleurs. Ce combat se retrouve dans la défense persistante du salariat et de son St. Graal, le CDI, alors même que ce statut ne concerne plus qu'une minorité de personnes.

The left of the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries was forged on the values of work and defending workers. This fight centres around the never ending defence of the salaried worker and the Holy Grail of permanent, salaried contracts, even through this status only applies to the minority.

With the launch of the initiative, Hubleur hopes that a great societal debate will open up in Switzerland:

Ce sera au moins la porte ouverte à un grand débat de société et l'occasion de réfléchir à ce que l'on veut et à quelle vie on aspire. Ce système d'allocation universelle (ou autres noms), ça fait un moment que je le suis, je me souviens qu'on en avait parlé dans des cours sur la précarité et le lien social il y a une dizaine d'années à l'université.

Le principe est franchement séduisant et mérite qu'on s'y arrête.

Quand on voit le monde que nous donne le système capitaliste et productiviste actuel, on peut bien se prendre à rêver d'autre chose, d'un monde laissant plus de chances à chacune et chacun.

This will at least open the door to a great societal debate and the chance to reflect on what we want and to what kind of life we aspire. I've been following the idea of a universal benefit system (amongst other names) for a while. I remember talking about it in a class on instability and social ties a decade ago at university. The idea is frankly very seductive and deserves a closer look. When you look at the world created through the current capitalist, productivist model, you could easily end up longing for something else, for a world that gives everyone a better chance.

Europe: Economic Crisis Fuels Rise in Anti-Immigration Politics

The French presidential election may be over, but the fact that outgoing president Nicolas Sarkozy chose immigration as the core theme of his campaign is still the subject of much debate on the Web. Many netizens took aim with his choice to flirt with his party's far-right – voicing their difference of opinions. Original French post by [Lova Rakotomalala](#). English translation by [Ariane Defreine](#). Posted 10 May 2012 20:31 GMT

The French presidential election may be over, but the fact that outgoing president Nicolas Sarkozy chose immigration as a core theme of his campaign is still the subject of much debate on the Web. Many netizens have wondered whether his choice to flirt with the far-right wing of his electorate helped temper his defeat or whether, on the contrary, it was one of the reasons his electorate deserted him.

Given the apparent waning appetite of European voters for multiculturalism, singling out immigration as the root of the

global economic crisis has proven fruitful for far-right parties across the continent.



African refugees, by Vito Manzari on Flickr (CC BY 2.0 license)

If this rhetoric sounds familiar, it's because it has affected the old continent, when in times of crisis, in a cyclical pattern for centuries. Valérie, on her blog *Crêpe Georgette*, recounted the chronology of perceptions on immigration in France from the first half of the 19th century until today:

Europe: Economic Crisis Fuels Rise in Anti-Immigration Politics

S'il est une idée en vogue, c'est bien de penser que les anciennes vagues d'immigration (italiennes, polonaises, espagnoles, belges ...) se sont parfaitement intégrées au contraire des vagues, plus récentes, maghrébines et africaines.

Les anciennes vagues d'immigrés étaient travailleuses, ne posaient aucun problème et les français les ont d'ailleurs parfaitement acceptées, entend-on souvent.

Constatons donc que les propos actuels sur les immigrés les plus récents ne sont qu'une répétition d'idées reçues anciennes et qui se sont exercées à l'encontre de toutes les communautés migrantes (qu'elles viennent de province ou de pays étrangers).

If there is but one fashionable idea, it is the belief that the old immigration waves (from Italy, Poland, Spain, Belgium...) are now fully integrated in our society, as opposed to the more recent immigration waves from Maghreb and Africa.

We often hear the former immigration waves were related to labour, did not cause any issue, and were indeed perfectly accepted by the French.

Let us then recognise that current comments on the most recent immigration waves are the mere reiteration of old stereotypes which all migrant communities have faced (whether they originated from the countryside or from foreign countries).

Valérie drew a parallel between allegations that Italian and Spanish immigrants did not and could not be integrated, and those against today's immigrants from Eastern Europe and Africa:

Toutes les populations d'immigrés – mais aussi les populations pauvres de manière générale – sont vues au cours des siècles comme sales, non intégrées, se vautrant dans la luxure et des coutumes exotiques. Ce qu'on entend à l'heure actuelle sur les quartiers « islamisés », « envahis » de femmes en burqa avec 10 enfants n'est que la répétition, comme vous le constatez, de propos tenus sur toutes les vagues d'immigration précédentes. L'italien lui aussi fait une cuisine infâme, trop d'enfants et se vêt d'oripeaux. Le polonais se ridiculise avec son catholicisme particulier et à se tenir debout pendant la messe alors que le bon français est assis.

All immigrant populations - but also the poor in general - have been deemed throughout the centuries to be dirty, non-integrated, indulging in lust and other exotic customs. As you may observe, what is said today about the islamised neighbourhoods, swamped with women wearing the burqa and their tens of children, is only repeating comments of all the previous waves of immigration. The Italian immigrant also cooks dreadful food, has too many children, and dresses in rags. The Polish immigrant is ridiculed for his peculiar

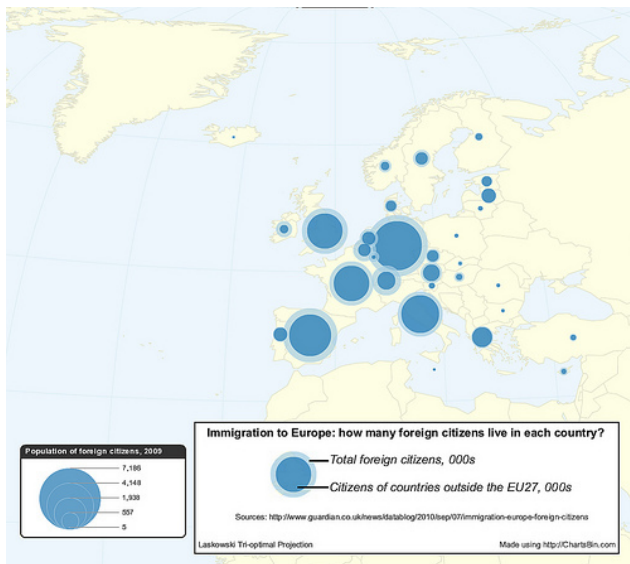
brand of Catholicism and his habit of standing up throughout mass whereas proper French people remain seated.

Economic downturn not the only reason

Nevertheless, the economic downturn alone cannot explain the attractiveness of anti-immigration arguments. In an editorial on the future of multiculturalism in France, Julie Owono highlighted that:

The reason for the growing worry over the future of Europe is not simply related to the crisis. Contrary to what some politicians were quick to explain on the evening of the first round, it seems that the French who gave their vote to extremism do not suffer that much from the immigration scourge. French analysts have found that, while the latter represents a major concern for 62 per cent of National Front voters, areas where the party has received a significant number of votes do not have a particularly high immigration rate.

A European phenomenon



Foreigners in Europe, by Digital Dreams on Flickr (CC BY license)

Politicians singing this weathered old tune against immigration are not limited to France. In Greece, the Neo-Nazi party known as Golden Dawn took advantage of the country's economic difficulties and broke through during the most recent general elections. In Great Britain, a commenter posting under the name James reacted to the fact that Cameron,

Merkel, and Sarkozy declared the failure of multiculturalism in Europe:

She [Merkel] wanted People from richer nations to embrace and train poorer region folk! It hasn't worked, its cost us all billions and its getting more expensive year on year! Would you rather have a farmer from romania working in britain, claiming to be poor and sending all the money home to build a mansion! thats whats happening.

Valérie said she is no longer surprised by recycling of anti-immigration rhetoric. She suggested in her blog some reading to open up the debate:

Pour combattre les craintes face aux immigrants maghrébins et africains, on gagnerait à lire les textes du 19eme et du début du 20eme pour comprendre comment se fondent ces peurs et comment l'on ne fait que répéter les mêmes idées ayant cours dans les siècles précédents. Conseils de lecture :

- Conseillé par Melle S. : A. SAYAD L'immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité (1. L'illusion du provisoire et 2. Les enfants illégitimes).
 - Gérard Noiriel, Le creuset français.
- Laurent Dornel, La France hostile. Histoire de la xénophobie en France au XIXe siècle

To address anxieties over immigrants from Maghreb and Africa, one would gain from reading texts from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries in order to understand the foundations of such fears and how the same arguments are being used throughout the centuries. Suggested reading:

- by Melle S.: A. Sayad, Immigration or the Paradoxes of Alterity (1. The illusion of the ephemerality and 2. The illegitimate children)
- Gérard Noiriel, The French Melting-Pot
- Laurent Dornel, Hostile France. A History of Xenophobia in France in the 19th Century.

Germany: #Blockupy Protests Against Pan-European Austerity

Blockupy protests against the austerity measures being implemented in the Eurozone shook even Frankfurt, the EU financial heart. Online social networks buzzed with citizen reports on the mobilizations that occurred under massive police presence and repression.

Written by Sara Moreira. Posted 21 May 2012 21:16 GMT

Blockupy protests against the widespread impoverishment and denial of democratic rights occurring in the Eurozone as part of a global systemic crisis shook the financial epicenter of Europe - Frankfurt - last week.

Following the global action days on 12 and 15 May, 2012, activists from across Europe were called to converge in Frankfurt in an international solidarity demonstration. The ultimate goal was to blockade the *European Central Bank* (ECB) and other crucial global capitalism institutions. On May 4, however, the *Frankfurt Municipal Department for Public Order* announced that all actions planned were deemed illegal, except for a rally on Saturday, May 19.

Still, thousands of activists decided to take a stand against the ban and claim the constitutional right of unarmed assembly, *without either prior registration or permission*.

While international mainstream media didn't give much attention to the events, online social networks buzzed with citizen reports on the mobilizations that occurred under massive police presence and repression.



Occupy Frankfurt in front of ECB. Photo shared by Roarmag.org

On Twitter many videos and photos were shared under the hashtag #Blockupy. Netizens and collectives from different countries, such as Occupy Brussels and Belgium, livestreamed the protests, marches and assemblies, as well

as the cultural program and diverse debates on labor, ecology, economy among others.

Demonstrate for the right to demonstrate

Blockupy started on the same day that newly elected French President Hollande met Chancellor Merkel in Berlin, May 16. Meanwhile in Frankfurt, the police complied with the order of eviction of the seven month long Occupy Frankfurt settlement around the Euro sign near the ECB headquarters.



Blockupy protesters take action against banking and finance system. Photo by Patrick Gerhard Stoesser, copyright Demotix (May 17, 2012).

The blog *Critical Legal Thinking*, which had a comprehensive coverage of the four days of protest, described the city as effectively in [undeclared] State of Exception.

On May 17, a bank holiday, as mainstream media directed the spotlight to the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble - who was awarded the Charlemagne Prize for his major role in the definition of the austerity policies mostly imposed on the periphery European countries - buses filled with activists from different cities heading to the anti-austerity demonstration in the center of Frankfurt, were stopped from entering the city and escorted back by the police.

Despite the attempts of intimidation, around 2,000 activists managed, at least for a few hours, to occupy the historic Roemerberg square where the city hall is based, and which represents the birth of democracy in Germany.



Police intercept three Berlin buses on the way to #Frankfurt. Photo by @Blockupy on Twitter.

The square was soon surrounded by the riot police:



Protesters sit down and lock arms in opposition to police presence. Photo by Patrick Gerhard Soesser, copyright Demotix (May 17, 2012).

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At the end of the day riot police evicted the square with violence, as different photo reporters illustrated:



A protester is detained by police.

Photo by Patrick Gerhard Stoesser, copyright Demotix (May 17, 2012).

The detention of at least 400 protesters of different nationalities triggered solidarity protests in different cities across Europe:



Embassy of Germany in Rome - Protest against repression and arrests in Frankfurt during the protests against the crisis. Signs against the Rome-Berlin axis, the ECB and Merkel.

Photo by Simona Granati, copyright Demotix (May 18, 2012).

A video report by Finnish user of YouTube sydansalama1, with interviews subtitled in English, sums up the events of the day:



The staff of banks were told by their employees to take the day off or work from home to avoid having to come into the city on Friday, May 18 - the day when the blockade to the financial district was expected to take place. However, as Jerome Ross from Roar Magazine wrote the night before, *Frankfurt [is] on lock-down as over 5,000 police [are] deployed in an unprecedented operation to keep protesters out of the city and away from the banks:*

Germany: #Blockupy Protests Against Pan-European Austerity

as the activists here prepare to physically block the headquarters of the European Central Bank, the police already seems to have done the job for them.



"I block! You too?" Photo by ateneinrivolta on Flickr (CC BY-ND 2.0 license).

That day, international mainstream media reported on Goldman Sachs being hired by the Spanish government to evaluate banking conglomerate Bankia, taken over by the state earlier in May, and also about rumors of a referendum in Greece to ballot the membership in the Eurozone. In Frankfurt, while banners read messages of support to the

European southern countries (such as *We are all Greeks*), the city remained *affected by massive police presence, identity checks and road blocks*.

When the legal day for protesting finally arrived, May 19, around 20,000 protesters (according to the police, or more than 25,000 according to the organization) rallied the city center.



Blockupy Demonstration in Frankfurt. A large banner held up by protesters reads: *International resistance against the Austerity Imposed by the Troika and Governments*. Photo by Michele Lapini copyright Demotix (May 19, 2012).

Germany: #Blockupy Protests Against Pan-European Austerity



Blockupy Frankfurt: More than 20,000 against financial crisis politics. International participants in the demonstration. Photo by Patrick Gerhard Stoesser copyright Demotix (May 19, 2012).

Germany: #Blockupy Protests Against Pan-European Austerity



Blockupy protest (May 19, 2012).

Photo by strassenstriche.net on Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0 license).

John Halloway, writing for *the Guardian*, described *Blockupy* as *a glimmer of hope in times of austerity*, and argued that it would bring momentum to *explosions of creative anger that will follow*. International policy analyst Vinay Gupta, finalizes:

Those people in the streets rioting, the protesting classes, are fighting not for internal political change within their own countries, but (whether they know it or not) for a re-arrangement of the political balance of an entire continent.

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