

# Coordinated efforts in Europe and North Africa to fight against Debt and Austerity

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The International Citizen Debt Audit Network – ICAN, has been born under the slogan “We don’t owe! We won’t pay!”, bringing together movements and networks in different European and North African countries, fighting austerity measures through the implementation of Citizen Debt Audits.

The First Euro-Mediterranean Meeting of the newly formed International Network for Citizen Debt Audits, has been held on April 7<sup>th</sup> in Brussels. Activists from twelve countries participated: Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Egypt and Tunisia. The different regions are developing or initiating Citizen Debt Audits or campaigns against austerity and debt.

During the meeting different organizations, networks and social movements shared experiences, talking about the type of audits being conducted or promoted in each country, as well as what type of actions and social mobilizations strategies are developing in each territory (see appendix for a list of the different campaigns). Among them, the Spanish Citizen Debt Audit Platform, “We don’t owe, we won’t pay!”, was presented, which brings together organizations and social movements in the Spanish State and will conduct a citizen debt audit in the country.

Beyond the exchange of information on how each country is tackling the debt situation, the meeting set the foundations for a better communication and coordination of the international network. It also outlined a common calendar, which identifies important action dates against debt and austerity: May 1<sup>st</sup> Labor Day, Global May protests from May 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> (coinciding with the first anniversary of “15M/Indignados” movement in Spain) and May 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> protests, actions, rallies and blockades against the European Central Bank in Frankfurt.

The proposal made by Greece of holding a Global Day of Action against Debt, Austerity and in solidarity with the Greek people, was warmly welcomed, probably during the Global Week of Action against Debt and IFIs, held annually between October 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. This year coincides with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Thomas Sankara, President of Burkina Faso, killed (among other issues) for opposing to payment of debt. It has been also agreed to study the possibility of a second international meeting, with greater participation of grassroots activists, and growing presence of organisations and more countries, probably in Barcelona early autumn 2012.

Greek activists, authors of Debtocracy, put an end to the meeting with the presentation of Catastroika trailer: [www.catastroika.com](http://www.catastroika.com)

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## **Austerity, present at the meeting in Brussels.**

In Spain, work towards a Citizen Debt Audit started in October last year, but it was at the end of March 2012 when the Citizen Debt Audit Platform, "We don't owe, we won't pay!" was created, with local work groups throughout the country. On the basis of the existence of sufficient evidence of illegitimacy in debt that Spanish Government, together with the EU and regional governments, are using as a pretext to pull ahead with bleeding austerity policies, it seeks to show through a Citizen Debt Audit, the details of the process that led to this situation. One of the objectives is to claim the right to decide through democratic and sovereign power, what to do with the debt and our future, without interference of financial markets, the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF. It will be a citizen process, open to all those who wish to participate. On one hand, it will address the Spanish state as debtor, public debt and private debt in risk of becoming public. It will be done on a State, regional and local level. The audit process will also have a comprehensive vision, analyzing not only economic and financial issues, but also impact on gender, environment, culture or social and political aspects. On another other hand, will also include the role of the Spanish State as creditor of debts with countries in the Global South. [www.auditoria15m.org](http://www.auditoria15m.org)

Greece describes their situation as a social genocide. Their Non-payment and Debt Audit campaign has been working for one year now, with big social support especially from the "Aganaktismeni" ("Indignant") movement and with special emphasis on gender. During the intervention of George Mitralias, member of the Greek Committee against Debt, the suicide of the retired pharmacist (who decided to take his life rather than loosing his dignity due to the pension cuts applied) was recalled. [www.contra-xreos.gr](http://www.contra-xreos.gr)

The Irish Debt Audit began in January 2011, initially done urgently by experts on a small-scale. Much of the debt comes from a single bank, the Anglo Bank (under judicial investigation). A debt covered with an ECB loan that the state continues to pay while applying austerity measures. They are now working on education and mobilization using the results of the audit. Their objectives include global regulation of the financial sector. [www.notourdebt.ie](http://www.notourdebt.ie)

Portuguese campaign kicks off in December 2011 and includes the participation of a broad spectrum of experts, professionals and grassroots activists, with the ultimate goal of forcing the restructuring of public debt because of its illegitimacy, using the audit strategy as a foundation for creating a new social paradigm. [www.auditoriacidada.info](http://www.auditoriacidada.info)

In Italy various networks work on citizen education through universities and public schools, showing the illegitimacy of debt, arguing non-payment and with mobilization actions against banks, privatizations or the construction of the high-speed (TGV) Torino-Lione train. There are outstanding complaints against corruption and lack of regulation. [www.rivoltaildebito.globalist.it](http://www.rivoltaildebito.globalist.it)

Poland's economic growth is levered through borrowing from financial institutions, what may result in another debt crisis. They are experiencing tax cuts for corporations, increasing VAT taxes (with effects on disadvantaged population), a Social Security reform (with increasing difficulty of access to healthcare), privatizations and intentions of delaying retirement age. A large majority of the population is against these measures and soon their audit process will begin. [www.nienaszdlug.pl](http://www.nienaszdlug.pl)

In Egypt, several people and groups are working on starting the campaign in collaboration with organizations in Germany, France and the UK. Its objectives include the suspension of debt payments. With the current government against them (which is subscribing eight times more debt than the previous dictatorship), they want to work on the odious debt of Mubarak's era, sending a petition to the European Parliament to suspend the payment of debt. [www.dropegyptdebt.org](http://www.dropegyptdebt.org)

Within objectives of the demonstrations against debt in Tunisia, is the end the current regime, moratorium on the payment of debt and cancellation of odious debt accumulated by Ben Ali's regime. They are carrying out education campaigns, working with media, trade unions and unemployed and have a petition signed by 130 MEPs to support their request for a moratorium. However, the government, taking advantage of the crisis, keeps subscribing more debt. There is close collaboration with French organizations and parties. [www.tunisie.attac.org](http://www.tunisie.attac.org), [www.zelzel.net](http://www.zelzel.net)

France, the Collective for a Citizen Audit of Public Debt has 120 local groups working on the report throughout the entire French territory. Beyond the question of debt, they are working against the austerity measures and the Fiscal Pact promoted by the European Union. In addition, Paris' "Indignés" have also organized a working group on debt. [www.audit-citoyen.org](http://www.audit-citoyen.org)

In the UK, debt is politically used by liberals. It has been non-democratically subscribed to put forward austerity policies. Different groups organise actions of solidarity with Greece, Ireland and Egypt, but are also starting an audit of British debt, which will be developed mainly by experts. [www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk)

In Germany, where the media repeats there is no crisis in the country, inequality within the population is growing fast. They consider important working on the international network and are organising the demonstrations against the European Central Bank next May 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. [www.blockupy-frankfurt.org](http://www.blockupy-frankfurt.org)

Media is silent in Belgium as well. Groups like CADTM, ATTAC or Vie Feminine, are conducting a campaign against Belgian bank bailout by the government. Especially Dexia, which has been rescued twice already. A judicial case against the Belgian State and Dexia has been opened. [www.sauvetage-dexia.be](http://www.sauvetage-dexia.be)

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\* <http://www.cadtm.org/Coordinated-efforts-in-Europe-and>