

# Reflections on democratic discontent

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# Background: me & my talk

## Eastern & Central European **democracies in transition**

- studies & reflection on change
- the promise of democracy
- increasing disillusionment
  
- **my origin:** Bulgaria

## Western European **welfare states**

- changes with globalisation
- recently suffered from similar symptoms of democratic discontent
  
- **my current work & location:** the Netherlands





# An Eastern European malaise of democracy?

- According to Eurobarometer 2008, only
  - 21% of Lithuanians
  - 24% of Bulgarians
  - 24% of Romanians
  - 30% of Hungarians
  - 38% of Poles

believe they have benefited from the fall of the Berlin Wall  
(*Krastev, 2010*)





democratic discontent

OR



discontent with democracy



# Discontent with policy rather than democracy

- **but what kind of policies?**
  - **new public management** -> to areas, e.g. health care and care for the elderly which citizens did not mandate to be governed by the market
  - **globalisation & global regulation** -> decreased the policy space of national, democratically elected governments
  - **lack of policy space** -> all mainstream parties have pursued similar policies





“A good argument can be made that it is *lack of policy space* - and *not lack of market access* - which is (or likely to become soon) the real binding constraint on a prosperous global economy.”



# Flirting with the electorate ... married to the IMF?



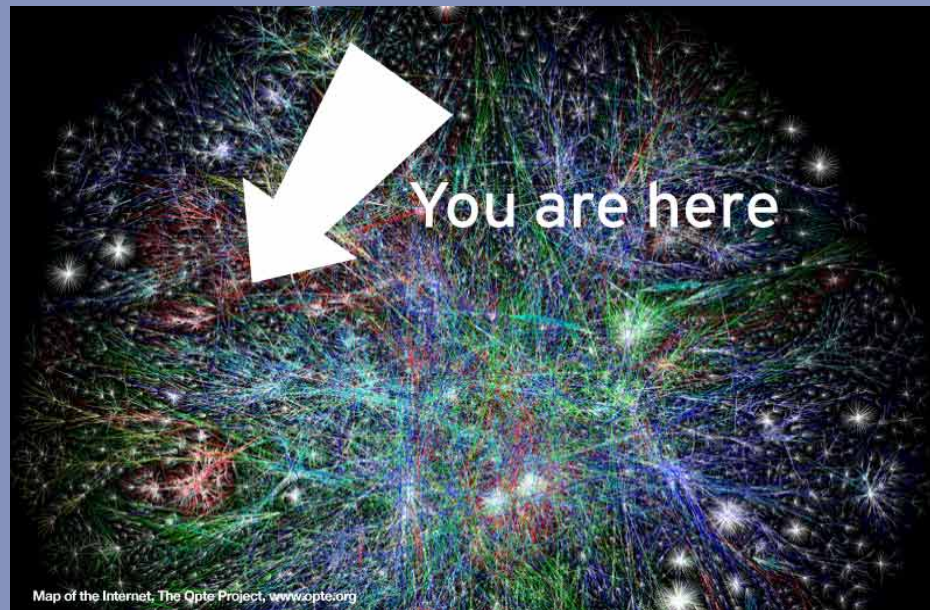
global regulation have eroded the ability of  
democratically elected elites to respond to their  
electorate







overwhelming  
**change** in the last  
decades





*"Globalization, and the frustration accompanying it, is leading many to a jittery search for self-worth ... If you lack confidence in your ability to surmount the challenges of modernization, you might as well retreat into yourself and focus on who you are, rather than on what you want to achieve with others."*

(Dominique Moïsi)





"... And the less convinced people are about their future, the more they tend to *focus on their identity in a negative, defensive manner.*"

(Dominique Moïsi)

“Immigration is out of control, everybody thinks that. England wants to remain English.”

(David Kingsbury)

a property developer, quoted by the  
Financial Times



# Politics of Emotion

*rationality*



*emotion*

VS.



# Democratic discontent: **is not just** fear, irrationality and dissatisfaction with globalisation

Public's expectations have grown tremendously

- standards of democracy
- how decisions should be made
- what democracy can deliver



# Study, understand & respect

discourses challenging established  
ways of governing in European  
democracies

arguing for more  
direct democracy  
and transparency in  
policy making, like  
blogger Beppe  
Grillo



protesting  
against  
concrete policy  
decisions



# More direct democracy:

a remedy for democratic  
discontent?

- in global or local arenas?
- in concrete policy decisions?
- but how to ensure deliberation?





*"You denounce the scourge of American imperialism, reject the authority of the U.N. and the World Bank, and then a little joke."*