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EU external actions in the contested global order –
(in)coherence, (dis)continuity, resilience

Direct democracy in the European Union and the EU's neighbouring countries

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Referendum as an Instrument of Exercising Power in the EU

Key words:

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Introduction

In the last few decades, forms of direct democracy have been widely used to deal with important political matters throughout the world. Many European countries today practice forms of direct democracy, particularly referendum, at both national and local levels. What is more, referendums are becoming more frequently employed as instruments of direct democracy even in many countries where they are not part of the established political tradition. In many other countries, the introduction of direct democracy is on the political agenda. The European Union and European integration were subjects to popular votes on a number of crucial occasions, and the increasing role played by referendum calls for better understanding of its presence in Europe and the European Union's region.

Direct democracy, defined as a set of procedures giving all the citizens the right to make decisions binding the state, is considered to be the most pure form of democracy, because of the way in which the nation expresses its opinion about how it should function. The referendum and popular initiative are the most important and the most frequently used forms of direct democracy. The phenomenon of referendum is an significant part of the political processes in many countries. Switzerland is certainly the world's leader in the use of direct democracy's devices. That institution has strongly shaped the Swiss political system and the history of this small federal state. In Switzerland the possibility of having referendums is considered to be the corner stone of the overall political structure. But also other West European countries – such as France, Lichtenstein, Ireland, Italy, Denmark – use direct democratic rules and hold referendums and popular initiatives to a quite great extent. While in Switzerland referenda are the central element of the political system, in several other countries – they are characteristics occurring as frequently as general elections. In most countries referendum is a requirement in case of constitutional change, but in other states referendums are exceptional political instruments. However, there are also states, such as the Netherlands, Germany or the United Kingdom, where the institution of referendum is even unknown aspect of democracy. Of course, the Netherlands and Britain made a huge step toward direct democracy debating the lack of direct instruments and having organized a referendum on European integration. On the other hand, some countries, for example France, are debating whether to expand already existing provisions (Morel 1993, 225). European governments use direct democracy tools for issues concerning different national and even international problems – in particular for processes of the European integration. Many authors emphasize that in democratic states referendum and other instruments of direct democracy should not be thrown away, because they are crucial devices of citizens' government. Supporters of direct form of democracy put more stress on personal and active participation of citizens in decision-making processes. They support the functioning of all kinds of citizens' associations and emphasize the educational value of political campaigns connected with votes. The role of referendum is on the increase and this significant democratic instrument needs to be better explained - especially in relation to the European integration and the EU, where it has been employed more than forty times. This article is an attempt to make a more detailed analysis of the involvement of the European democracies in the integration process through the institution of referendum sixteen years after the collapse of communism.

The referendum institution

The referendum is an institution that allows the electorate to approve or reject a proposal by the legislature. Voters make a choice between the available alternatives¹ on the ballot paper. Bogusław Banaszak and Artur Preisner understand this notion as a way of direct decision made by persons entitled to voting on important matters of a country or a territory (Banaszak, Preisner 1996,

¹ Usually 'Yes' or 'No'.

154). Eugeniusz Zieliński writes: “Referendum is a low-governmental institution whose concept is that the citizens with the political rights are entitled to express their opinions in voting on the constitution, bills and other most important problems of political life” (Zieliński 1995, 9). Once a notion of referendum is defined in this way it can be characterized by the following features: direct participation of citizens in expressing their own opinions, every person with the voting right has only one vote, the will of the majority is the ground of decisions in the process of passing laws. Ideological grounds or foundations for the concept of referendum can be found in the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The formula of referendum institution permitted the accomplishment of the general will idea and superiority of the people in modern societies. The second source of the referendum institution are experiences connected with the cultivation of the ancient people’s rights in Swiss communities. Many authors exchange their observations and with the reference to them “most political systems pay respect to the principle of direct role of citizens in their constitutions, but few employ the referendum on a regular basis” (Lane, Ersson 1999, 198).

Direct democracy and referendums have both - positive aspects and disadvantages. They can affect greater integration of the society and even lead to a stabilization of the political system by heightening popular control, and giving a veto function to the public. Direct democracy increases the legitimacy of political events and processes. The most controversial and difficult issues are submitted to the people. This indicates that representative democracy instruments may be less capable of dealing with difficult political problems and that referendums may be considered a stronger source of political legitimacy on controversial issues (Dalton, Bürklin, Drummond 2001, 149). Referendums and direct democracy can insure the common needs and primary interest of all of the citizens, protected by its constitution (Sagi 2000, 26-27). The following arguments are raised against direct democracy and referendums: citizens fail to understand the complex issues, citizens have little interest in participating, citizens are easy to manipulate, citizens are prone to decide emotionally, there are too many referenda confusing the voters, political leadership is impossible, referendums are inadequate for major issues, referenda hinder progress, referenda destroy civil rights, and finally referenda are expensive (Frey 2003, 15-19). On the other hand, supporters of direct democracy point to the deficiencies of the functioning model of representative democracy. Most of them believe that this form of government has failed to meet social expectations. A criticism of the functioning of representative democracy does not exclude the adoption of some of its solutions in the models of direct democracy. A properly functioning representative democracy and direct democracy can be complementary. Actually, both these forms support the idea that the ultimate power must belong to the people. This can play a very important role in the process of exercising power in the EU.

Referendums and the European integration process

The referendum plays an important role in the European unification process, because it has become very popular as a way of deciding on public policy issues at the European level. Some of scholars regard referendums as a means to achieve political legitimacy of the widening and deepening EU, through an incremental delegation of national competencies. In majority of the European countries it was employed to solve different problems related to the European integration issues. The EU members and other states which in a certain measure are connected with the UE used the referendum institution for many times in the process of creating European structures. During last 34 years 47 EU-related referendums took place in the European states. In 35 popular votes the electorates approved the proposals, while in 12 referendums those eligible expressed their objection.

Table 1. Referendums on European integration

	Country	Time	Subject	Turnout (%)	Yes (%)
1	France	April 23, 1972	EC Enlargement	60.27	68.28

2	Ireland	May 10, 1972	EC Membership	70.88	83.1
3	Norway	September 26, 1972	EC Membership	79.2	46.5
4	Denmark.	October 2, 1972	EC Membership	90.14	63.29
5	Switzerland	December 3, 1972	EFTA Membership	52	72.5
6	United Kingdom	June 5, 1975	EC Membership	64.03	67.23
7	Greenland	February 23, 1982	EC-Membership	74.91	45.96
8	Denmark	February 27, 1986	Common Market – SEA	75.39	56.24
9	Ireland	May 26, 1987	Common Market - SEA	44.09	69.92
10	Italy	June 18, 1989	Mandate for MEPs	85.4	88.06
11	Denmark	June 2, 1992	Maastricht Treaty	82.9	49.3
12	Ireland	June 18, 1992	Maastricht Treaty	57.3	69.1
13	France	September 20, 1992	Maastricht Treaty	69.69	51.05
14	Switzerland	December 6, 1992	EEA Membership	78	49.7
15	Liechtenstein	December 12, 1992	EEA Membership	87	55.81
16	Denmark	May 18, 1993	Maastricht Treaty with opt-outs	85.5	56.77
17	Austria	June 12, 1994	EU Membership	82.35	66.58
18	Finland	October 16, 1994	EU Membership	70.4	56.88
19	Sweden	November 13, 1994	EU Membership	83.32	52.74
20	Åland Islands	November 20, 1994	EU Membership	49.1	73.64
21	Norway	November 28, 1994	EU Membership	89	47.8
22	Liechtenstein	April 9, 1995	EEA Membership	82.05	55.88
23	Switzerland	June 8, 1997	EU Candidature	35	25.9
24	Ireland	May 22, 1998	Amsterdam Treaty	56.26	61.74
25	Denmark	May 28, 1998	Amsterdam Treaty	76.24	55.10
26	Switzerland	May 21, 2000	Bilateral Treaties with EU	48	67.2
27	Denmark	September 28, 2000	EMU Membership	87.5	46.87
28	Switzerland	March 4, 2001	EU Candidature	55	23.2
29	Ireland	June 7, 2001	Nice-Treaty	34.79	46.13
30	Ireland	October 19, 2002	European Enlargement	49.47	62.89
31	Malta	March 8, 2003	EU Accession	91	53.6
32	Slovenia	March 23, 2003	EU Accession	60.3	89.6
33	Hungary	April 12, 2003	EU Accession	45.6	83.7
34	Lithuania	May 11, 2003	EU Accession	63.3	89.9
35	Slovakia	May 11, 2003	EU Accession	52.2	92.4
36	Poland	June 7-8, 2003	EU Accession	58.8	77.5
37	Czech Republic	June 16, 2003	EU Accession	55.2	77.3

38	Estonia	September 14, 2003	EU Accession	64	66.8
39	Sweden	September 14, 2003	Euro Accession	81.6	41.8
40	Latvia	September 20, 2003	EU accession	72.5	67
41	Romania	October 19, 2003	Constit. amendment for EU acc.	55.2	89.6
42	Spain	February 20, 2005	EU Constitution	42	76
43	France	May 29, 2005	EU Constitution	69.37	45.33
44	The Netherlands	June 1, 2005	EU Constitution	62.8	38.4
45	Switzerland	June 5, 2005	Schengen Treaty	56.63	54.6
46	Luxembourg	July 10, 2005	EU Constitution	90.44	56.52
47	Switzerland	September 25, 2005	Extension of the free traffic of the persons	53.64	55.95

Source: T. Christin and S. Hug (June 2002), *Referendums and citizen support for European Integration*, "Comparative Political Studies", Vol. 35 No. 5, p. 591; www.iri-europe.com, own research.

Having analyzed all referendums held on the European integration issues several conclusions can be formulated. Firstly, the referendums on EU have been organized very often, and in a great number of states² the electorates express various opinions on the referendum subjects. What is more, sometimes it occurs that one issue is rejected in referendum, and then after a couple of months a second vote on the same subject is organized. Then the referendum usually ends with the positive result³.

Overall, three or even four different categories of 'European referendums' can be distinguished. The first one is a group of votes concerning the subject of accession. A considerable group of countries has held referendums when deciding whether to join the community (24 votes - EC (6), EFTA (1), EEA (3), EU (14)). Second category consists of referendums that have taken place when new treaties had to be ratified (8 votes - Maastricht (4), Amsterdam (2), Nice (2)). The third group of referendums has been focused on matters to a certain extent connected with the EU (11 votes - Common Market SEA⁴ (2), Mandate for MEPs (1), EU candidature (2), bilateral treaties (3), EMU (2), constitution amendment (1)). The last and the fourth group of referendums consists of four votes on so called 'European constitution'.

The most important effect of referendum is the possibility to express the will of a nation in not only the most significant national issue but also in international issue. Referendums are occurring more frequently in Europe but it is often difficult to understand what their exact functions or possible drawbacks to the political systems and to the European integration are. Once we look at the referendums on EU related issues, at their participation and results, it can provide a good starting point to analyzing those EU votes and to answer a question of their role in the European integration process.

All so called 'European referendums' provide evidence that European states use these votes very actively in order to decisions about major national and European issues. What is more, they are aware of the consequences of their decisions, which can result, for instance, in non-entering the EU. On the other hand if speaking about referendums, the main worry is always of the outcomes, and in countries with voting thresholds - of the level of abstention. The most precious value of direct democracy and its forms is the fact that the governments respect the will of the citizens. Parliaments

² 20 EU members and 5 non-EU states.

³ An example of country with such referendums is Ireland.

⁴ The SEA votes could also be placed in the second category, which is connected with treaties, but on the other hand, these referendums were also related to the common market problem, thus, I decided to put them to the third group of referendums. In my opinion, additional category has to be added here.

taking decisions about European integration undertakings want to get the legitimacy from the nations. So, referendum is considered to be the most modern source of the legitimacy. Voting majority takes a final decision in a certain issue and makes its mind about the society's functioning. Decisions are taken at the highest and primary level of the national community.

The role of referendum in the process of exercising power

The referendums relating to the European integration process were organized in 25 European countries. Denmark and Ireland are the leaders (from the EU member states) in holding such votes – they have voted in the EU-related referendums for 6 times each. Switzerland used referendum to solve 7 European issues. So, more than 1/3 of all the referendums have taken place in three countries: Ireland and Denmark and Switzerland. France, Sweden, Lichtenstein and Norway used referendums twice, and the rest of the European countries voted once on the European matters. There are also some states that have never organized referendums. These are Belgium, Greece, Cyprus, Germany and Portugal. In 2005 the process of ratification the 'EU constitution' was launched. Spain was the first EU country that gave the question of constitution to decide for people. It has been also the first referendum on the EU ever held in Spain. The Dutch 2005 referendum on the 'European constitution' has been not only the first EU-related vote but also the first popular vote ever held in the history of the Netherlands.

Among 25 EU member states, 9 so called 'old' members and 9 'new' states had the opportunity to express their opinions directly on the European integration. On average, 66,59% of those eligible from all voting countries took part in referendums. At the same time, 67,63% of electorate from EU members participated. Comparing it with an average turnout in elections to the European Parliament since 1979 – 55,75%, it can be said that the citizens of the EU vote more enthusiastically in referendums than in elections. Furthermore, Europe's citizens are clearly more interested in taking part in referendums on Europe than in elections to the European Parliament. In referendums they can articulate their opinions in different European issues and they believe these votes can change more than the representatives to the European Parliament. They believe referendums are more important than the European elections.

Two issues dominate referendums: membership accession and the ratification of the European treaties. Europe's citizens are being asked to vote more and more frequently. Nearly three quarters of all the referendums on Europe have been held since 1994 (Kaufmann, Waters 2004, 15). Undoubtedly it is an evidence of a great dynamics of the development of direct democracy in Europe and of course it proves the tendency to resolve European problems by the means of referendum.

All of the EU related referendums mirror the increasing role and influence of public votes in every country, as well as throughout the Europe as a whole. When discussing electorate's actions in European votes three competing schools explaining people's behavior need to be enumerated: the 'attitude' school, the 'second-order election' school and the 'utilitarian expectations' school. The first school focuses on individuals' values and beliefs, and argues that voting behavior in EU referendums reflects people's underlying broad attitudes towards Europe (Siune, Svensson, Tonsgaard 1994, 107-116). According to the "second-order" theory of elections the important characteristic is that national elections are regarded to be of higher importance than "second order" referendums. For this reason the turnout in referendums is lower, and voters are expected to use referendums on European integration as a tools of showing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the government. The third theory is explained by Matthew J. Gabel who says that support for integration is supposed to be strongest among those who have the most to gain economically from the EU. Citizens, who believe they will benefit economically, will approve the integration with the EU, whereas people who believe the opposite will vote against (Gabel, Palmer 1995, 14-17). All these features were visible in the EU votes.

Bruno Kaufman and M. Dane Waters defined a number of shared positive and negative aspects, which the so called 'European' referendums have in common. First of all, the EU accession concern has been the major issue for many years in the European countries. Secondly, in almost all

cases, the outcome was decided by a clear majority and a majority of those eligible turned out for the vote, delivering a feeling of common identity in these European states. Finally, there is a consensus among observers, promoters, and opponents of EU membership that the functioning of direct democracy instruments, such as referendums, must be improved systematically. Referendums are characterized by a great potential to have an impact on democracy such as greater legitimacy of decisions made, better transparency, greater public communication and information and stronger integration of highly diversified societies. According to those authors, the EU accession referendums represent a new norm, and can be treated as a step forward in the process of further and deeper integration of the EU (Kaufman, Waters 2004, 20).

The EU accession referendums became a particular form of voting in the integration process. A special emphasis should be placed on those of 2003 that were held in nine candidate Central and Eastern European countries.⁵ Several comments regarding those popular votes have to be set out. The citizens of those countries said 'Yes' for their entrance and functioning in the EU. It is highly uncommon that a certain issue meets with such similar people's attitudes. Another fascinating feature of those referendums is the fact, that in all of the candidate countries, more than 50% of voters approved the EU accession. The turnout was also very high – 62,54% on average. What is more, in those states, where the thresholds were demanded for the vote's validity – the results were above the required minimum level. Furthermore, the governments did their best to increase the participation. One of the examples can be Poland where the referendum was settled for two days. If speaking about the national attitudes towards accession to the EU and expected results of referendums, what could be observed in some of candidate countries were rather unclear situations few months before the votes. The governments were not sure if the referendums' results were positive or not. Another important feature of the EU 2003 accession referendums is a 'cascade organization of votes' – in other words so called 'the domino effect'. The referendums were organized in a particular order. It means that at first countries with the greatest support voted, and then the other states with the smaller eagerness to the EU. In that situation the results of referendum in one country influenced the people's attitudes in the other one. Campaigns before the EU accession referendums were rather aggressive⁶. That EU accession issue was the only subject, which has been voted in so many countries in such a short period of time. The first vote was on 8th of March and the last one on 20th of September, 2003. This fact could influence the voting countries to a greater extent, and the citizens of those states could feel integrated as never before. Thus, the "integrating" factor of referendums is also worth mentioning. Despite the fact, that the Central European states have practically no tradition in organizing referendums, they began to give the most important decisions in citizens' hands more and more often. Undoubtedly, accession referendums are the proof of this particular situation. The 'European' referendums determine the development of direct democracy and institution of referendum in the post-communist countries. Participation, which was the highest in the history of referendums in those states, may be an evidence that the referendum will develop there, because the people seem to understand their possibilities and want to take part in the decision-making processes. However, the legal conditions and political circumstances for freedom and fairness of referendums are far from sufficiently developed and require big improvements ahead of the future referendums in these countries (Kaufmann 2004, 22). As the growing number of referendums says little about the quality of direct democracy in the new EU members, the efforts have to be focused on the quality of referendums - that is on fulfilling the basic requirements of "free and fair" votes in those countries.

Real democracy cannot exist without the engagement of the citizens in public life, and what is more, citizenship must be acknowledged as the core principle of democracy. Democracy is only possible through the endorsement of citizens by the means of their votes and active participation. Without public engagement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding

⁵ The one exception without the accession referendum was Cyprus.

⁶ For example, in Poland the election silence was broken, and in Slovakia the Eurosceptics had no possibility to distribute their critical views of the EU.

force. European democracy involves the public to make decisions important for the EU member and candidate states. Advocates of citizen participation put forward the necessity to strengthen the instruments of public involvement. Focusing on the participation in referendums in Central Europe, it can be said that votes in those countries proved dissatisfaction of the ruling elites, and the lack of trust to governments. But on the other hand, referendums on EU entry indicated that the citizens held themselves responsible for their functioning in the future Europe, and decided to participate in EU vote (Font 1998, 2-3). The process of the European integration entered a new phase for the countries from Eastern Europe. Citizens of those states have been given a possibility to decide on such important issue, which indeed is historic issue.

Discussing the referendums on European issues and effects of these votes, the referendum's impact on the democratic deficit must be also mentioned. The democratic deficit is often defined as the gap between the powers of the European institutions and the ability of European citizens to influence the work and decisions of those institutions. In other words, democratic deficit is understood as a situation, when people who are the subject to law are not adequately represented at the political level or have no possibilities to participate in the process of law making and governing (Perczyński, Vink 2000, 2). The European public often feels ignored when certain decisions are taken despite the public opinion. It is because of the fact, that the Europeans do not have many of influencing the decision making process of the EU (Mc Cormick 2002, 146). In order to change the level of satisfaction with democracy and to decrease the democratic deficit, citizens need to feel more committed to the EU. If people feel they have more direct influence on the decision making process of the EU, the democratic deficit will decrease. Loes van Mierlo asks the question how to make people feel they have more influence on the political life in the community? One option is to give the EP more power. The second alternative is to give more power to the people (Mierlo 2003, 5). Without any doubt referendum may be a good solution for it and serve to diminish the distance between the citizen and the EU.

Referendums on European issues strengthen not only the political role of citizens, but also the process of integration and the governments involved. The trend towards European referendum and the strengthening of direct political participation at the European level has received massive support from the most varied sources.

Concluding remarks

Across the world, referendums are being held on a variety of issues, but no-one could have predicted it, that the European issues would provoke such a huge number of votes (Kaufmann 2004, 8). Referendums on the EU generated enormous public concern not only in Europe, but also in the rest of the world. In referendums on national problems, the interest articulation in materialized through the political interaction between electorate and the government. European integration attempts to establish an additional stage of political governance. As a result, the contextualization of EU referendums involves both national political factors and the trans-national settings of the EU. By the means of referendums, electorates, national governments and the institutions of EU are involved in the same process of interest articulation as regards the integration process (Shu 2003, 9). As it was stressed in previous parts of the article, referendums on the EU issues enable the process of integration to take place not only at the political level, but also in the social sphere. Thus, the integrating factor plays there a very important role.

Furthermore, the citizens of Europe are pioneers in holding referendums on one particular concern. Indeed, the issues decided in referendums are of a wide range – they are of different integration's aspects, but they all are related to one particular issue, namely the integration at the European level. What seems to be very significant is the fact that no other single issue was a subject of such wide and direct citizens' engagement. Most of the European democracies practice forms of direct democracy. As it has been mentioned before, there are only few states, which have never employed referendums to solve any national problems. Similar situation can be observed among the EU members. Almost all of them ask their citizens to decide on the European issues. The introduction of procedures of direct democracy is currently widely discussed in some of the

countries. A great number of organizations and institutions initiate a debate on direct democracy at the EU level.

‘Enlargement enlarges direct democracy’ - this slogan mirrors the consequences of using referendum mechanisms and giving the power to the citizens in the process of the enlargement of the EU. Up to now referendums have been employed in three waves of enlargement in 1972, 1994 and 2003. As a result of enlargement waves a particular form of referendum was developed, i.e. an accession referendum. This type of referendum has already become a norm in the European integration process. Today it is almost unthinkable to access to the EU without holding a referendum. Moreover, the constitutional referendum is or - as a matter of fact - was going to dominate years 2005 and 2006. Over 80% of citizens from 25 EU member states supported the idea of holding referendum on ‘EU Constitutional Treaty’. Europeans wanted to hold referendums before adopting the ‘EU Constitution’. Nevertheless, this opinion was divided into those who believed it was essential and those who believed it would be useful but not essential. The process of ratification (by referendum) of the EU constitution was initiated by Spain, which on 20th of February 2005 held referendum on that treaty. Then voted France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The rejection of the ‘European Constitution’ by the people of France and the Netherlands has led the EU into a crisis. Never before in history has there been such an intense debate about the future of Europe. The high turnout in these two referendums showed that citizens wanted to take an active role in the European issues (DI - Democracy International).

What is most important, the draft of the ‘European constitution’ made some promising steps in the direction of more direct democracy and more citizens’ participation. Art. I-47-4 titled ‘European Citizens’ Initiative’ stated: "Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Constitution. European laws shall determine the provisions for the procedures and conditions required for such a citizens’ initiative, including the minimum number of Member States from which such citizens must come."

If the ‘European Constitution’ is approved by the means of referendums in the nearest future, this provision will be certainly a significant move towards further development of referendum institution in the EU. Additionally, referendums on the constitution may influence the expansion of referendums as a instrument of exercising people’s power at the European level.

Concluding these deliberations, I think it very useful to refer to very interesting statements of professors Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer, who studied the interdependence of democracy and happiness in the Swiss cantons. Their studies of what makes people happy have found that next to employment and low inflation, also democracy is the key factor. They proved that the more extensive the political participation rights of citizens, the more satisfied they are with their lives. They conclude their surveys in the following way: “Happiness not only depends on economic factors but also on how well developed democracy is. The study's main finding establishes political participation as an important determinant of citizens' well-being”. They suggest that around most of the benefits of democracy results from simply being involved in the process of political decision-making (Frey, Stutzer 2000, 1-2). Apart from negative experiences with taking part in votes during the years of previous regime in Central and Eastern Europe, it may be highly desirable to appreciate the Swiss practice and to get more involved in the democratic process as to make democracy more developed. Referendums on the EU integration processes may be a valuable device for it.

Summary

The referendum phenomenon is an important part of the political processes in many European countries. Despite, the World Wars and the Cold War slowed down if not stopped the democratization all over the world, especially in Europe, the European integration process in western part and the fall of the Berlin Wall in the eastern part of Europe provoked a new wave of

democratization with more than 30 new nationwide constitutions in this part of the world. Beside West European states, one could observe increasing number of the East European countries, which since 1990 have started to make use of direct democracy tools to a greater extent. The proof of it are undoubtedly referendums on accession to the EU, which in the period of time between March and September 2003 were held in nine candidate countries. Next to the accession referendums, the citizens of the EU express their opinions in votes on different issues related to their running in the Community.

European referendums suggest that the governments give the major national matters to vote by the citizens. And answering that proposition, people enthusiastically express their views on these problems. No other single issue was a subject of such wide and direct citizens' engagement. Thus, the UE referendums are shaping the institution of referendum in Europe. The process of the European integration entered a new phase. Citizens of European states have been given a possibility to decide on very important European issues. Through referendums, electorates, national governments and the institutions of EU are involved in the same process of interest articulation as regards the integration process.

Without any doubt more and more people in more and more European countries are able to participate in European politics in increasingly binding ways. The experience of direct democracy in relation to European issues is growing and confirms the general trend towards more direct participation at the European level. Referendums on European issues strengthen the political role of citizens, but also the process of integration and the governments which are involved.

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