# Direct Democracy Challenges

EU & regionally

Daniela Bozhinova Athens, Nov 9, 2012





### Freedom is participation in power Marcus Cicero

Electing representative – participation on Election day (representative democracy)

Making decisions on issues (direct democracy)
Referendum
Initiative
Recall

### DD on the Rise

European integration – referenda

Switzerland

USA

Nov 6, 2012 elections +174 referenda in 38 states

Central&Eastern Europe

### DD on the Rise

Central and Eastern Europe

Environmental issues become the center of citizens participation

Czech R - 2000-5 - 81 referenda, 2/3 environmental

Bulgaria – citizens initiate referendums on waste depots, extractive concessions, pipeline, water

Hungary

Poland – mainly recalls

### Bulgaria

3 major municipal referenda 2008-9





all on the issue of

Bourgas -

Alexandroupolis oil

pipeline 70000people

voted 99% against

Bourgas 27%

Sozopol 38%

Pomorie 60%

### **BULGARIA Direct democracy facts**

History - 3 national plebiscites
the last one in 1971 on the Constitution of "developed socialism"

**Since 1971** 

41 YEARS No national referenda

No referendum on EU accession (2007) limited number of local referenda



### **BULGARIA**

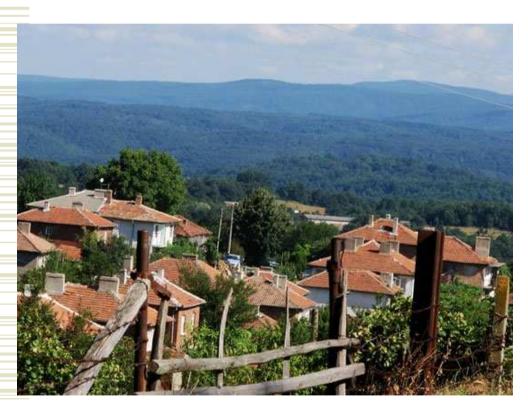
### **Direct democracy legislation**

### Law on Direct Participation ...

- ➤ High participation quorum now 60%
- ➤ High threshold for national referendum 500 000 signatures
- ➤ Short period of collection 3 months
- Limitations on topics
  - Legislature can edit the referendum question

### **Bulgaria** DD current developments

Turnout quorum proved absurd!!!



Cherni Vrah Village 2011 local referendum ruled invalid for insufficient turnout of 73%

turnout had to be 82% = last local elections

## Bulgaria DD current developments

#### National initiative mechanism (since 2009)

- N initiative to amend DD law
- N initiative to denounce agreement on Bourgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline



• N initiative "to limit the power of monopolies" – providers of electricity, gas, water etc.

NOT RESPECTED BY PARLIAMENT – NO RESPONSE

## Bulgaria DD current developments

#### Registered petitions for NATIONAL REFERENDUM

- NR? EU accession of Turkey 290 000 sign.
- NR? Agricultural subsidies
- NR? New constitution 597 152 signatures fraud accusations on hold
- NR! Nuclear energy 773 447 signatures
   Referendum scheduled 27 Jan 2013

### **Bulgaria** DD current developments

2011- Submission 500 000+ signatures



### Bulgaria & regionally Misuse/abuse of DD

- ➤ High barriers of DD do not empower citizens but parties which have the resources to campaign e.g. Bulgaria -BSP collected 700 000+ sign. for referendum on nuclear power station 2012
- ➤ Referendum used to eliminate political rivals e.g.Romania – Recall of President Basescu 29.07.2012
- Referendum used for hot potato political issues e.g. Greece–PM's referendum proposal on aid package2011
- Referendum used for political marketing, face-lifting e.g. Hungary-Fidesz party coming to power (2008) e.g. Bulgaria- Ataka party consolidating petition on Turkey



### Fair &Free DD standards

Reasonable number of signatures

Longer time for collection

No limitation on topics and issues (financial!)

No participation quorum

Popular vote has to be binding

Access to media!

Electronic signing? ICT

### The European Citizens' Initiative

Right of 1 million
European citizens from
at least 7 member-states
to propose legislation



First included in the draft
European Constitution
Included in the Lisbon treaty
Operational since 1/04/2012

### **European Citizens Initiative**

**Steps of Implementation** 

"Agenda Initiative"

- 1. ECI Committee of 7
- 2. Proposal
- 3. Registration (on-line register)
- 4. Signature Gathering (1 year)
- 5. Verification of signatures (3 months)
- 6. Submission for examination
- 7. EC communication public hearing, announce conclusions, inform of future actions

### **European Citizens Initiative**

Registered ECIs (12) May-Oct.2012

- 1. Media Pluralism
- 2. End Ecocide, for Earth Rights
- 3. Central Public On-line Collection for ECIs
- 4. Suspension of EU Climate&Energy Package
- 5. Gestion responsables des dechets, contre les incinerateurs
- 6. High Quality European Education for All

### **European Citizens Initiative**

Registered 12 ECIs May-Oct.2012

- 7. Stop Vivisection
- 8. Let Me Vote
- 9. Uno di noi
- 10. Water for Life
- 11. Single Communication Tariff Act
- 12. Fraternite 2020. Mobility. Progress. Europe.

### Democracy International call for Democratic Convention



### Thank you for your attention





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Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens Initiative