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**Direct Democracy: A Device
to Remedy Functional Deficiencies
of Representative Democracy?**

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1. Introduction

General knowledge abroad on things Swiss is not confined exclusively to products such as cheese, chocolate and clocks. It is commonly known that Switzerland has a rich, varied tradition of institutions concerned with direct democracy. I would like to begin with two examples of the Swiss practice of direct democracy.

Swiss parliamentarians, like all national parliamentarians, have a rather heavy workload. It corresponds to some 60% of a full-time job. However, this remuneration and facilities are far from adequate for such an amount of work. Not long ago, therefore, the Swiss Federal Assembly passed a parliamentary reform bill. A handful of parliamentarians with sufficient outside resources opposed this reform. They collected 50,000 signatures and so were able to request a referendum against the parliamentary decisions in question - or to be more accurate, they commissioned a number of students from our university and a PR consultancy to apply for the referendum and financed the poll campaign. Two Acts which would have improved remuneration and enabled part-time staff to be recruited were rejected in the 27 September 1992 referendum by a 70% majority.

Another example: while the ratification of the treaty on the European Economic Area passed through the parliaments of five EFTA member countries more or less without a hitch, it was rejected in the Swiss referendum on 6 December 1992 and only fairly narrowly accepted in Liechtenstein on 13 December 1992.

2. Theme

In this statement I would like to outline direct democracy in Switzerland on the basis of the answers to the following questions:

- What consequences do the institutions of direct democracy have for parliament?
- Is direct democracy compatible with a parliamentary system of government?

- Could the Swiss institutions of direct democracy be transposed into other political systems?
- Do referenda on specific issues have the effect of settling or aggravating conflict?
- Is direct democracy a "panacea for all political functional ills" in representative democracy?
- Is direct democracy a "superior form" of democracy?

3. **Theses**

Direct democracy as we Swiss know it does not guarantee "better" decisions than purely representative democracy, and certainly does not make for quicker decisions. However, direct democracy does allow wide participation, wide input into the political system, and this can most certainly be regarded as an advantage per se, which is desirable even if the large number of participants and the complex decision-making process results in sluggish movement through the political system and lower output.

Swiss direct democracy is not an export article. The same institutions in political systems with different structures and traditions would have different effects. The functional defects of representative democracy cannot be remedied by the simple implementation of direct democracy.

4. **Direct Democracy in Switzerland**

4.1 **Institutions of direct democracy**

No other state in the world has such a rich, varied tradition of institutions implementing direct democracy at communal, constituent state and national levels as Switzerland.

Switzerland has the following political institutions at national level:

- since 1848, compulsory constitutional referenda (Verfassungsreferendum) for total and partial reviews of the Constitution;
- since 1874, optional legislative referenda (Gesetzesreferendum);
- since 1891, petitions for referendum (Volksinitiative) on partial reviews of the Constitution;
- since 1921, referenda on international treaties (Staatsvertragsreferendum);
- since 1949, "resolutive referenda" (auflösendes Referendum) on urgent Federal decisions;
- since 1977, extension of the facility for referenda on international treaties.

Before dealing with each instrument in turn, let me say something about the concepts. We in Switzerland draw strict distinctions between plebiscites, referenda and "petitions for referendum" (Initiativen). Plebiscites are instigated on an optional, ad hoc basis by an organ of state (ie from above). The referendum is a permanent, constitutional institution and is instigated from below or from above, according to precisely established rules. A "petition for a referendum" (Initiative) is instigated by voters. Depending on the legal effect, the poll result can be either binding (deziſiv - decisive) or non-binding (konsultativ - consultative)¹.

"Real" direct democracy as understood in Switzerland and America can only be said to exist if a specified number of voters are entitled to submit an issue of their choosing for decision by referendum, even against the will of the organs of state.

Let us examine the institutions of direct democracy at federal level in detail:

¹ On consultative referenda, see the detailed study by Ulrich Rommelfanger, "Das konsultative Referendum. Eine verfassungstheoretische, -rechtliche und -vergleichende Untersuchung" (The consultative referendum - a study based on constitutional theory, law and comparison), Diss. Trier, Berlin, 1988. He comes to the conclusion that in Western democracies most consultative decisions become binding *de facto* because the organs of State usually accept and comply with the outcome.

A compulsory referendum is held on amendments to the Constitution. In order to be adopted they must attract a majority of voters and a majority of the 26 cantons. The poll result in each canton determines the cantonal vote. A referendum is held on Federal legislation and generally binding Federal decisions if requested by 50,000 eligible voters or 8 cantons. Signatures must be collected within three months. A majority of voters is sufficient for acceptance. Under Article 121 (2) of the Swiss Federal Constitution, 100,000 Swiss voters can petition for a referendum to "adopt, rescind or amend specific Articles of the Federal Constitution". This is known as the "Verfassungsinitiative" (petition for a constitutional referendum). Signatures must be collected within 18 months. A petition is accepted if the majority of voters and cantons agrees to it.

I would like to describe in detail the procedure for such public petitions in the form of a detailed proposal for a partial review of the Constitution.

1. A "petition committee" (Initiativkomitee), which must comprise at least seven petitioners, draws up a text. This text must concern only one issue, as laid down in Article 121 of the Federal Constitution (unity of content), and must constitute a fully drafted proposal for an article of the Constitution (unity of form). The committee must submit a form containing the list of signatures to the Federal Chancellery for preliminary examination. This document must include the text of the petition and a clause enabling it to be withdrawn without reservation.
2. "Before the collection of signatures begins, the Federal Chancellery shall issue an order establishing whether the list of signatures complies with the requisite legal forms." (Federal Law on Political Rights, Article 69 (1)). It may alter the title of the petition if it is "manifestly misleading". Appeals may be lodged with the Administrative Court against Federal Council orders. The title and text of the petition are published in the Federal Gazette ("Amtsblatt der Eidgenossenschaft" - Gazette of the Confederation).
3. After publication in the Gazette, the petitioners have 18 months in which to collect the requisite 100,000 authenticated signatures. Every person signing the petition must enter his name "in legible handwriting", as well as his forenames, year of birth and residential address. Before the expiry of the 18 months the lists of signatures must be submitted to the competent government offices (usually the communal authorities) for "voting right certification". Some signatures always turn

out to be invalid. The authenticated signatures are submitted to the Federal Chancellory, which issues an order establishing whether the petition has been made in proper form.

4. Now begins the internal administrative and parliamentary phase, where the initiative largely passes to the organs of state. "If it is established that the petition has been completed in proper form, the Federal Council shall submit to the Federal Assembly the declaration on and application for a public referendum" (Section 23 of the Law on Procedure of the Confederate Councils). The Federal Council (Government) has a maximum of 24 months to do so. This period may be extended to 30 months if it submits to the Federal Assembly an alternative draft or a "decree closely connected with the petition for a referendum" (Section 29 (2) of the Law on Procedure of the Confederate Councils).

The Federal Assembly has four years from the time of submission to reach a decision on whether to accept the petition or not. "The Federal Assembly may extend the period by one year if at least one Council has reached a decision on an alternative draft or a decree closely connected with the petition for a referendum" (Section 5(a) of the Law on Procedure of the Confederate Councils). The Federal Assembly is empowered to verify whether the requirements of unity of content and unity of form are fulfilled, and if it considers that this is not the case, it may declare a petition invalid². On the other hand, the question of the constitutionality of a request for a referendum can never be examined.

If the Federal Assembly rejects the petition - which is what generally happens - then it "must be presented to the people and the states for acceptance or rejection" (Article 121 (6) of the Federal Constitution). Until such time as the Federal Council establishes the date for voting, a petition for a referendum can be withdrawn on a majority vote by the Petition Committee, which is what normally happens when the parliament formulates an acceptable alternative proposal or a review of legislation.

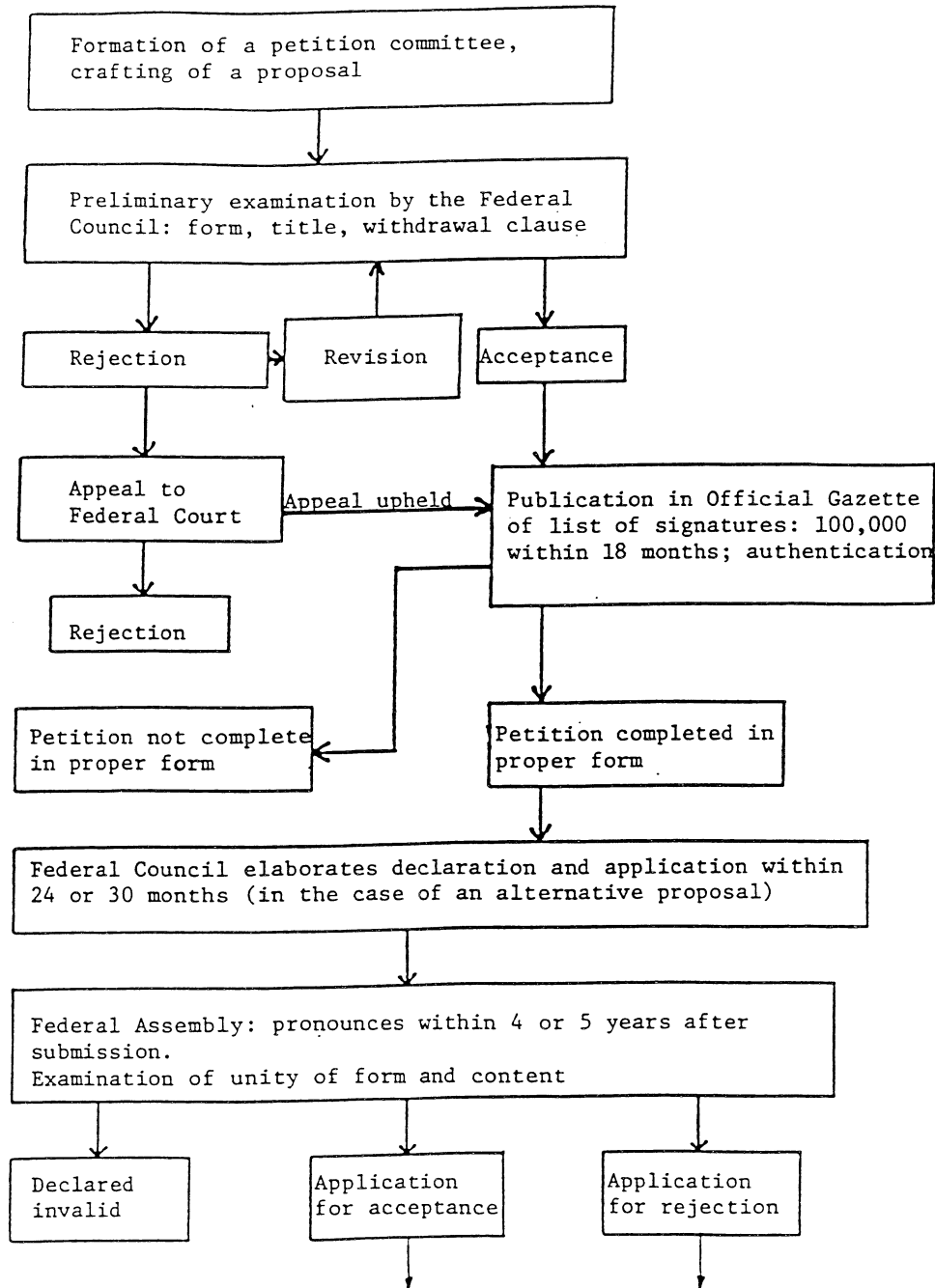
² Only two petitions for referendum have hitherto been declared invalid: the "Chevallier petition" for a referendum on an armaments moratorium in 1955 and the Labour Party's petition for a referendum against rising prices and inflation in 1977.

The parliament can advise the people and states to reject the petition for a referendum, and can offer its own proposal for a review as an alternative to be voted on together with, the petition. Prior to 1987 the voter was not allowed to vote for both the petition and the alternative proposal (he could only vote for one and against the other), but in 1987 a new provision was introduced as Article 121 (a): the ballot paper where there is an alternative to the petition proposal henceforth puts three questions to the voter: "1. Do you prefer the referendum proposal to current legislation? 2. Do you prefer the alternative proposal to current legislation? 3. Which of the two should be adopted if the people and the states prefer both to current legislation?". This authorises the so-called "double yes". If both proposals are accepted, the result of the third question decides. "However, if one of the proposals receives more people's votes and the other more states' votes in the third question, then neither of the proposals shall come into force."

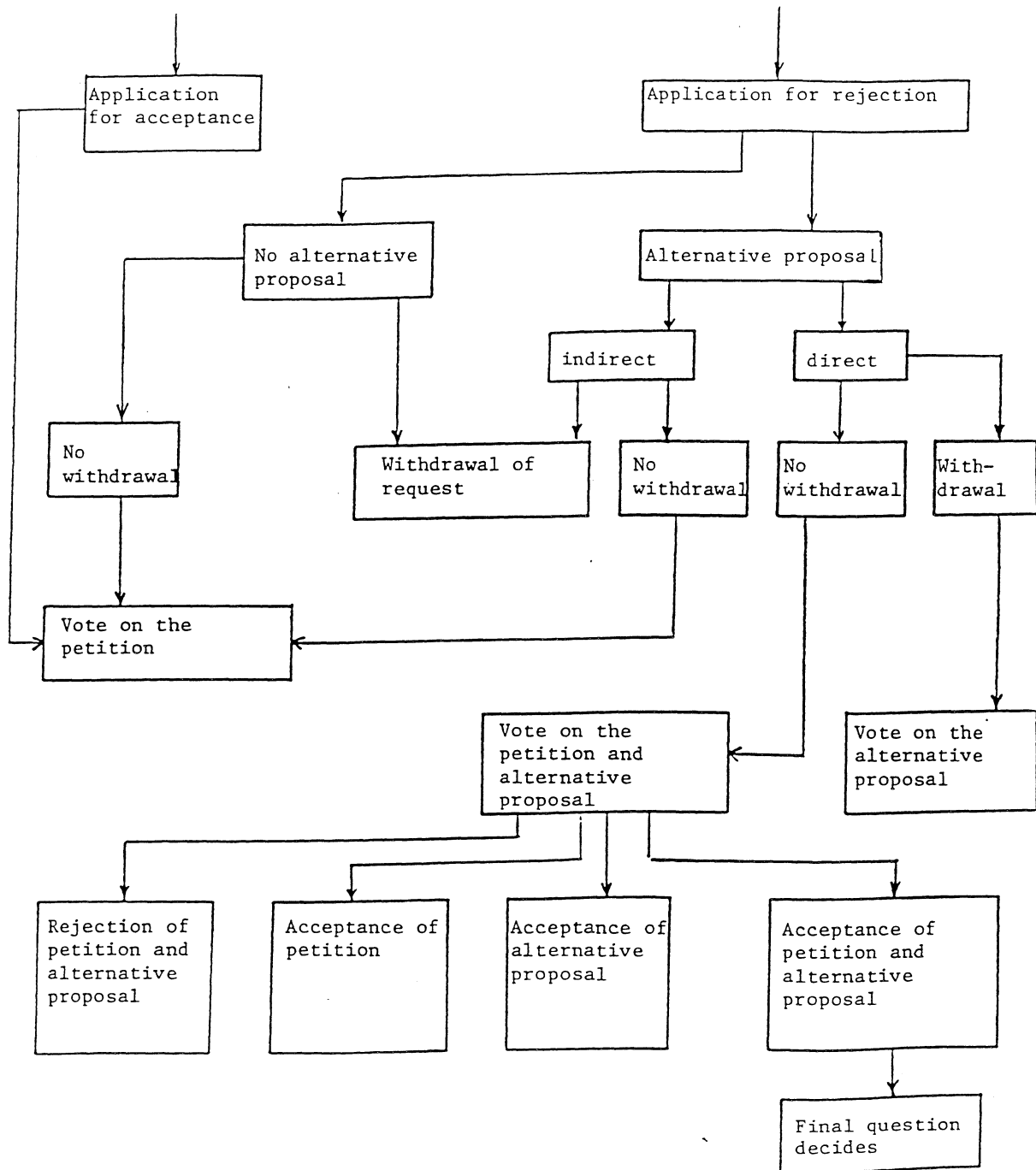
Direct democracy in Switzerland is currently a very long-drawn-out process. In extreme cases up to seven years may elapse between the registration of a petition for a referendum and the actual voting. Before 1950 the Confederate Councils had one year in which to reach a decision on a petition. After 1950, two years were allowed for a petition in the form of a general proposal and three years for a detailed proposal. In 1962, parliament was empowered to extend the length of time for processing petitions.

Figure 1 below summarises the procedure for petitions for referenda in the form of a diagram.

Fig. 1: Procedure in Switzerland for a petition for referendum on the partial review of the Federal Constitution (detailed proposal)³



³ See Silvano Möckli, *Direkte Demokratie. Ein Vergleich der Einrichtungen und Verfahren in der Schweiz und Kalifornien, unter Berücksichtigung von Frankreich, Italien, Dänemark, Irland, Oesterreich, Liechtenstein und Australien*, Bern und Stuttgart 1994, p. 105.



At cantonal and communal level, the institutions of direct democracy are even further diversified. Examples of forms which are unknown at Federal Level are the referenda on financial matters, regulations, decrees, and administrative bodies, and petitions for referenda on legislation, administrative matters and revocation of administrative bodies. Furthermore, 5 cantons have forms of democracy based on civic assemblies ("Landsgemeinden - annual assemblies of the voters of a canton), 84% of the approximately 3,000 Swiss communes have assemblies of citizens.

4.2 Practice of direct democracy

Between 1848 and 1993 the electorate (which since 1971 has included women voters) made 416 Federal-level decisions on specific issues. They adopted about half of these. In the past 25 years direct democracy has increased in intensity. 46% of all ballot decisions in Switzerland since 1848 were taken after 1969.

Table 1: Votes on specific issues in Switzerland 1848-1993.

Legal form	Total proposals	Proposals adopted
Compulsory constitutional referenda	185	134
Optional legislative	117	57
Petitions for referenda	114	11
Total	416	202

The percentage turnout for referenda is usually low. Between 1970 and 1990 the average was 41.4%. Only where the issue is very controversial is participation as high as in purely representative Western democracies: eg 68.6% in the vote on the abolition of the army on 26 November 1989 and 78.3% in the vote on the treaty on the European Economic Area on 6 December 1992.

Let us compare this with the turnout for elections: in the national parliamentary elections in 1947 the figure was 72.4%. It has been in virtually constant decline ever since. The turnout for the 1987 elections was 46.5%, and 46.0% in 1991.

Table 2 below shows that for the period 1970-1990, of the eight countries included, votes on specific issues are a feature of everyday political life only in Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Switzerland has the lowest average turnout.

Table 2. Number of ballots held (excluding elections), number of ballot decisions and average percentage turnout at national level between 1970 and 1990.

Country	Number of ballots held	Number of ballot decisions	Average percentage turnout
Switzerland	63	158	41.4
France	2	2	48.8
Italy	7	18	70.2
Denmark	4	4	77.9
Ireland	7	9	48.6
Austria	1	1	64.1
Liechtenstein	22	30	72.5
Australia	5	17	94.1

5. Questions about direct democracy

5.1 Direct democracy and parliament

Direct democracy always means complementing, not replacing, representative democracy. Here is a question which should directly concern you all: Do political systems comprising elements of direct democracy make life easier or more difficult for parliamentarians? The answer depends on where one stands and on the current political situation. If a member of parliament or a parliamentary group is

defeated in parliament, direct democracy offers the possibility of revising the decision. If the parliamentarian was on the majority side, he runs the risk of seeing the people reject a compromise which took years of laborious negotiation. In Switzerland, direct democracy serves the ends of political forces seeking both inertia and change. Statutory referenda tend to have a conservative, and public petitions for referenda an innovative, function. Direct democracy does not generally benefit a specific political party. However, as a rule the people are more conservative than parliament. The general trend indicates that parliament is weakened by the presence of direct democracy, because many of its decisions are not final and binding and groups on the outside can then consult the people directly.

5.2 Direct democracy and the parliamentary system of government

In a direct democracy, therefore, the government and parliament have to bear in mind that they are liable to repudiation by the people. In Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the United States, theory and practice are based on the assumption that the result of voting should not affect government stability.

To the Swiss mind, if the people constantly risked overthrowing the government by voting against its decisions, direct democracy would make little sense. Switzerland is a non-parliamentary democracy, ie parliament cannot overthrow the government and the government cannot dissolve parliament. Furthermore, Switzerland is a democracy based on consensus. Both these qualities would appear to be structural preconditions for the functioning of direct democracy.

In a parliamentary democracy, the government, parliamentary groups and voters are in a different situation as regards decision-making from that, for instance, in the non-parliamentary democracies of Switzerland or California, where the government cannot be overthrown.

In parliamentary democracies - especially in majority political systems where power is concentrated in the hands of the parliamentary majority⁴ - party and

⁴ See Arend Lijphart, "Democratic Political Systems: Types, Cases, Causes and Consequences", in the Journal of Theoretical Politics, Volume 1, Number 1, January 1989, pp. 33-48.

parliamentary group discipline must extend beyond parliament to the party's attitude in referenda, if the government is not to be jeopardised. In that case, the main question is not the actual subject of the referendum but whether or not the public has confidence in the government or Head of State. The vote becomes a substitute for an election, and the poll campaign becomes an election campaign in which the parties are virtually the only protagonists. If party links are strong, the ballot result will reflect the parties' relative strengths. Again, the result has a similar effect on government stability to a motion for a vote of confidence in parliament: if it loses, it might well have to resign.

5.3 Direct democracy and conflict resolution

It is true that in apparently hopeless political situations referenda sometimes help identify peaceful solutions for conflicts and resolve deadlock in the political system. However, referenda are not guaranteed to settle all conflicts; they can also step up the controversy.

Votes on specific issues enable problems to be singled out and decisions to be taken on them in isolation from general social conflicts.⁵ Such referenda can resolve conflicts between or within parties if the latter are prepared to accept the referendum result as binding. A prerequisite is fair participation in the formulation of the questions and the preparation of the campaign.

⁵ Leonhard Neidhart, "Regierbarkeitsfragen in der direkten Demokratie" (Questions of governability in direct democracy), in "Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Politische Wissenschaft", 23 (1983), p. 37.

David Magleby does not consider that the process of direct democracy in the United States is based on compromise.⁶ In his view, referenda are "high-risk efforts at conflict resolution". Petitions for referenda often comprise extreme demands, and the campaigns are accordingly conducted passionately and may expose latent conflicts. A typical example of this effect of exacerbating conflict in a community is the American system of "recall", which can be used as a weapon of conflict. Recall campaigns generally lay bare a multitude of emotions.⁷ It should be added that elections, too, can have the effect of intensifying conflict.

This situation is reinforced in a free society by the fact that the media like clear-cut issues, controversies which force people to adopt clear positions for or against; they are interested in highly controversial subjects because they attract large audiences and therefore promote sales.

In fact, in the "direct initiative"⁸ as practised in California, it is impossible to secure a compromise. This is not the case in Switzerland, where, although referendum petitions also comprise extreme demands, the road to a compromise remains open thanks to the possibility of withdrawal and of putting forward direct or indirect alternative proposals. The petition deals with a given social problem over some length of time and so operates as a safety valve. The result is, in Neidhart's view (1983, p. 39), that Switzerland "has been spared many serious conflicts".⁹ Hans Werder (1978, p. 164) contends that public petitions for referenda have extremely positive effects on problem-solving: "The facility for requesting referenda has undoubtedly been a major contribution to at least partly helping the Swiss political system over the increasing problems of the post-war era - as it did in the thirties. Without this facility such major problems as excessive immigration, housing shortages and the extension of the social security system would have remained

⁶ David B. Magleby, "Direct Legislation. Voting on Ballot Propositions in the United States". Baltimore and London, 1984, pp 184.

⁷ Thomas E. Cronin, "Direct Democracy. The Politics of Initiative, Referendum and Recall". Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1989, p 144.

⁸ That is petitions which move directly to the referendum stage without prior discussion in Parliament.

⁹ Leonhard Neidhart (footnote 5), p. 39.

deadlocked for years at the pre-parliamentary negotiation phase".¹⁰ Nevertheless, Werder continues, requests for referenda "cannot guarantee that punctual solutions which tackle the causes will be found to outstanding social problems".

However, compromise is one thing that *is* catered for in compulsory and optional statutory referenda in Switzerland. The extensive consultation procedure and the protracted legislative and constituent process also enable virtually all subjects susceptible of treatment by referendum to be taken into account.

In France, plebiscites enabled the Algerian question to be settled. In Italy, a referendum legitimated the divorce and abortion laws. In Denmark in 1972 the referendum on EEC membership pacified the domestic political scene. On 27 February 1986, a consultative referendum was held on the Single European Act, and both the social democrat and radical liberal groups in parliament promised to comply with the result¹¹. 56% of votes were in favour, as against 63.4% in 1972. Although the referendum result had the effect of resolving conflicts, the referendum campaign was quite different. It was unusually hard-fought by Danish standards and "split parties, trade unions, ministries, households and families" (EEC magazine 2/1986, p. 15).

The Irish referenda on abortion in 1983 and on divorce in 1986 had a rather conflict-heightening effect¹². 66.9% of voters were in favour of prohibiting abortion, and only 36.5% were in favour of allowing divorce. The FitzGerald Government thus failed to curb the influence of the Catholic Church in the country, and the problem of the 70 000 wrecked marriages remained unresolved.

In Australia, almost all attempts at constitutional revision are being blocked by the constitutional referendum. In Liechtenstein, women's suffrage was rejected in 1968, 1971 and 1973, before being narrowly approved in 1984 with 51.3% votes in favour.

¹⁰ Hans Werder, "Die Bedeutung der Volksinitiative in der Nachkriegszeit" (The significance of public requests for referenda in the post-war period), Bern, 1978, p. 164.

¹¹ See Ole Borre, "The Danish Referendum on the EC Common Act", in *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, August 1986, pp. 189-193.

¹² See Cornelius O'Leary, "The Irish Referendum on Divorce (1986)" in *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1987, pp. 69-74.

Reinhard Schiffrers (1971, p. 287) contends that the referenda during the Weimar Republic indirectly had a predominantly corrosive effect.¹³ The intensifying opposition to compromise and concentration on the yes-or-no alternative meant that the referenda encouraged agitation. The result was not the reconciliation but rather the forced exposure of antagonisms. The antagonisms between groups and classes were thus heightened.

Ulrich Rommelfanger is sceptical about the conflict-resolving function of referenda. "In most cases the attempt to achieve pacification and heightened tolerance for the controversial decision was unsuccessful".¹⁴ "The question whether consultative referenda can contribute to increasing tolerance in controversial political decisions and thus strengthen their legitimacy and also the capacity of the organs of state to act must essentially be answered in the negative".¹⁵

Referenda and plebiscites are un-suited to resolving conflict if they are being used as "the last line of defence" in a conflict which has already escalated. Even if the intention is to resolve or reduce conflict, the result can be utterly different. In Neidhart's view (1983, p. 26) in cases of very intense conflict, with different groups rallying around different viewpoints, the problems are well-nigh insoluble.¹⁶ More and more individuals are drawn into the conflict and more and more arguments and emotions clash. Where everyone can decide together, everyone can also quarrel together.

5.4 Is direct democracy a "panacea for all political functional ills"?

Representative democracy has functional deficiencies as regards participation from below. The symptoms in all Western democracies are alienation, low turnout at elections, disillusionment with political parties, citizens' action committees,

¹³ Reinhard Schiffrers, "Elemente der direkten Demokratie im Weimarer Regierungssystem" (Elements of direct democracy in the Weimar Government system), Düsseldorf, 1971, p. 287.

¹⁴ Ulrich Rommelfanger (footnote 1), p. 271.

¹⁵ Ulrich Rommelfanger (footnote 1), p. 37.

¹⁶ Leonhard Neidhart (footnote 5), p. 26.

demonstrations and spontaneous direct action. Could direct democracy remedy these defects? Obviously the answer is yes, inasmuch as they clearly signal the pressure from below, direct it into institutional channels, and give extra-parliamentary groups an opportunity of circumventing or repudiating the government and parliament.

But there is a caveat here. Such desirable effects may be accompanied by undesirable side-effects. "... The whole political set-up operates differently in the presence of an opposition or a Constitutional Court, or again where there is a possibility of appealing to the people"¹⁷. Direct democracy is an important structural element in a political system which - if public petitions can be made for referenda - can serve as a lever to change other structural elements in the system. Of course it is difficult to make statements generally applicable to all states on the functions of referenda and referendum petitions. The actual consequences of direct democracy for the structure of a given political system and the political process may vary enormously according to the political situation, the prevailing institutional conditions, the political culture and the political figures. Virtually every referendum has its own particular story. Direct democracy with referenda and referendum petitions is an everyday feature of political life only in Switzerland, in around half the US States and Liechtenstein, whereas votes on specific issues are exceptional political events in other countries. While the general view is that direct democracy in Switzerland and the United States functions satisfactorily, that does not mean that it would necessarily operate well if transposed elsewhere.

¹⁷ Otmar Jung, "Direkt Demokratie: Forschungsstand und -aufgaben" (Direct democracy: the present, and future state of research) in "Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen" (Periodical on parliamentary issues), number 3/90, p. 496.

5.5 Is direct democracy a "superior form" of democracy?

The root meaning of democracy is self-government by the people. As a good democrat one can scarcely challenge this interpretation. Decisions taken by means of direct democracy are more legitimate than those taken under representative democracy because they involve the electorate more closely. This makes representative democracy look very much like an inferior substitute for direct democracy¹⁸.

However: popular self-government is impossible in practice. The will of the people has to be shaped by representatives; this will is only expressed in answers to questions. Direct democracy too needs an active minority to take the initiative. Direct democracy must therefore, as already mentioned, always merely complement and not replace representative democracy. The active protagonists are often the same. Instruments of direct democracy are an additional option in the political context. Although decisions are taken by a section of the people, the instigation, preparation, formulation and grounding of the decisions are a matter for an elite.

Most empirical electoral surveys demonstrate that the majority of citizens are not greatly interested in political participation. Only particular elites fully exploit the opportunities for participation.

A representative democracy can also provide for easy access to the political system and wide input, provided the representatives are fulfilling their duties properly. That means that they must be capable of representing the people not only formally but also in substantive matters: electors must be able to relate to the conduct of their representatives, to identify with them. This is a combined mental and political process.

¹⁸ Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, "Mittelbare/repräsentative Demokratie als eigentliche Form der Demokratie" (Indirect/representative democracy as the authentic form of democracy), in Georg Müller et al. (publ.), "Staatsorganisation und Staatsfunktionen im Wandel" (Organisation and functions of the State in the process of change), "Festschrift für Kurt Eichenberger" (publication in honour of Kurt Eichenberger), Basle/Frankfurt-am-Main, 1982, p. 305.

6. Conclusion

Democracy is not (only) a question of technique, whether involving representation or direct democracy: it is a way of life, a political culture. The quality of democracy cannot be judged exclusively by its institutions, it must also be gauged by the extent to which the protagonists fill these institutions with political life.

Where direct democracy exists, it neither comes up to the highest expectations of its convinced supporters nor warrants the worst fears of its bitter opponents. It is a useful, though far from magic, instrument in a politically imperfect world.

My statement has not been devoid of an element of scepticism vis-à-vis direct democracy. This was fully intentional, because I know that observers abroad like to idealise Swiss direct democracy.

Let me balance things up with a closing quotation from Woodrow Wilson, US President from 1913 to 1921. The statement concerns direct democracy in the United States and dates from 1911¹⁹:

"For twenty years I preached to the students of Princeton that the Referendum and the Recall was bosh. I have since investigated and I want to apologise to those students. It is the safeguard of politics. It takes power from the boss and places it in the hands of the people."

¹⁹

Quoted by Thomas Cronin (footnote 7), p. 38.

Summary

Devices of direct democracy are an important structural element in Switzerland's political system. In this article, institutions and functions of Switzerland's direct democracy will be presented. Then the author will pursue whether the direct democracy can be used as a device to Remedy Functional Deficiencies of Representative Democracy. He comes to the conclusion that Switzerland's direct democracy is not an exportable good. We know from the Swiss experience that there is no single model that describes how initiatives and referendums function in every state.