

## *Democracy Actions 2013*

In mid-January, Ronald Pabst and Cora Pfafferott travelled to Vienna to observe the people's consultation on whether Austria's system of military conscription and a mandatory civilian service



should be maintained. The result of the vote: 60 per cent of Austrian voters opted for not changing the current system, the voter turnout was high at 50 per cent. However, the Austrian Government had initiated the referendum as a tactical move involving party politics. Also, the result was non-binding. These were our main points of criticism.

Together with Claudine Nierth of Mehr Demokratie Germany, Erwin Mayer of mehr demokratie! Austria and the journalist Christian Felber we held a press

conference in a traditional Viennese café two days after the people had voted. On this occasion we presented the results of our monitoring report that we had issued jointly. We were happy to see many journalists disseminating our demand to introduce binding and citizen-initiated referenda in Austria via newspaper, radio and Austria's main TV channel.

The report can be downloaded in [English](#) and in [German](#).

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### **Observing the national referendum in Bulgaria on nuclear energy**

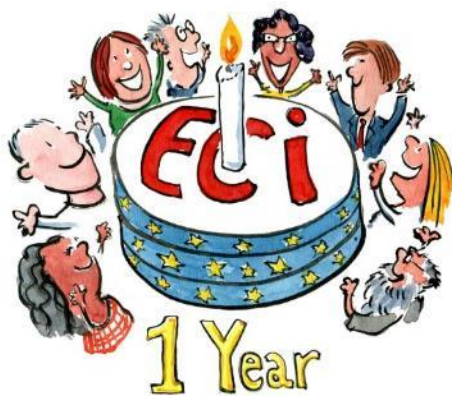
On 27 January 2013, the people of Bulgaria were called to the polls to answer the question: "Should nuclear energy be developed in Bulgaria through the construction of a new nuclear power station?" It was the first national referendum in Bulgaria since 1971, and it was initiated directly by the people.

Following an invitation by the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Democracy International send a mission to Bulgaria to monitor the referendum in terms of fairness and freedom. Daniela Bozhinova, board member of Democracy International and member Dr. Klaus Hofmann were among the observers who visited 25 polling stations in Bulgaria's capital and adjoining towns and villages.



Overall, the democracy observers did not find any substantial irregularities in the way the voting was conducted. Yet they raised concerns about the restrictive requirements concerning the minimum level of voter participation, the lack of clarity concerning the wording of the question and the manner in which the question was altered following the collection of signatures.

## Happy Birthday, ECI!



“The European Citizens' Initiative is still too weak for real political change” - this is the message that Daniel Schily of Democracy International, Bruno Kaufmann of IRI Europe and Assya Kavrakova of the European Citizen and Action Service (ECAS) voiced in the Press Club Brussels Europe on 20 March 2013. Just a few days before the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) turned one year old – the European Commission had opened the registry for ECIs on 1 April 2012 – the time had come to publicly assess the first tool of direct democracy at

transnational level on the occasion of a press briefing.

The three experts demanded that public awareness of the ECI hence to be increased. Also, there should be a better resourced citizens' infrastructure, and the ECI should further be simplified and be made more uniform.

On the occasion of the ECI's first anniversary, Democracy International joined with IRI Europe, ECAS and the ECI campaign to produce a briefing providing an assessment of the European Citizens' Initiative first year in practice. You can [access the briefing here](#).



## New Council for new countries



On Saturday, 4th May 2013, Democracy International formally established the Council in our headquarters in Cologne, Germany. The Council is foreseen in our statute, which says that democracy initiatives with more than seven members can apply for membership of the Council. Its main task is to bring in experience, to advise on best practice and to help democracy groups with campaigns.

The six founding members of the Council are:

- mehr demokratie! österreich (from Austria, represented by Erwin Leitner)
- democratie.nu (Belgium, Marc Janssens)
- Mehr Demokratie e.V. (Germany, Roman Huber)
- OMNIBUS für Direkte Demokratie (Germany, Michael von der Lohe)
- Initiativ fir Demokratie-Erweiterung a.s.b.l. (Luxembourg, Alfred Groff)
- the Referendum Platform (the Netherlands)

Gerald Häfner, chairperson of Democracy International and board members Armin Steuernagel and Suresh Nautiyal also attended the founding ceremony.

## Democracy International has a new website

On the morning of Monday m27 of July 2013, we entered the office and something magical had happened overnight: our new website had gone live at [www.democracy-international.org](http://www.democracy-international.org)



The switch became possible after we had arduously transferred all contents (publications, press releases, news items, and so on...) from the old website to the one now in use. We remain very grateful for the help we received by Oscár Fernandez-Rodriguez and Zsanett Kocsó, who worked with us at the time.

With the new website we aim to feature democracy activists and their campaigns and to bring you closer their fight for more direct democracy in their own countries and in the world.

## Building the campaign for a more democratic EU

In August 2013, Armin Steuernagel, board member of Democracy International, took charge to lead - together with our chairperson Gerald Häfner – took charge of leading our campaign for a more democratic EU. At a time of democratically illegitimate EU treaty change, the core idea of the campaign is to recast Europe up from the ground up by creating a new, democratic EU convention. This long-term assembly is to be composed of citizens, civil society, academics, entrepreneurs and politicians. Their main task is to work out a new EU draft treaty eventually to be ratified by all the people of the EU via referendums held in their respective Member States.



Armin Steuernagel quickly set up a team of young campaigners. Anna Saulwick, Sophie von Hatzfeldt, Florian Kollwijn, Alina Otilia Baleanu, Daniel Lentfer, Kim-Fabian von Dall'Armi, Lukas Stolz and many others are working hard to realise the campaign for a more democratic EU. The campaign is due to start in early 2014.

## Joe Mathews from the US is new board member



In November Joe Mathews joined Democracy International's board. Joe Mathews lives in California in the United States. He is a strong advocate for direct democracy and California editor for Zócalo Public Square, a Los Angeles-based ideas exchange that combines daily humanities, journalism and live events. He writes the syndicated Connecting California column for Zócalo and 26 media outlets around California.

## *Democracy Visions 2014*

We - the board and staff of Democracy International – cordially thank you for your work, support and interest in our democracy actions throughout 2013.

The New Year is just a couple of days away.

Early in 2014, we will kick-off our campaign for a more democratic EU. In the run-up to the European Elections, we will continue working towards a European Union in which the power derives from the people. For this to happen we want to endorse a democratic EU convention and referenda in the EU Member states. You wish to participate in the campaign? [Contact us](#), every voice counts to create a more democratic EU.

For a more democratic EU!  
Support us!

We hope to have you on board when exploring democracy along the Danube from 1 to 9 April 2014. We cordially invite you to travel with us through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary to meet with democracy activists and to go on an exciting political sightseeing trip with us together. Our preparations for the conference are currently underway. You wish to travel with us together? For more information and to register [click here](#)



The campaign for a more democratic EU and the “Danube Democracy Rally” will be two crucial steps to pursue our aims: more democracy at local, national and transnational level and to building an effective membership organization of democracy activists around the world.

### ***Season's Greetings!***

*After all, we wish you and your family a very happy New Year!  
We look forward to seeing you again in 2014!*