

Democracy 2.0, A European Reality Check

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We always upgrade to the new and improved version of everything. Shouldn't the European Union be an upgrade to democracy as well? Find out why strengthening the power of the Irish referendum through Direct Democracy is the next step.

Ireland is a Plebiscite

This is about who controls the Irish referendum agenda; the government or the people.

When the government or the majority party in parliament controls the referendum agenda, they just schedule other referendums until the people vote the way they want, and "then and only then" is it a binding outcome. This is called a Plebiscite. The people complain that "this is not democratic", it is, because through the constitution "we the sovereign people of Ireland" give them the power to do so. No signatures need to be gathered, no major debate, the parliament just votes to schedule another referendum. Lisbon 1, Lisbon 2, Lisbon 3, Lisbon whatever?

Direct Democracy

When the people control the referendum agenda, then the outcome of the vote is binding, "NO means NO and YES means YES". When the people control the agenda, the people gather enough signatures to have a referendum on "whatever issue, whenever they want", and the outcome is binding. In this definition of democracy, only the constitution or the people can cause a referendum to happen, not the government. Let's be clear, the government has NO POWER to schedule a referendum, only the people or the constitution does. This is called "Direct Democracy".

Democracy 2.0!

Irish referendums are triggered by the constitution and controlled by the parliament. To change this, we need to change the Irish constitution. If the EU can change our constitution from the top down, then "we the sovereign people of Ireland" can certainly change it from the bottom up. If the Irish government does not respect the will of the Irish people and schedules another Lisbon referendum, then we should take that power away and give the right to cause referendum back to the people. This single act would strengthen the democratic power of the people and truly upgrade Irish democracy.

Can we do this?

This is the perfect time to do it. The Irish people will be angry if the government does not respect their vote and goes ahead with Lisbon 2. We can focus the resulting "anger and outrage" to push the idea of a constitutional change through. If successful, second referendum votes will be a thing of the past.

What are the bigger picture implications of this strategy for a United Europe?

The short answer is that if Ireland makes this change, then Ireland can truly lead the way to a more democratic Europe.

Here's why.

The beauty of direct democracy is that the people can let their leaders legislate with the comfort of knowing that they can step in at any time, create a referendum, and change or "throw out" new or old laws when they begin to affect their lives in negative ways. Politicians will not push for unpopular laws when they know the people can step in and throw them out.

This means that the Irish people can allow the EU to continue unifying and step in with referendum veto powers on future EU laws or competencies that do not serve them. You will not need to understand all the intricacies of each treaty, hardly anyone does, however, you will know that you have the ability to change what it is to live with their results.

Switzerland has had "direct democracy", for more than 150 years. Switzerland is a federation of 26 autonomous cantons or provinces (the EU has 27 countries) and is considered the most advanced democracy on the planet. (see link below) They have "direct democracy" on every level of government; local, regional and national. To the Swiss it's all about preserving and expanding the citizen's sovereign power of referendum. "Power to the People".

http://www.swissworld.org/dvd_rom/direct_democracy_2005/index.html