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Why Hasn't Internet Affected Democracy
To a Greater Extent?
Electronic Democracy as the Future of
Democracy in Europe

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ABSTRAKT

Bakalářská práce s názvem “Why Hasn’t Internet Affected Democracy to a Greater Extent? Electronic Democracy as the Future of Democracy in Europe” pojednává o elektronické demokracii, jako novém směru demokracie v 21.století a o postupu její implementace ve vybraných evropských zemích. Protože elektronická demokracie je novou větví demokracie, představuje tato práce také tradiční formy demokracie, ze kterých elektronická demokracie vychází, a to především demokracii přímou a její příklady z Athén a Švýcarska. Práce rozebírá demokratický potenciál Internetu a sociálních sítí. Cílem této práce také je popsat výhody a nebezpečí spojená s příchodem elektronické demokracie, přičemž její úspěšné zapojení spočívá v kulturních a politických dispozicích jednotlivých společností.

Klíčová slova: demokracie, přímá demokracie, internet, elektronická demokracie, elektronické volby, švýcarský politický systém

ABSTRACT

The thesis “Why Hasn’t Internet Affected Democracy to a Greater Extent? Electronic Democracy as the Future of Democracy in Europe” explores electronic democracy as a new element in the world of politics and possibly the new path for democracy in the 21st century. This paper also refers about the implementation of some tools of electronic democracy in particular European countries. Electronic democracy is a new branch of direct democracy and therefore it is important to first describe the traditional forms of democracy, especially the direct democracy and examples of states with a direct democracy system – Athens and Switzerland. This thesis also explores the democratic potential of the internet and the social networks. Another purpose of this thesis is to show that there are both promises and risks in the advent of electronic democracy while its successful implementation depends on the cultural and political conditions of the particular society into which it might be introduced.

Key words: democracy, direct democracy, internet, electronic democracy, electronic voting, the political system of Switzerland

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores relationships between electronic democracy and traditional forms of democracy. Since electronic democracy is simply a new and more progressive way of conducting the traditional one, this text first identifies the crucial aspects of the traditional democracy, i.e. the cultural and political conditions prevailing in any society. Those conditions are demonstrated by examining two examples of direct democracy – Athens of 5th century BC and modern-day Switzerland.

This thesis focuses on the mechanisms and requirements of the direct democratic system, because as explained through the whole paper, this system is closer to the true concept of democracy of allowing people to actually decide governmental – even though this possesses some risks as well. In this respect the tools of electronic democracy seem more compatible with the direct democracy as well.

The general concept of e-democracy as a changing element on many levels of the democratic process is described in this thesis, as well as the general problems associated with this new phenomenon of electronic democracy. The thesis also refers about the relation between the new media and politics, as they represent influential e-democracy tools, though not always used in purely democratic way.

In the end of this thesis I would like to draw a conclusion what is the future of electronic democracy in Europe based on the conditions and also the already happening projects.

I have chosen the topic of electronic democracy because I believe there is a future in this new branch of democracy, which is going to radically transform the way that democratic system functions. Electronic means will allow many more people to directly participate in political decision-making. The internet as a mean of communication has taken over our lives completely, especially in the way we share information. It is just a question of time before this great invention of 20th century, very accurately compared with the invention of printing in the 15th century, will transform politics completely. In this thesis I try to outline the possible way how that could happen.

1. DEMOCRACY AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM

This part of work is a description of what is democracy and what forms of democracy we know. Later the paper describes the system of direct democracy more closely and evaluates its advantages and disadvantages. On two examples – modern Switzerland and ancient Athens – this text attempts to show how the direct democracy may and may not work. Drawing from those examples and the definition, I will sum up the conditions for working democracy which are crucial for the introduction of the electronic tools into democratic processes of the future.

1.1 What is democracy?

Democracy is a form of government in which the citizens have power to influence the decision-making process with their votes or other inputs. Mostly for that reason, because it is responsive to the people's will, and, to varying degrees, allow the citizens to determine governmental policy, democracy is generally perceived as the best form of governance that the citizens might want. But, as Winston Churchill once said: *"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried."* (Langworth 2008: 574) Even today there are wars being fought for democratic ideas all over our planet, from the Arab States in Africa and Middle East, South America or Eastern Europe.

The 20th century was a victorious century for democracy, even though this seemed very unlikely in its first half (Dahl 1987). This thesis draws a picture of possible further development of democracy as it will connect with electronic means of communication, especially with the internet. First, an explanation of what democracy means and requires, is needed.

In democracy, people generally enjoy freedom and their rights are guaranteed, however this freedom comes with responsibility. This responsibility comes from their right to vote (from choosing their representatives in the representative democracy, to national or regional referenda in the direct democracies). Even if they decide not to vote at all, they have to understand they are making a political decision which affects the state and the future of their country. This responsibility is probably more evident to people in direct democracies, like Switzerland and as going to be explained later, and very much also depends on the

political culture of the country as well. To recognize one's political responsibility is very important when speaking about the "*push-button democracy*" (Hilbert 2009:5), as explained later in the section about electronic democracy.

Political theory recognizes two essential forms of democracy. Direct democracy represents a model of direct, personal participation. The last word in all major decisions is up to the people. The traditional form of direct democracy is a people's assembly, when everybody meets and raises their hands to vote. A more modern form is a referendum or popular initiative, when direct democracy enables the citizens to participate in the decision-making, through voting on specific issues, which allows them to decide on actual government policy. The second form of democracy is representative democracy, prevailing around the world (Hilbert 2009). Citizens elect their representatives and with that delegate their decision-making power on them. Representative democracy therefore implies that the elected representatives should attempt to reflect the opinions of the electorate he or she represents (Dahl 1987).

This thesis further concentrate on direct democracy, since it has much stronger meaning in connection with electronic tools and their incorporation into the decision-making process. Most of the scholars do not believe that representative democracy in today's form can endure the digitalization of politics in the same form as we know it today and that it will have to employ more direct strategies (Anttiroiko 2003; Hilbert 2009) and therefore new forms of democracy, somehow hybrid and inclining towards direct form while being electronic, will appear. Electronic democracy would make direct-democracy strategies much easier to conduct than they are today and therefore direct participation in the legislative process could be enhanced. Those theories and their background are also explained the chapter about e-democracy.

This sections describes two states with a direct democracy system or a system very close to that concept: Athenian democracy from the 4th and 5th centuries BC and the modern semi-direct democratic system of Switzerland. Switzerland is a crucial entity for this thesis, because it shows how successful and elaborated can direct democracy can be with or without electronic means. The Swiss has been practising direct democracy for centuries and they've also decided to be one of the first European countries to try out the mechanisms of electronic democracy (i.e. e-voting projects described later). For both those reasons I take Switzerland as a very

good example how normal or e-democracy can work when certain conditions are fulfilled.

1.2 Direct democracy

Direct democracy is a form of democratic government in which people decide on policy initiatives instead of electing representatives to decide on their behalf. There are also politicians with powers in direct democracies, but they have different competences and areas of power and within system of more direct democracy their role becomes considerably more administrative, as they basically only carry out the decision made by the people. Direct democracy gives people the power to decide on various levels of the political process, such as the direct making of laws, the electing or dismissing official authorities directly and other broader options on how to control the political decision,-making process.

Direct democracy in its old form (citizen's assembly) does not work in any country in the whole world at the national level. It however works in two Swiss cantons, Appenzel Innerrhoden and Glaurus (Wikipedia 2015) and is known as the town meeting; such a people's assembly also takes place in some towns in the United States, especially smaller communities in New England (University of Chicago Press 2003) Some instruments of direct democracy are used along the indirect instruments in other cantons of Switzerland and therefore we refer to the governmental system of Switzerland as semi-direct democracy. But Switzerland is definitely closer to the direct democratic political system than in any other country in the world, even though other countries employ some direct democracy instruments as well, although a lot less frequently.

Direct democracy is very specific form of government, which cannot work just everywhere. There are some conditions that have to be fulfilled if we want to make sure direct democracy will not lead to political and consequently social catastrophe. I would like to name just one condition that is absolutely essential and that is the political literacy of the citizens (Crawford 1996). This condition is fulfilled in Switzerland where referenda and other decision making of citizens has a long tradition. People are raised in order to be able to make rational decisions, objectively consider the pros and cons of each issue, and do not let their emotions affect the political decision making (Dahl 1987: 156). Not only are the citizens themselves democratically literate, but also the Swiss bureaucracy knows exactly how to make

any referendum efficient and democratic, by providing people with enough information on which to take their decisions, without themselves taking sides. The Swiss people therefore can reach their decisions without feeling pressured and manipulated.

For example one of the latest referendums was on the topic of immigrations, which has proven to be a most controversial topic for many European countries during the last decade or two. A popular initiative to restrict immigration into the country was proposed by a civic-group called Eco-Pop, a political grouping which combines green-left economic ambitions with proposal of very nationalist policies more common of a more right-wing political spectrum. The proposal was however rejected by 74% of Swiss voters (The Economist 2014), as they understood that this step might harm their economy. Furthermore they understood that immigration is something from which their country more or less originated, so restricting people from coming to their country would be like denying history.

2. DEMOCRACY IN SWITZERLAND

Before examining the institutional working of direct democracy inside Switzerland, we have to look at the special type of political system existing in Switzerland, which is very different from the rest of Europe. Switzerland is a small Central European country, which has been an island of democracy for centuries in a Europe full of monarchies. The tradition of direct democracy in Switzerland dates back to the end of the 13th century. This section should also help to show why Swiss society is a perfect environment for the e-voting projects try outs, as Gerlach and Gasser state: *“Switzerland seems to be in some ways particularly suited to the adoption of e-voting procedures since voting takes place more often than in countries without such a strong tradition of direct democracy.”* (Gerlach and Gasser 2009: 13)

2.1 Direct democracy in Switzerland

In Switzerland, to vote does not mean to come to the ballots only to elect representatives. Their system of multiple referenda at various levels of government and concerning the total range of government policies mean, that Swiss people are the supreme political authority in the country. Their political power is based explicitly on their right to vote in various referenda (Linder 2002). They also vote in various types of binding referenda on three levels – local, regional and national – and their

decisions constitute the governmental policy. There are four types of referenda: mandatory, facultative, optional and popular initiative (Linder 2002). „*From the founding of a modern Switzerland as a Federation in 1848 until the end of a February 2008, 546 proposals underwent a nation-wide popular vote, 318(or 58 percent) of them in the last three decades alone. As a result, Swiss citizens are called to the ballots to vote on a federal bill, a constitutional amendment or a treaty approximately every three to four months.*” (Reich 2008: 13) Their referenda concern various issues as women right to vote in 1971 (History of Switzerland 2004) or allowed but supervised heroine use in 2008 (BBC News 2008).

Mandatory referenda require a „double majority“ of both the people and the cantons (Reich 2008). There are three occasions when a mandatory referendum is required: amendments to the Federal Constitution, entry into international organizations or communities and voting on a statutes which is urgent but lacks a constitutional basis (Constitution of Switzerland 1999:article 140). For example in 2002, Swiss entered the United Nation by approval of 54% of citizens in mandatory, nation-wide referenda, after first rejecting the idea in 1986 (The Economist 2002; Swissinfo 2007).

People are also enable to vote in an optional referendum on „*federal acts, emergency federal acts whole term of validity exceeds one year, federal decrees, provided the Constitution or an act so requires, international treaties that are of unlimited duration and may not be terminated, provide for accession to an international organisation or contain important legislative provisions or whose implementation requires the enactment of federal legislation.*“ (Constitution of Switzerland 1999: article 141) An optional referendum requires a signature of 50 000 persons. The optional referendum allows citizens initiate legislation but it also affects the political scene indirectly. The possibility and probability of rejection taught Swiss politicians to collaborate more (Reich 2008:16).

The third tool of direct democracy tool used in Switzerland is the popular initiative which serves as an instrument for a constitutional revision. This revision can be complete (Constitution of Switzerland 1999: article 138) or partial (Constitution of Switzerland 1999: article 139). In both cases, 100 000 persons eligible to vote are needed in support. Popular initiatives are used by various groups of different intentions, as well as political parties. It can easily be turned into a social pressure tool, as when popular initiative banned a kosher butchering in 1892 (Reich

2008:21). There has been many popular initiatives on controversial topics in the 20th and 21st century, including the UN membership, executive pay limits (The New York Times 2013) and above mentioned migration restriction in 2014. The most recent Swiss voting took place on March 8th (Swissinfo 2015) and concerned consumer taxation.

Since 2000, a few Swiss cantons have been testing the on-line voting in referenda. This is later elaborated in the chapter about e-voting projects. It is by no means surprising that e-voting has been accepted in a country, where voting is almost a monthly occasion and therefore needs to be made as easy and as accessible as possible. Also more than half a million Swiss citizens live abroad and on-line voting is a perfect way how to ensure they have the equal opportunity to vote (Gerlach and Gasser 2009:10; Swiss authorities online 2015)

However, direct democracy has a long tradition in Switzerland, present from the 13th century and institutionalised during the foundation of the modern state in the mid-19th century with hardly any interruptions. The system is also supported by wider social and cultural conditions. One of them is the Swiss *“strong identification with the state”* (Gerlach and Gasser 2009:13) which is in return fostered by the direct democracy system, as the direct democracy system is the *“most precious element of its common culture”* (Linder 2002:17) Even though the democracy was not perfect in the beginning (no political rights for women and in some cantons even for the unmarried men), it has connected very culturally different cantons into the state with the connecting idea of the sovereign people (Linder 2002:15). The Swiss add *“government through the people”* to the well-known *“government of the people, for the people”* (Linder 2002:89).

People in Switzerland are constantly (through the frequent voting) reminded they are the sovereign power in the state. Consequently, they trust the system deeply. As Werner Seitz puts it, there are three main aspects of the Swiss political culture: *„a) the perception of being “special” as a part of a national identity, b) political negotiations, the search for consensus and integration, c) direct democracy and a strong sense for the sovereignty of the people“* (Gerlach and Gasser 2009:13). All those aspects and historical situations create the unique political culture of Switzerland today which enable the direct democracy tools to work efficiently. It could be defined by a two-way system of both trust and feedback. Citizens trust their government in carrying on their decisions accurately and with providing them with

objective information on which to base their decisions and the government can trust its citizens to make rational decisions, which is mostly caused by the long tradition of direct democracy and democratic values enrooted in the Swiss society. The government gives feedback to citizens by forming policy based on their decisions and the citizens can always ‘protest’ by collecting signatures for a popular initiative. The conditions lies both on the side of government and the citizens – the citizens are more active while the government accepts its administrative nature - and only then the direct democracy can work.

2.2 System of Switzerland

The Swiss Confederation is a divided into 26 cantons of various sizes. Switzerland does not have a capital city, however Bern is the centre of federal authorities and therefore called the ‚federal city‘. Switzerland as we know it today emerged in 1848 after a short civil war but traces of Swiss ‚nation‘ can be found as early as in 13th century. This nation and community was based on a network of mutual agreements between various entities. Starting in the late 13th centuries, various regions with different sizes and statuses decided to join on to the small country and over centuries Switzerland was growing in size (Linder 2002). Switzerland does however lack the typical characteristic of the modern national states originating in 19th century and that is the common language of inhabitants of particular geographical area (Reich 2008: 5). This was caused by the specific state formation – the joining areas were of different languages, namely French, Italian and German and the language of the original community was Romansch. That is why modern Switzerland recognizes four nation languages today.

It also lacks a common cultural heritage or united ethnicity. Based on its history, the country is also divided religiously. However, considering the significant diversity in all areas, Switzerland has only experienced one problem concerning this problem. In 1979 a new French-speaking canton was created through referendum. The area of the new canton Jura used to belong to the German-speaking canton of Bern (Wikipedia 2015).

The government, called Federal Council consists of seven members and the Federal Chancellor, effectively the prime minister. All the representative functions and ceremonial duties are carried out by the Federal President, elected from the members of the Federal Council (The Federal Council 2015). The Federal Council

respects the language and ethnic diversity of the state and also the importance of historically significant municipalities. Two members always have to be German-speaking, one French-speaking and the minority languages have to be represented too. Bern, Zurich, Basle and Geneva must always be represented as well as Catholics (Linder 2002: 32)

Switzerland, even though officially called a Swiss Confederation, is a federal state. Naming was bargained over after the civil war in 1848 and was decided by the whole nation. The structure of the state is federative.

2.2.1 Referenda

In the Swiss Confederation, the sovereign power belongs to the people, directly. The Swiss democracy is the only modern political system which holds the people as the sovereign authority. All the major decisions of high importance (especially any change in constitution) are decided by a whole nation in the federal referendum, where double majority is needed. The double majority means that both majority of the electorate and a majority of cantons must vote in favour (Reich 2008). The Swiss parliament consists of two chambers together known as the Federal Assembly. One of them is the National Council with its 200 members chosen by people of the whole country where the cantons are represented proportionate to their electorate. The second chamber, The Council of States is representative body of the 26 cantons. 20 Swiss cantons have 2 representatives while 6 cantons (half cantons) have only 1 representative. This division of power is based on historical reasons.

A pure direct democracy, as a system where people meet in a square and raise their hands in favour or rejection of a proposals brought by government or people still works in the two smallest cantons of Swiss Confederation. It is important to remember that Switzerland is a federation, therefore it is possible for each of the cantons and furthermore communes to have slightly different systems.

The cantons of Appenzell Inerrhoden and Glaurus apply the system of Landsgemeinde. Landsgemeinde is „a sovereign assembly of active citizens held by way of a ceremony at least once a year. It is the highest legislative authority „... *[it] elects the government and high civil servants and in both cantons it passes new laws.*“ (Loughlin 2011: 203) Citizens (since 1994 this includes women) meet in an open air square and issues varying from public policy to public spending are discussed. In Appenzell Innerhoden this voting now includes about 3000 eligible

voters, but only minority actually attends. A municipal assembly is not simply an assembly where proposals made by politicians are voted upon. Every citizen can make his own proposal or alter the proposed project. Projects are also discussed and therefore can be understood more accurately and of course monitored by the whole community (Loughlin 2011:205).The sovereign assembly in the canton of Glarus is very similar and does not imply any significant differences in terms of this thesis.

Coincidentally, the potential size of the assemblies in the two Swiss cantons is very close to the potential size of the Athenian forum of the 5th century B.C, where direct democracy originates. Size is indeed important aspect of the assembly issue.

The existence of the cantonal assemblies is strongly supported and facilitated by the Swiss political culture and their national distinction. People attend the assembly fully informed (by unbiased information provided by the bureaucracy), knowing their decision matter and therefore has to be rational and responsible. Additionally, people of Appenzell Innerhoden and Glaurus recognize the town assemblies as part of their distinctive political and community culture, special even inside already different Swiss political culture.

It is quite logical that this form of direct democracy, an assembly, can only work in smaller cantons and on the level of municipalities, but would be impossible to conduct at the national level.

2.2.2 The government of Switzerland as an administrative body

The sovereignty of people makes Switzerland with its direct democracy special and Swiss are proud of this distinction (Gerlach and Gasser 2009). Unlike in other countries, the government serves as an administration body, carrying out the decisions made by people in referenda. They enjoy a little freedom on deciding how specifically the decisions will be implemented.

Drawing from the Swiss experience, where the government is already stripped of the decision power, one of the questions coming with the introduction of electronic democracy in European democracy should be: What role will the elected government play, if the countries have similar recourse to the referenda in decision-making process, as in Switzerland?

3. ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

Democracy in the ancient Athens, a city state and surrounding area of Attica, altogether „covered an area of about 640 square miles“ (Rothchild 2007: 5) and has become an historical model of working democracy. Athens is the oldest known fully democratic state in Europe and for that they have been invoked few more times in modern history as a true model of a system of direct democracy. *“It was the Greeks in the Athenian city-state (or polis) who first developed something resembling what we understand to be citizen politics.”*(Qvartrup 2007:16) With the advent of electronic democracy, which supports direct involvement of citizens in the policy and decision making process, the examination of political systems of direct democracy becomes important.

However, we have to be critical when worshipping Athenian democracy, because it had its critics back in 4th century BCE, as it still does now. Some scholars believe, that the history of Athenian democracy is more of a cautionary tale than a fairytale and that we should be looking deeper into the system which might look appealing and very democratic on the surface, but in fact it allowed radical excesses and caused a lot of harm to many innocent people. (Rothchild 2007;Trimidas 2015) This was true especially when democracy included the majority of poor (even though free) men which viewed their political rights as a possible way how to restrict the powers of the rich.

The philosophy behind Athenian democracy was the idea of public interest. All institutions of the state had to act in accordance with the public interest and the easiest way how to find out what the public desired, according to Greeks, was to gather everyone into an open space and let them decide. Even though, culturally speaking, the people of Athens still heavily relied on the will of Gods, they also started to believe in their own decisions and decision of their officials. The right to vote directly in the forum therefore meant much more than in modern representative democracies, political right was a source of authority (Fustel De Coulanges 1998).

When speaking about Athenian democracy and describing the institutions, we mean the classical period of Athenian history, from 490 BCE to 323 BCE when the city of Athens was defeated and seized by Macedonian army. Antipater, who was in control of the seized area in 323 suppressed a revolution of the Greeks who intended to restore democracy and turned Athens into an oligarchy instead (Rothchild 2007: 8).

In Athens, the sovereign power was in the hands of citizens, which met in the Assembly, on a regular basis and ruled themselves. Those citizens assemblies consisted of all free Athenian male citizens of pure Athenian origin. However, citizens only accounted for a fraction of the whole population of Athens. Only about 10 to 20 percent of the total Athenian population could be participate actively, excluding slaves, women and men without property (Rothchild 2007). Nonetheless, we cannot rush into the conclusion that this made Athens undemocratic because the exclusion of some groups of population from the political life was true even in the times of founding of the United States. More than half a million of black slaves was excluded from politics as well as women, naturally. Moreover, some states imposed a minimum property condition on the white males which added to wider exclusion. Similar exclusion was true even in Great Britain of the 19th century, which was considered exemplary democratic at that time.

3.1 Institutions of Athens – the Assembly

The main institutions of the Athenian democracy are going to be described now. It is clear that they would deserve further explanation but I only want to use them in comparison with modern democratic institution and institution of Swiss system. For that purpose we only need a cursory knowledge.

One of the main institutions with most of the responsibilities was the Council of 500, representing the tribes proportionally. The Council was basically a legislative body, their main purpose was to decide what was going to be discussed at the Assembly meeting. They also substituted today's ministry of foreign affairs.

Probably the most important and also interesting institution seems to be the Assembly (Qvortrup 2007). This institution is very interesting from modern point of view because we can hardly imagine how the meeting of about 6000 people could ever reach any decision, when there is such a dissension in politics today. The Assembly of Athenian citizens, which met about 40 times a year „was the ultimate repository of legislative authority“ (Rothchild 2007:17). Since 390 BCE onwards, citizens were paid for their attendance. Agenda of the meeting differed each time and it was council's task to let citizens know what was going to be discussed ahead.

The Assembly voted on two types of proposals – specific and open. They both could be made into a topic of discussion. Performance and speech in assembly was dependent on oratory skills, which were however taught and cultivated in the ancient

world (Held 1987: 27). All citizens were allowed to make proposals. Yet, proposals had to be submitted to consideration by the Council and only if the Council found them suitable, they were put on the agenda.

All officials (magistrates) had to go through several scrutinies. Those scrutinies took place before they entered the office, during the term and afterwards. After the magistrate finished his term in office, he was subject of euthyna, scrutiny which examined how he managed the public money or if he didn't abuse his power (Rothchild 2007)

3.2 The fall of Athens

The fall of Athenian democracy came with the defeat by Macedonians. However, George Tridimas (Tridimas 2015) believes the reasons for the fall were both internal and external. While the defeat caused severe external damage, internal tensions between the poor and rich classes were working as a subversive element for some time. The poor were supporting the wars as they meant a „*gainful employment in the fleet and allotment abroad if victorious*“ (Tridimas 2015:23) while the rich opposed it because of the war expenses. What became a clear and big problem of the Athenian system was the length of the decision process in the assemblies.

Furthermore, the system of assemblies was very vulnerable to the excitement of the moment and mass decisions influenced by emotions and impulsive behaviour, as in the case of the generals in the Peloponnesian war which were voted out of their positions as soon as they made any decision leading to a defeat in a battle. This, of course, consequently affected the power and the action readiness of the Athenian army. When in an acute situation and in need to reach important yet difficult decisions quickly, the system of assembly proved to be very inconvenient.

3.3 Comparison between Switzerland and Athens

The conditions of Athenian democracy are very interesting. Now follows the comparison with Switzerland.

One of the conditions is a small-scale society, where only a fraction of people can call themselves citizens and therefore participate in the political life. This fraction was freed of daily work in Athens due to the work of slaves which accounted for a huge part of society. We definitely cannot think about any form of an economy based on the work of slaves. However, the Swiss economy heavily depends on the work

of foreigners, which do not (in most of the cantons) have any political power as well (just at metoiks, the settled citizens in Athens). Still, Swiss economy is very high-performance and therefore does not allow Swiss citizens to focus on political life only. They most definitely do not have all day to spend in the Assembly. Assemblies take place in the cantons of Appenzell Innerhodden and Glaurus, this happens however only one time a year on fixed day and therefore allows citizens to clear out some space in their calendars. Nonetheless, the Swiss do spend a lot of time solving politics. Still, considering the fact that in other respects their society (economically, socially) does not differ much from other western countries, I cannot find any other reason for their ability and willingness to devote to politics (that means even the simple act of contemplating the options of vote and discussing them with others), than long tradition rooted in their culture. In this point, Athenian and Swiss democracy seems to be very similar – their citizens are aware of the fact, that democracy requires active political participation.

The exclusivity of the Athenian democracy was true for Switzerland on the federal level up until 1971 and on the cantonal level, for example in the canton of Appenzel Innerhoden even deeper into the 20st century (women were given the right to vote in 1991). Yet, this only concerns women suffrage. Other category which is of importance here are the foreigners. Some cantons (Neuchatel – already in 1849!!!, Jura, Vaud, Fribourg, Geneva (Linder 2002)) allowed foreigners to vote on the cantonal and communal level. These cantons still represent only a fragment and small step toward bigger political integration of foreigners into the political life of Switzerland. Inclusion of foreigners into the political life of Athens would have never been possible, because the citizenship and resultantly the political power as an actual possibility and obligation to participate in state affairs, was limited to the people with Athenian ancestors only.

The last condition which Held mentions is the size of the state. Classical model of democracy worked in small city-states (Held 1987:34). This explains why direct democracy tools can work perfectly on the cantonal level in Switzerland and contrawise, why only limited range of direct democracy tools (such as referenda) can work efficiently on the national level.

4. CONDITIONS OF DEMOCRACY

With that said we can now sum up that there are some conditions which country has to fulfil for it to be called democratic. But just as there is an ideal and reality when it comes to democracy itself, there is also a formal form and reality when it comes to particular democracies. All the so-called democratic countries can elect their officials in free, fair and frequent elections, they can exercise and guard the free expression of their citizens, provide for alternative sources of information and associational autonomy (Dahl 2000:85), but if the citizens are somehow ‚deaf‘ to some of those offers, then the democratic character of those countries is debatable. They have a democratic form, but their democratic potential is an empty box, even though „...*the real key to democracy is that the people WANT to and TRY to make the system work in their own interest: the all important concept of feedback.*“ (Crawford 1996:80) This condition can also be generalized into concept of democratic beliefs and political culture (Dahl 2000:145). As early as Fustel de Coulanges in 1864 when examining ancient democracies concluded that „*democracy can work only if every single citizen is completely dedicated to work on it.*“ (Fustel de Coulanges 1998:167) Obviously, this is an exaggeration as democracy can work even with only a fragment of people working on it, as obvious from the often very low turnout of voters in Swiss referenda. After all, democratic right is also the right not to participate. There has to be at least the opportunity to participate and a culture, which will encourage at least fragment of people to participate. This condition is very difficult to sustain in countries which were once under totalitarian or authoritarian rule for long time and were democratized in the wave of democratization in the second half of 21st century. Those countries fulfil the formal conditions of democratic countries but such factors as political culture often work as subversive elements.

What is also connected with the actual democratic nature of country is the cultural diversity of any particular country and how it is resolved. Once again, Switzerland was successful in dealing with its rather diverse culture, in terms of both the religion, language and the rural/urban split in the country. Switzerland maintained a special political system which allows fair representation for all various groups because it is based on strong unanimity. This system is of course tightly connected with the political culture of the country again and requires specific

conditions to work, such as commitment to democratic procedures or tolerance and both the will and the ability to make compromises (Dahl 2000: 153).

Additionally, people often mention that politics are too complicated to understand. It is true that this to responsibly keep a close eye on political scene is very difficult and might remind us once more of the time-consuming political life of ancient Athens. Furthermore, the real problem and threat to democratic system appears if citizens are not able to comprehend how their government works because then they even ... *“cannot readily hold their leaders accountable, particularly at elections.”* (Dahl 2000:136) This illegibility of both the political scene and system can cut two ways. Firstly it supports corruption and secondly it increases citizen's indifference towards anything connected with politics. Such an atmosphere heavily supports deterioration of democracy.

It is clear that both those problems can be fixed or minimalized with the entrance of the internet into the politic activities. I elaborate on this topic in the chapter about e-democracy.

4.1 The feedback condition

If we look back into the history of political feedback, which is important in order for the democratic government to be responsible, meaning hearing the responses from its people. Democratic government acts on behalf of its people, making decisions based on the public interest (as already mentioned in the Athenian part). Feedback is what enables government to identify the interest of people.

One of the original forms of political feedback from the governed people, was the institution of epikheirotonia as documented in ancient Athens. This was a vote to evaluate the performance of officers and it was carried out at every single assembly (Rothchild 2007:35). There are effectually no assemblies today (with the exceptions mentioned above) and the main form of feedback that the politicians in representative democracies get is their re-election in the next elections. Limitedly used form of serious feedback is impeachment. Impeachment is a tool used in a removal of a public official, mostly due to serious violation of law (US House of Representatives 2015). Impeachment is rarely used, although it is part of many constitutions.

Non-institutional form of feedback might be opinion polls about both the party's performance or individual politicians performance, or specific feedback from pressure groups of various interests.

On-line communication and social networks could change all this and bring about more effective communication between the politicians and its people. It is becoming more usual and hopefully it will become completely common for politicians to establish accounts on the social networks and engage in direct communication with their voters earlier than in the chaotic pre-election time.

5. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Citizens in every democracy, no matter if representative or direct, should participate actively and be curious about the political affairs. However, this condition is especially important in system with direct democracy devices, when citizens make important decision by themselves. Voting in referendum is by no means single yes or no, even though even the most complex issues have to be in the end simplified into a question of this form. Again, this can possess problems for many inexperienced bureaucracies without the traditions of the Swiss bureaucracy, which knows how to present the issue in an easily understandable and unbiased way. The act of voting however, should come after long process of discussion, debates and consideration. *„We also have to recognize that participation in direct democracy is very demanding. Voters in Swiss democracy are supposed to vote on issues that are sometimes very complicated. To read the official documentation on four or five proposals can take several hours. Every year there are about eight federal issues at stake”* (Linder 2002:94). The insufficient competence and knowledge of voters is a very old argument against the system of direct democracy, which dates back to the establishment of modern United States, even though for considerable time direct democracy was the system of the American communities. At some point such communities became too big to be governed directly and now direct democracy only exists at communal level in east coast towns. Direct democracy system is simply a system that requires a lot of time and effort from the citizens. This has worked in the ancient Athens where the Athenian freemen had the time to engage in political debates as the slaves did the job for their masters and it works in Switzerland, where involvement in politics has a long tradition, but it would be very erroneous to think

that the tools of direct democracy tools can simply be implemented into any society with a democratic system. Direct democracy in practice is a problematic issue because of the *“decisions and the decision-making processes”* (Anttiroiko 2003:121). Some of the issues that are voted upon can be very complex and might require professional guidance when considering all sides and direct voting by citizens might lack the parliamentary deliberation (Linder 2002: 111) – with Swiss being the exception again, due to political culture and specific bureaucracy. This has to be taken into account when thinking about the devices of electronic democracy as well, because due to its very simple usage, no extra time expense and easy accessibility, decisions made by one click without any consideration before, look very tempting, leaving the system open to extreme views.

As stated before, direct democracy system needs active citizens. But one of the biggest advantages of direct democracy, as its supporters propose it, is the fact that this active participation is also beneficial for the society. The specific conditions that successful direct democracy requires in the long-run transform attitudes within the society into more open-minded, greater respect towards others and also indirectly improves the relations between the people and the authorities (Linder 2002:111). Owing to this, a distinct shift in the role and behaviour of the authorities has to be made, depriving them of the representative democracy superiority of the ‘ruling elite’ (Dahl 1987), an attitude which tends to dominate among the leaders within any representative democracy. When people feel like they have a word in the course of their country, they will also try to protect this word and therefore become more politically active and conscious. *“Chief among the educative effects is the positive impact of direct democracy on political participation, a critical component of representation in a democracy”* (Tolbert 2006:32). Direct democracy changes the electorate, the political culture as well as the administration system.

Another advantage of direct democracy, especially the referendum and popular initiative, is bigger responsiveness of the parliament and especially wider openness of the political agenda. This is possible, because *“any question can be made into a political issue”* (Linder 2002:98) and people essentially decide what is going to be discussed and solved if they find enough support for their initiative, even though this allows even extreme issues into the political sphere.

Linder states, that in direct democracy *“there is a high political integration, but slow and continuous innovation”* (Linder 2002:136). What he means by this

relation, especially in comparison with competitive representative democracies, is the fact that wider co-operation between the parties in parliament, as well as interest groups and political parties as such, does not allow for innovation. This proves to be most harmful during a period when economical innovation is needed (Linder 2002: 137). In systems of representative democracy, it is easier for one or two parties to get together and push through some radical changes even though they have to be ready to take the responsibility if anything goes wrong. In Switzerland this is not possible, because Swiss politics are created by small steps approved by all sides, almost unanimously.

The idea of direct democracy might seem unfeasible to many people today, considering the size and complexity of modern societies. However, as shown in the following section, it is much more possible, given the advent of internet and new technologies. Moreover, if the idea of democracy genuinely is the concept of majority, to fulfil what they want most accurately in most things, then direct democracy with direct communication and decisions made by the people seems more suitable.

6. ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

The previous part of the thesis showed that many countries in the world can be called democratic, even though both the level and the type of participation of its citizens might differ significantly. Limitation of participation can be both institutional and cultural. Citizens's participation in the governmental sphere is naturally wider in direct democracy, as in the case of Switzerland. In representative democracies, the participation is usually limited to voting in elections or joining a pressure group.

This part of thesis intend to show that all spheres of politics, including the participating citizens, has been affected by the advent of modern technologies already and that this trend will continue. Also it demonstrates that the technologies do not only change the way limited citizen's participation is conducted, but also broaden their opportunities to participate and the government's ability to listen to their citizens.

Digital revolution has been changing our world for many decades now, most rapidly and obviously during the last 15 years. With the advent of mobile phones, computers and the information and communication technologies (abbreviated to

ICTs in the following text) the impact those technologies have on our lives has become irreversible. And because the *“concept of democracy is almost exclusively based on information and communication procedurer”* (Hilbert 2009:3) it is evident, that democracy cannot and should not be left out of this revolution.

The importance of ICTs in our lives and our society is growing and governments need to react to this trend. Like many other inventions of humankind, even ICTs can be used in both positive and negative way, and it is therefore crucial to recognize their importance and guide people in the right way with regards to them being used in the context of politics, *“in order to reduce harmful effects and influences.”* (Jafarkarimi 2014:645)

6.1 The concept of electronic democracy

Electronic democracy, also known as e-democracy or Internet democracy is a new form of democracy which should combine the traditional philosophy of democracy with the use of information and communication technologies invented in 20th and 21st century. This new way how democracy process can be conducted is not supposed to substitute either the direct, or the representative form of democracy, but make the process easier and perhaps quicker. Many scholars believe (as I also do in the conclusion of this paper), that the incorporation of ICTs into the democratic process at any level should alter the current models of representative democracy quite considerably and bring the direct and representative models closer, creating somehow a hybrid model of democracy including attributes of both. This is a similar model to the political system of Switzerland, therefore, in terms of Swiss democracy nothing will change, only the way how the concept is technically put into place. However, in the most countries with representative democracies, electronic democracy might change the whole political system. For example the British system is based on the supremacy of the parliament but this institution would be very suppressed under more direct system. The idea then is, that virtually, with the advent of electronic democracy, all countries in the world can be turned into Switzerland.

For purpose of this paper I would like to cite definition of e-democracy as presented in the paper *Characterizing E-Participation in Policy Making* by professor Ann Macintosh of University of Leeds:

“E-democracy is concerned with the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes

and strengthen representative democracy. The principal ICT mechanism is the internet accessed through an increasing variety of channels, including PCs, both in the home and in public locations, mobile phones, and interactive digital TV. The democratic decision making processes can be divided into two main categories: one addressing the electoral process, including e-voting, and the other addressing citizen e-participation in democratic decision-making process.” (Macintosh 2004:2)

This thesis does not study the obvious technical advantages of the remote e-voting, which is also presented at the only form of e-democracy. E-voting can work in any democratic country, does not matter if representative or direct, and it is a question of technical matter. This paper studies how the other areas of electronic democracy, as described below, can change the traditional forms of democracy and what cultural and political conditions it requires.

In terms of direct democracy and direct influence of people on politics, the use of ICTs is one of the easiest ways how the citizens can reach out to their governments on all levels and influence the decision making or law making process. The internet seems to be a perfect democratic medium due to the absence of central control. This makes censorship much harder than in the case of traditional media as TV or newspapers. Internet is and has always been a space for uncontrolled and unmediated free and mass debates, even though the ‘uncontrolled’ aspect has been questioned often recently, for example in the affair of Edward Snowden. It is a medium, which enormously complicates violation of right to free speech because it is very difficult to detect, control and punish all statements made on-line. Also, many servers are transnational, therefore even if one government does not like what is being said on-line, they cannot legally erase the information from web. Also, the internet penetration grows and it is really easy for most of people to go on-line and express their opinion today. Internet provides a sense of relevancy in participation through allowing everyone’s voice to be heard and expressed (Anttiroiko 2003). The internet is a completely new type of media. If we wanted to apply Thompson’s theory of media on the internet, it would probably fall closest to the mass media kind of quasi-communication and interaction. Thompson defines mass media as media which create a structured break between the producer and recipient of media and therefore the communication between the producer and the audience is lost, as well as the feedback (Thompson 2004). There is really a time and place break between the producer of the message and the audience on the internet. However, the internet

allows for very strong and immediate feedback and nurtures dialogue, which is lacking in the traditional mass media. This is one of the characteristics of the internet and other ICTs linked with it that supports the arguments of the proponents of e-democracy.

The interest in electronic democracy and its significance for modern society is growing. Numerous studies explore and predict its future and there are projects run all over the world to prove that electronic democracy techniques can become a common feature of political life in the future.

6.2 The areas of electronic democracy

Electronic democracy is very complex phenomenon, and it remains both evolving and easy to manipulate. We could say that issues concerning electronic democracy can be divided into two sections. First, there is the case of electronic voting, which is more of a technically-based problem, simply improving the ease of vote. Then there is e-democracy, which basically centre on the wider debate and communication between the government and the citizens and extension of the area where citizens will have direct influence. *“E-democracy has become a term that is used widely but also has widely different instantiations...In some countries and in some government circles e-democracy has become synonymous with e-voting, however, voting is certainly not the only mechanism whereby citizens can influence democratic decision making.”* (Macintosh 2004:1) This thesis examines the implementation of e-democracy and provides information and analysis of other ways how ICTs collide with democracy and politics.

In the chapter about democracy, we have identified some conditions that have to be full-filled for democracy to work well. The main requirements are politically active citizens (even if that meant only the act of voting). If we want citizens to be active and their activity to be democratic, we need to supply them with adequate information. Above all, there has to exist an area for a dialogue between the citizens and the government, an area for feedback. Such dialogues would be constructed on the information provided. Additionally, there should be a relationship between the government and the citizens which would allow citizens to be active in influencing the policy-making process (Macintosh 2004:2). All this constitutes democracy.

To begin with, it is necessary to concentrate on the areas, where the e-democracy might have the greatest impact. First of all, one of the principal aims of electronic democracy purpose is to reach out to wider population and broaden the access of people to more relevant information. Proponents of electronic democracy want the politics-related information to be more *“readable and understandable”* (Macintosh 2004:4), enabling citizens to stay informed on political situation more easily (e-enabling in Macintosh 2004:3) The Swiss bureaucracy already knows how to make all information needed for political decisions of people understandable yet unbiased.

On the level of feedback and government-citizen dialogues, the best tools for simplification of arguments are the social networks. There is room for specific discussion forums and chat rooms to be open, with evaluation of the content’s accuracy. Citizens should be allowed and supported to express their opinions on both on-going issues or possible agenda. Those forums and chat rooms might use special technologies which operate with the idea of argument maps and visualized argument (Edutechwiki 2012). They should help in *“summarising the substance of the responses, to identify the participants main concerns, their level of support for any draft proposals, or their suggestions for action they think necessary to address problems raised.”* (OECD 2003: 70) This level is called e-engaging by prof. Macintosh (Macintosh 2004:3)

The third level of e-democracy is the e-empowering, in other words strengthening the influence citizens have in the policy formation (Macintosh 2004:3), for example that the citizens would be allowed to suggest or even authorize their own policies.

One of the main purpose of e-democracy is more active and wider participation of citizens. To distinguish what the term e-participation really means is difficult, because authors use it in different ways. For some of them, e-participation means the on-line discussion about issues, for other e-participation only defines direct decision-making or policy-making. In this paper, when talking about e-participation, I also mean various activities and I later specify them instead of sticking to the rigid definition of one author.

6.3 New media and politics

To define new media is not easy and there is no universal definition. For purpose of this thesis and the connection of the term new media especially with the social networks, I use definition of the new media in opposition to mass media. The new media use the model of “many-to-many”, a wide network and break the wall between the producer of the message and its recipient. All users become interactive and the system is completely decentralized (Zemánková 2014).

The relation between politics and new media (especially the social networks) has been at the centre of attention especially since the revolutions in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region started, that is with the revolution in Tunisia in 2010. For the first time ever, social networks (namely *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*) proved to be a bridge not only between individual people, or people and the state but also a bridge for international support in tumultuous times. Involvement of social networks in those revolutions was so deep that they often referred to as the *Twitter* Revolutions (Jafarkarimi 2014).

But social networks are used even in more peaceful conditions and still can bring about some significant change, even it is not as dramatic as overthrowing a dictator. They are more frequently used by politicians and political organizations to transfer information and news, to make enquiries about the public opinion or as a channel explaining how to get a financial support. It is now quite common for political parties and individual politicians have their own *Facebook* account, *Twitter* account or *YouTube* channel. Websites have now become an indispensable part of PR programmes of political parties and the primary source of information for the public. New media and social networks are also very evident in the pre-election campaigns and in the campaign teams there are special sub-teams taking care of those areas. This trend, i.e. the use of social networks in the campaign, is especially evident in the USA, namely in the presidential campaigns. Most recently, the Hillary Warren-Clinton, running for the American presidency in 2016, has announced her intentions to only on social networks.

To take another example the British Parliament has always been very active in communication with public. This institution now has several accounts on various social networks and both chambers write their own blogs. It also manages a website,

which allows on-line discussion and sharing of opinions about latest events not only between politicians and citizens but also between individual citizens (Clarke 2010:3)

One of the arguments of proponents of a larger use of social networks in politics is their ability to mobilize people and instigate their political activism. Social networks provide not only very user-friendly platform for organizing a greater number of people, but also a platform on how to gain financial and other benefits. One example of this aspect of social media was the Arab uprising event or KONY 2012. When the whole world was discussing the enactment of SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) and ACTA (Ant-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement), the most crucial opposition groups, which adamantly pressured governments to dismiss the law, were all formed on-line (Losey 2014).

Social networks are a very new phenomenon which is still only just developing, so it is therefore difficult to truly evaluate their overall impact on politics generally. We can however outline the impact it has had so far, particularly in the case of the Arab Spring events.

6.3.1 The role of the New Media in Arab spring events

Cyberactivism, the term used to describe employment of ICTs and especially social networks in the recruiting and mobilizing of the opponents of the Mubarak's regime in Egypt had been spreading across the country since 2004. In 2008, during the time of an escalating crisis on both economic and social grounds, many cyberactivists found themselves in prison or custody and their activities were restricted. However, the trend was unstoppable from that time onwards. On the account of the very wide and active use of social networks in the revolutionary activities, both the Egyptian and Tunisian revolution are often referred to as *Facebook* or *Twitter* revolutions. The role of new media in those events was very vigorous especially when there was such far-reaching state control over the conventional media.

Social networks were used in many areas of the revolution process. As one activist expressed it: "*We used Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.*" (Howard 2011:677) *YouTube* proved to be a very effective channel on how to inform the rest of the world about the horrors going on in Egypt. Those pictures and videos did not need any commentary and yet they clearly showed what was happening first-hand. They couldn't be biased or manipulated as they went on-line straight off.

Social networks and new media were used primarily by young and urban groups of citizens, which are believed to have been at the centre of the overthrow of these dictatorships. The situation on-line often predicted the off-line events. For example lively discussions or blogs invoking political issues or criticizing particular political figures frequently led to their resignation (Howard 2011:3). Social networks helped to establish networks of the revolutionary movements and they enabled very effective and quick organization. Dictators tried to shut-down those networks, however the character of the protesting group occurred to be a problem for the regime, since protesters were mostly young and technically skilled individuals, often hackers. Additionally, it is virtually impossible to confiscate the mobile phones of thousands of people. Another obstruction happened to be the international support of revolutions, enabled by the widespread use of ICTs. There was no problem in relocating the servers when attacked by the state. (Howard 2011:15)

The Tunisian revolution started in late 2010 and ended in early 2011. However, subversive activities and anti-regime cyberactivism was going on for years and was also recognized by the state.

The Tunisian government forbade *YouTube* and the *DailyMotion* website in 2007 and one year later blocked *Facebook* for one whole month (Howard 2011:9). Protesters in Tunisia used *YouTube* and *Twitter* the most. The biggest impact that implementation of social networks had in the case of Tunisia was that it began debates about freedom throughout the whole Arab region. Hashtags from *Twitter* concerning the revolution in Tunisia were “retweeted” by people in Egypt and the revolutionary ideas slowly infiltrated to Egypt and other countries.

The use of ICTs before and during the revolutions has changed the political scene in the MENA region completely. Political parties and actors have learnt how to use those technologies and they still remain the political-hub in countries like Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood has even established its own local social networks called the *ikhwanbook* (Howard 2011:21).

The revolutions were successful and strongly supported mainly for due to the dire conditions of the society living under dictatorship and the incompetence of the state apparatus to tackle the growing revolts effectively. All the revolutionary states were going through a heavy political and economic crisis which was the main driving force for the protest. However, the role of new media and social networks should not be underestimated, as they helped to connect people and even bridge the nations.

Their importance might be supported by the effort put into their shutdown by the dictators. “*Social media alone did not cause political upheaval in North Africa. But information technologies – including mobile phones and the Internet – altered the capacity of citizens and civil society actors to affect domestic politics.*” (Howard 2011:23) In the perspective of electronic democracy, it is important to understand how powerful civil society might be, notably when equipped with powerful ICT and media tools.

However, if we want to specify the effect that the social networks had in the Arab spring events, their role was more destructive than creative. They assisted in the overthrow of the military rule, but the democratic culture was, and still is, missing. In terms of rebuilding a democratic society, both revolutions failed. Politics cannot be changed as imply as a *Facebook* status.

6.4 Advantages and disadvantages of e-democracy

One of predicted consequences in implementation of ICTSs into the political process was wider pluralism, meaning that more people can get involved at more levels of government. This should be achieved by restricting the monopoly of mainstream media channels and giving the opportunity to express opinions freely. Ross Ferguson and Barry Griffiths (Clarke 2010) point out that there are experts with both the knowledge and skills and even the tools how to influence the searching engines and other possibilities how to cause imbalance in what was once viewed as an equal access to information. It is also clear, that richer political parties or actors have greater means at their disposal for communicating their messages. It could be therefore said, that the already existing inequality in the access to normal means of communication is only reproduced in the case of new media or even deepened. This seems to be big problem especially in the case of the characteristics of democracy, as discussed above. However, “... *e-democracy has the potential to narrow the existing gap between the political class and their constituents*” (Hilbert 2009:20), because it shortens the distance between politicians and the electorate. However, criticism appears even on this level, combined with the criticism of the concept of the majority in democracy. The consent or dissent with politics expressed on-line will not represent not only the opinion of minority interested in politics, but also the minority interested in politics which is able to use ICTs most efficiently (Clarke 2010).

It was also proved that wider choice from media channels does not necessarily change the type of content that people consume. It supports larger consumption of the same content, coming from different types of media (Clarke 2010:4). In practice that means, that enhancing interest in politics through new media was not really proven to be efficient. It means that people who were interested in media content concerned with politics before the new media arrived, will now widen their range of channels. However, as with the case of access to information, the new media deepen the gap between the citizens interested in politics and citizens which feel indifferent towards politics. Furthermore, the same argument can be applied to political participation through new technologies. Some scholars believe, that on-line participation will only copy the patterns of off-line participation structures. New media and strategies of their use in the political process will be embraced and used by the traditionally politically active citizens while the typically absent will remain absent even in the digitalized politics (Clarke 2010:6).

Another argument for electronic democracy is that due to the easier communication and dialogue between the politicians and the citizens, the governments are going to be more responsive to the will of their people and the outcome of their decisions will therefore be closer to the ideas of the public (OECD 2003). However, as with the criticism of genuine democracy, the arguments against are following: only a fragment of the population is active in participating, therefore the “will of the people” only represents the will of the active minority. In case of electronic democracy it represents only the will of the active minority which is concurrently able to use ICTs efficiently. However, the obvious advantages of electronic voting (comfortability, saving time) might attract wider population at least to the act of voting.

One of the main benefits of using ICTs in politics is their popularity with the younger generations, namely the people between 20 and 30 years. Younger people tend to be less interested in politics – for example because they seem to ‘formal’ for them (OECD 2003) -but very interested in, skilled and equipped with modern technologies, especially social networks Incorporation of those technologies into the democratic process might make political activity more appealing for the young citizens. Still, the confirmation of possible effect of incorporating ICTs into the democratic process (for example e-voting) on the younger citizen’s participations is lacking and further research needs to be conducted in this area. (Clarke 2010:7)

Of course that there are also obvious risks in using ICTs in politics. One of them is a threat of false information which might harm one's name and media profile, often without real chance to identify the assailant. Secondly there is a possible risk of overwhelming citizens with information. Even though information could be more readable and accessible, if there is an incessant flow of information through all media channels, the effect could be quite opposite from the desired. Once again, Switzerland is very skilled in providing their citizens with enough and balanced information.

Still, the biggest issue concerning the relationship between the internet and politics is the issue of surveillance, accumulation and analysis of citizen's personal data by the state and consequently used in "*ways that breach privacy rights.*" (Clarke 2010:9) Even though states often argue with the fact that controlling social media and users movement on the Internet can help to solve crimes, track down criminals or even to find victims of kidnapping, the topic of state surveillance state is being invoked more frequently, especially since the affair of Edward Snowden. In discussion of a close relationship between ICTs data and state, George Orwell's ground breaking title 1984 remains a most accurate reference.

6.5 Improving democracy through getting involved on-line

Electronic democracy concerns especially areas of effective and enhanced participation of citizens or a wider direct competence of the citizens in all stages of the decision-making process. Not all works, papers and thoughts about electronic democracy focus on the institutional implementation of ICT. Theories concerning e-democracy tools also explore how ICTs can improve democracy without changing its existing institutions. They look into the potential of getting citizens more involved on the level of dialogues and enlightened thinking. They think of ICTs, especially social networks as a tools how to make citizens more active and the politicians more responsive (OECD 2003). This form of e-democracy proved to be competent and powerful during the events in the MENA region starting in 2010. ICTs make many forms of participation easier and therefore more attractive to people. For that reason, it is believed that incorporation of ICTs can help revitalize the deteriorating democratic culture and help stimulate the citizens (Jafarkarimi 2014). However, as proved by the example of Egypt – where the comeback of military rule was very quick, even though the dictator changed – what has to come first is the changed of

mind-set. Electronic tools, ICTs and the new media can be helpful, but changes in people's attitudes have to come first.

If we leave out the institutional use of e-democracy mechanisms (i.e. on-line voting), we can identify aims of electronic democracy as following: support wider participation of citizens by reaching out to them more efficiently and with way of communication they find suitable; make information more understandable and easily accessible and therefore make debates deeper with the purpose of wider contribution; help bridge the gap between political representatives and the citizens. *“Appropriate feedback on citizens' input to e-consultation can, hopefully, contribute to the overall transparency, accountability and openness of government.”* (OECD 2003:71)

The internet is the place we go to when in need of information today. ICTs have become an inseparable part of our daily lives, involved in every area of our activity indeed. The world economy would not work without a highly functioning ICT infrastructure. *“The spread of information networks is forming a new nervous system of our planet.”* (Hillary Rodham Clinton, Remarks on Internet Freedom 2010) The internet has altered the world, connected the secluded parts of our planet and completely changed the way we think about proximity and range. Even though we can make a really long list of advantages of the internet in terms of democracy, we have to add that without the introduction of proper rules and both the electorate and the politicians changing their mind-sets, it can easily be turned into the opposite case. One of the main characteristics of the internet which was celebrated at the beginning was its power to breach the information barriers and monopolies, which were often used to manipulate people. The internet with broad access to oceans of information has a chance to change this. The freedom of speech must be guaranteed because it is, as well as a free interaction between citizens with different attitudes and ideas, a cornerstone of democracy. Those interactions in then public sphere used to mean discussions in cafeterias, however with the advent of ICTs they turned into discussions on *Facebook* or *Twitter*. We have to be cautious however, because just as the internet, on-line forums and social networks can be used to promote plurality and understanding, they can also be used to support and spread violence, hatred and misunderstandings.

Electronic democracy tools and projects can be introduced at various levels of the political process, the local/communal, regional, national and supranational. When we talk about democracy we have to be aware of the fact, that the democratic process

has many levels and they all have to be considered as possible spheres of influence for the electronic democracy (Anttiroiko 2003:122)

6.6. Digital divide

The term “*digital divide is used to refer to the role that differences in access to and knowledge of Internet technologies play in determining one’s likelihood of participating in online politics.*” (Clarke 2010:6) The digital divide forms the base for other criticisms of electronic democracy tools, because equal access to ICTs is naturally essential for the practice of electronic democracy. It is evident, that the digital divide is never going to be closed entirely, because some people cannot always afford to have the latest technologies. While subsidising people and their homes with an internet access would not be so costly in the western world, when similar research was made the South American region, it turned out that providing all homes with Internet connection would eat up 25% of GDP of this region (Hilbert 2009:24).

However, if we want to practically implement those technologies into the political process, there has to be at least minimum access to them for every citizen. Every citizen has to be allowed not only to realistically cast their vote on-line (in terms of e-voting) but as long as everybody does not have the same access to on-line discussions and deliberations etc., these tools cannot be considered democratic either.

The technical aspect of the digital divide is only one side of the problem. The other side is the knowledge and skills needed to use the new technologies. However, there have been steps made in this direction, notably in the case of the elderly, as showed by the figures from the USA (Pew Research Center 2012).

The digital divide is one of the basic problems which e-democracy faces in the future. The time, when all the eligible citizens are equally equipped and well enough educated to be able to use the ICTs with the same effectiveness is yet to come. However, education and support of use of ICTs by all groups of citizens is the very first step towards a future with the tools of electronic democracy (OECD 2003).

6.7 The form of government with electronic democracy implementation

The use of ICTs in the political process favours direct democracy. As mentioned in the chapter about democracy and the political system of Switzerland,

the biggest issue concerning realization of the traditional direct democracy form of governance at the state level, was the administrative and technical side. Administrative and technical problems of direct involvement of citizens in the political process are lessened with ICTs. However, the problems with its philosophy remain.

ICTs provide space for debate and information about alternative possibilities, nonetheless the last word and decision is up to people and if they still remain rather negligent towards politics and they will not think the issues through, and arguments towards direct democracy will remain the same. It is therefore crucial to start with the enhancement of e-participation.

However, a more active participation of citizens at the level of debating the issues is not the only possible outcome that the incorporation of ICTs into democratic process might have. There are basically two future scenarios for the form of democracy affected by wider use of ICTs and not one of them preserve the traditional representative form of democracy as it is known and experienced today. There is a possibility of a much greater role of the citizens in the whole decision-making and policy-making process, with electronic voting on actual legislature made by on-line contributions from the masses, leaving the major decisions up to the people instead of the government – as in Switzerland. This model of democracy would necessarily need to be supported by an elaborated system of control and its realization requires a massive change in mindset of both the electorate and the politicians, as discussed above. However, electronic direct democracy strategies can be implemented even in countries with a weak direct democracy tradition, at the local and community levels, educating the citizens in self-governance and fostering an electronic direct democracy future at higher level. Their implementation should be gradual.

6.7.1 The hybrid model

Even though some go as far as contemplating the idea of on-line made legislature authored by citizens, most scholars and politics remain restrained and focus on *“more genuine approaches that aim at breaking with the dichotomy of traditional nations of direct and representative democracy.”* (Hilbert 2009:2)

They try to think and construct model of democracy, which would combine the best and most beneficial attributes of both direct and representative democracy

while using the information and communication technologies widely. The aim is to cut down the risks of traditional direct democracy while build stronger and more responsive relationship between the people and their representatives (Hilbert 2009:8).

In any representative democracy the decisions are responsibility for decisions are relies on a small group of legitimately elected individuals. The biggest problems seems to be elitism and no certainty that the representative will really represent the interest of their voters. Another problem of the representative systém is the lack of citizens' influence over the agenda of government and the fact, that even if they do not completely agree with the final decision of their representatives, there is very little they can do. The logic of the system deprives citizens of effective criticism of their representatives during their term of office and also of the possibility of changing their decisions which might differ from what they were originally promised. (Hilbert 2009:6)

On the other hand, direct democracy has been criticized as an irrational governance by irrational masses ever since its beginnings in Athens. It has always been said that the masses can never have sufficient and adequate knowledge about all the complex problems of government. With the prospect of electronic democracy, this problem remains and it perhaps intensified: it is certainly the biggest challenge faced by the advocates of electronic democracy. They have to come with *“applications for democratic ends in designing institutional procedures that constantly and dynamically convert the myriad of individual online will expressions into a coherent common will.”*(Hilbert 2009:8)

6.7.2 Electronic direct democracy

The concept of direct democracy and problems which its realization might have in today's modern society were described above. Nonetheless, many of those problems can be solved (the administrative) or minimalized (the cultural) by the implementation of electronic democracy.

Electronic direct democracy does not mean anything more than a system of direct democracy conducted by electronic communication technologies. It is an extension of the idea of electronic democracy to its maximum, letting the citizens affect not only the decision making process, but letting them also initiate new

legislation. Therefore, the electronic direct democracy system would make the current representatives more of an administrative body, as it exists in Switzerland.

The push for more direct involvement of citizens while employing the electronic tools comes for example from the People's Administrative Direct democracy party from The United Kingdom. This party believes that the current representative form of democracy as experienced in UK does not follow the ideas of democracy as born in ancient Greece and this needs to be changed (Direct Democracy 2015).

Electronic direct democracy is indeed an interesting concept, which has a future. However, above we laid some conditions and explained, that direct democracy (to be effective and democratic) requires specific conditions. Those conditions does not really depend and cannot be substituted with the newest technology, as they concern and depend on the people. Before those conditions are fulfilled, electronic direct democracy can do more harm than good. However, the relationship is two sided. If the implementation of electronic direct democracy is slow and gradual, then the needed culture can be created and learnt over generations, in decades allowing for completely direct electronic democracy. Unfortunately, slow and gradual does not seem to be the characteristic of technologies as it has never been. Therefore, it is more probable they will bring far-reaching changes and their negative aspects are going to be reduced subsequently.

7. EXAMPLES OF E-VOTING PROJECTS

In the chapter about democracy I have mentioned the time requirements many times. It is obvious that political activity is going to always require time. Yet, with the advent of ICTs, those time expenses could be recudec. In this chapter, I would like to show how the incorporation of ICTs can save time in the case of voting. Voting, the act of expressing one's idea and attitudes on various political issues, is the most known component of democracy. Moreover, in modern representative democracies it seems to be the only political obligation the citizens still full-fill, even though the voters' turnout is decreasing gradually in most modern democracies, especially among younger voters.

I use two examples from Europe and one example from Asia: Swizerland and Estonia, and Mongolia. The reason for comparing Estonia and Swizerland is the fact, that even though all countries in Europe might share the similar ideas about the

origin, values and future of democracy, historic events have not allowed them all to follow the same course of political development. Although Europe is a very small continent, the history of European countries differs a lot. Not all countries had – especially because of the 20th century wars and political charades – the same opportunity to pursue the democratic ideals (Dahl 1987). In this respect it is interesting to compare projects from a country with longer democratic traditions and one with a democracy disturbed by totalitarian rule. However, electronic democracy seems to be working in both – western Switzerland and Estonia of the former Soviet bloc. Moreover, the third example is Mongolia, for long time part of what were known as Third World countries.

7.1 Estonia

It might be no surprise that such a forward country as Switzerland, with a long tradition of democracy and innovation in both the political process and society, instituted and uses electronic voting and other internet-based means to enhance their electronic side of democracy. But implementation of e-voting is little bit surprising in post-Soviet bloc country, Estonia.

The discussion about the possibility of the usage of internet or electronic devices in the voting process started in 2001 and one year later legal steps were already taken. The official e-voting project started in 2003. The first test of the complex e-voting system took place when people were asked to vote in a referendum in the capital Tallinn in 2004.

Even though lacking a longer tradition of democracy, Estonia has tried to digitalize its administration for years. In 2001 they opened an electronic portal which connects all on-line services of the state administration. Electronic ID cards, which are used in the e-voting process now, were introduced one year later (Brunclík and Novák 2014).

The Estonian e-voting system is specific from two reasons. Firstly, it offers three ways how to cast your vote on-line, one of them being voting through a cell-phone (ACE 2015). The other characteristic of the Estonian e-voting system is that the voter can change his/her decision multiple times. The e-voting happens days before the ballot election takes place. Voters are allowed to change their vote by another electronic vote or by going to a polling station and voting in the traditional way. Normal ballot voting is superior to the electronic vote. All changes have to be

made in the period before the official election term, four to ten days before (Brunclík and Novák 2014)

E-voting in 2001 was proved successful and has later been used on various occasions again. In 2005 internet voting on a municipal level and then again in 2009 and 2013 at the same level. It has been recognized as an additional legal way of voting and was used in the national parliamentary elections (2007 2011 and 2015) and even in the European Parliamentary Elections (2009 and 2014).

The percent of e-voters among participating voters has risen steadily, with a single drop in the local elections of 2013. In the last two elections (European Parliamentary Elections 2014 and Parliamentary elections 2015) the e-voters accounted for over 30% of the people who voted (Vabariigi Vallimiskomisjon 2015).

7.2 Switzerland

Voting of various types (including the referendum and popular initiative) is the central feature of the Swiss Confederation political system. Voters in Switzerland are asked to vote many times a year (Linder 2002) allowing the voting to become part of their everyday life. Due to those reasons, the government of Switzerland has decided a long time ago to make the process of voting easier. In 1992, the Swiss parliament approved legislation, that enabled and supported the implementation of new methods, following the new trends in technology (Chevallier 2006:55).

In 2000 the project ‚vote électronique‘ started. Three cantons were involved in this pilot project of remote Internet voting-systems (Zurich, Geneva and Neuchatel). Systems of those cantons differ slightly. Neuchatel uses on-line portal which combines the e-voting system as well as other systems of the cantonal administration. Zurich system does not work in centralized cantons while the Geneva’s system is very suitable for them. Other cantons are allowed to use those two systems without the need to develop their own.

However, apart from the canton of Geneva and Neuchatel, the e-voting system should mainly serve the Swiss citizens living abroad. Swiss government and administration is careful in extending this opportunity to all voters, as they want to make sure the system works perfectly and does not jeopardize the democratic standards of the country. However, „*the long-term aim is to make it possible for all voters to vote on-line.*” (Swiss Authorities online 2015)

The Swiss internet voting system is very similar to the postal voting system, which remains very popular among voters, for example in the canton of Geneva about 70% of voters usually chose to vote by mail (Brunclík and Novák 2014:74). The voter gets a special voting card with codes. If he chooses to vote by mail, he sends the card back with a completed list of candidates. If he wants to vote on-line, the codes serve as an enter key into the on-line voting system (Chevallier 2006).

The implementation of electronic democracy tools such as the internet voting is logical in Switzerland. Not many questions about ‚if‘ had to be answered in the case of Switzerland, where frequent voting is reality and vital part of the political system. More questions raised with ‚how‘, because voting is part of people’s life and changing the method of voting affect them. The main condition that has to be kept is the genuine trust that people have in the voting system.

7.3 The structure of the E-voters in Switzerland and Estonia

One of the main promises of the implementation of the e-voting (or i-voting) was the increase in of the voters’ turnout. To determine the real effect that those electronic systems have had on the voters participation is difficult, because there are numerous other factors that can affect any individual vote. We can therefore only count the percentage of the e-voters among all the voters and try to describe the socio-demographic structure of the e-voters. As the on-line voting is a complementary method in all countries with e-voting projects, those who chose to vote on-line form a special society. To vote on-line is *“a personal choice and an indication of a way of life in which information technologies are, or are not, a central theme.”* (Chevallier 2006:61)

Not surprisingly, more young people have chosen to vote on-line than does the elderly. By young we mean people under age of 35 (Brunclík and Novák 2014). This was expected and hoped for from the beginning of the e-voting projects, as its proponents believed in attractiveness of the new technologies for the young people. It is a very promising sign, because people learn how to vote on-line from a young age and it can be expected their children will incline towards those methods as well. Therefore, the numbers of the e-voters will grow steadily in the following decades.

The other most noticeable indicator was the voter’s income. The studies showed that people with higher income are more likely to vote on-line. This indicator might be connected with another characteristic of the e-voters and that is their trust to

modern technologies. This characteristic is connected with crucial aspect of the whole e-democracy prospect as a new method of something very personal to people as exercising political rights. All systems of e-democracy (including the on-line voting) have to be easy understandable for people. There has to be a system of protection against fraud and manipulation. The indicator of IT competence and friendliness in the end stands as the most crucial factor when deciding whether or not to vote on-line (Chevalier 2006). With that argument we get back to the discussion about the digital divide, equal access but also knowledge of the technologies used in the e-democracy system and understand, that the further implementation of e-democracy tools is a long process which requires various changes in the way societies operate.

7.4 SMS referendum in Mongolia

One of the key tools of direct democracy is the referendum. Even though more than a half of all national-level referendums, which were held between the years 1990-1993 took place in Switzerland (Reich 2008:3) and this trend is continuous, there are many other countries that use occasionally this direct democracy tools when deciding about questions of various importance, even though not so often.

One surprising example is Mongolia. This referendum can be considered as one example of electronic direct democracy, as the voting was conducted through text messages. Voters had four days to decide whether they wanted to support austerity measures or investment into the expansion of the Oyu Tolgoi copper mine. This referendum, fully relying on modern technologies, was introduced by the new prime minister Chimed Saikhanbileg. It was first national-wide referendum of its kind in Mongolia (Reuters 2015). The participation however was low, as response came from only about 10% of reachable cellphones. 56.1% of voters supposed the increased investment in projects of Oyu Tolgoi mine scale, as they believed those investments might stimulate the collapsing economy of Mongolia (Frontier Capitals 2015). Even though participation in this January 2015 referendum in Mongolia was not significantly high, the introduction of a text message poll in country as Mongolia is groundbreaking. The text-message option of voting has obvious advantages as it does not limit the vote to time and place and it costs less than organizing a standard poll event. It does have some flaws as well. In Mongolia authorities were not able to

secure the „one person, one vote“ conditions, as one person was able to vote with each of his devices.

Despite the imperfections in the procedure, the fact that electronic direct democracy instrument was put into place in country as Mongolia cannot be left out, because it could serve as a helpful precedent for other countries which want to implement electronic direct democracy tools into their political systems. It is also important to note that Mongolia is the country where usage of electronic direct democracy tools, such as cell phone voting, makes perfect sense. Mongolia is a vast country with sparse population density. Many people live in the middle of a steppe and the closest polling station is always very far away with no easy way of transportation. The introduction of tools that do not require a physical presence at voting booth might raise electoral participation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis had three main purposes: to show that special conditions are needed for democracy (and especially the direct form of it) in order to work well; to extend those conditions to the implementation of electronic democracy, while showing the possible effects, that digitalization of democracy might have; to present already existing projects of electronic democracy.

Drawing from the definition of democracy as a “rule by the people”, this thesis explained that the direct democracy seems to be more appropriate in really letting the people decide and rule. However, it also clarified problems that direct democracy might face, as it required a specific cultural and political environment. Those conditions were derived from the description of two examples of direct democracy in Europe, the ancient Athens and modern Switzerland. Switzerland has been often invoked in this thesis as a shining example of a country fulfilling all those conditions and therefore a perfect (and already active) laboratory for e-democracy projects.

The digitalization of our lives is unstoppable and it already reaches out into the political area as well. The employment of electronic, digital and communication tools in the democratic process might be very beneficial. This is obvious from the example of the use of social networks in the Arab spring uprisings. Nonetheless, this thesis identified also the risks of electronic democracy. Once those risks are identified, strategies how to minimize them should be employed on all levels of the democratic process.

Electronic tools might solve the administrative problems of direct democracy. However, the empowerment of people in being more active and also in influencing as well as the institutional shifts towards direct democracy has to be preceded by a shift in the mind-sets on both side of the political divide – citizens and politicians. Therefore this thesis concluded that the technological change should be completed along with gradual changes in society. While the technological change is unstoppable and will be very rapid, the changes in the political systems in the direction of an electronic direct democracy have to be slow and gradual.

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