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Electronic Voting in Europe
Technology, Law, Politics and Society

Workshop of the ESF TED Programme
together with GI and OCG

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Preface

The emergence of the Internet and other electronic-commerce technologies has fundamentally altered the environment in which governments deliver services to citizens, businesses, and other government entities. Many countries have launched electronic government programs to develop a new way of interaction with the government for companies and citizens. Too often those efforts only concentrate on the administrative side neglecting the democratic processes. Still there are ambitious governments and institutions that have taken a step ahead to develop electronic democracy initiatives. Electronic voting, being the most important form of decision making by citizens, is the main driver for such projects and at the same time the biggest obstacle due to the complexity of the topic.

It is therefore important to discuss the concepts and experiences made with electronic voting. One key research program for this is the “Towards Electronic Democracy” project sponsored by the European Science Foundation. The aim of the program is to draw on the modern methods of decision analysis and group decision support, deployed over the WWW, in order to involve the public in decisions.

During the 2003 TED summer school in Varenna the idea came up to organize a specialised workshop to discuss the developments in electronic voting in Europe not only from the perspective of one isolated discipline but in an interdisciplinary approach covering technology, law, politics and society. Together with the conference location in Bregenz at the beautiful Lake of Constance, surrounded by Switzerland, Germany and Austria, it convinced the steering committee to go ahead with the project.

We wish to thank Wolfgang Polasek, Simon French, Fabrizio Ruggeri and the remaining members of the TED steering committee for making this interesting workshop with 20 presentations from 11 European countries possible. It is the largest accumulation of information on electronic voting to date.

Further thanks go to the German Society of Informatics and the Lecture Notes in Informatics editorial board under Prof. Mayr and Jürgen Kuck from Köllen Publishers who made it possible to print the workshop proceedings in such a perfect manner. We are also indebted to the Austrian Computer Society with its forum Electronic Government that has now hosted the working group E-Democracy/E-Voting for the third year. The working group has been a forum for interesting discussions that would not have been possible otherwise.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Jürgen Weiss, MP as we could always approach him for advice and support with his long year experience in organizing elections.

Finally, we also want to thank our colleagues from the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Production Management, who have supported us since our initial idea to research on the topic of e-Voting.

Vienna, July 2004

Alexander Prosser, Robert Krimmer
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Preface
by Univ. Prof. Dr. Andreas Khol MP (President of the Austrian National Council)
and Jürgen Weiß MP (President of the Austrian Federal Council)

These times are a period of rapid political and technological change. Old and new
political systems – local, regional, national, supranational or global – are in transition.
Their underlying conceptions, preconditions and philosophical foundations are
questioned and contested. One response of thinkers, politicians and citizens has been to
endorse modern communication technologies and regard them as means to renew the
practice of politics and the space of the political. Other responses have led to more
critical and reflective discourses on democracy and constitutionalism under the
conditions of late modernity and its particular relation to technology. They are concerned
with the oppositions and antagonisms asserting themselves against democracy be it in
the name of national interest, economic or technological necessity. At the same time,
they call our attention to the threat of a decline of democratic deliberation and decision-
making within the traditional institutions of representative nation states. The response
they offer is a reassessment of our concepts of democratic freedom, democratic practice
and citizenship.

Seen from this perspective the new communication technologies have a high democratic
potential. They offer powerful tools for exchanging information, engaging in discussion,
campaigning and creating awareness about political issues. However, experience shows
that reliance on technology cannot be the solution for the current problems our political
systems face. Particularly lower voter turnout is not – with the exception of a few cases –
a result of being difficult to vote by traditional means. It is more likely to be a symptom
of dissatisfaction with or even ignorance of politics. Often it is dissatisfaction with the
party one voted for previously and the first step to shift one’s party affiliation at the next
occasion.

Hence, the Austrian Parliament endorses the second response outlined above and uses
new communication technologies to participate in the practices of citizenisation and to
encourage citizens to take part in the discussion of our common affairs. Conscious of the
questions of social and epistemic justice and the difficult and often criticised relation
between communication and power, the Austrian Parliament and the Austrian
Government aim to widen transparency, openness and inclusiveness of the political
process with the help of new technologies. An outstanding example is the “Austrian
Convention”, a forum of politicians and experts that discusses constitutional reform. A
functional and well-designed website provides immediate access to all proceedings.
Citizens can get in touch with the conventioneers and the secretariat of the Convention
and submit their thoughts and ideas on the Convention and the new constitution.
Currently we are working on a new and easily accessible database which will provide
not only a lot of background information on the context of the Convention but which
will also be a step towards more interaction between the Parliament and civil society.
Yet, there are serious concerns and doubts about e-voting. Can e-voting help to resolve the problems we currently and face? To what changes of the system of representative democracy might it lead in the long run? Therefore we welcome your initiative and your workshop on electronic voting in Europe, which aims to address a lot of crucial issues in an interdisciplinary context. We hope and wish that your discussions will provide insights and impulses for the discourse on law, politics, society and technology.

Vienna, June 2004

Univ. Prof. Dr. Andreas Khol MP
President of the Austrian National Council

Jürgen Weiss MP
President of the Austrian Federal Council
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