



Abstract

Between October 11 and October 13, 2003, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy organized and sponsored an international symposium, workshops, roundtables, and a media program on Initiatives, Referendums, and Direct Democracy. The direct democracy experts invited by the Foundation to participate in these events are key members and founders of the Initiative and Referendum Institutes (IRI) of Europe and the United States. They have all served for more than a decade as direct democracy consultants with the European Parliament, individual EU governments, state governments of the United States, as well as civic groups and research institutions all over the world.

This symposium and its related activities had two fundamental objectives. The first was to provide the people of Taiwan access to accurate and comprehensive international expertise on direct democracy and its main tools, referendums, and initiatives. The second was to ensure that as Taiwan enters into a new and historic phase of its democratization by espousing direct democracy, all related actors, including politicians, legislators, members of the cabinet, intellectuals, concerned civil society members, NGO's, and the media, could be optimally informed about the initiative and referendum process. The series of roundtables, workshops, meetings, media programs, and the international symposium thus provided space for ample interaction between experts from Europe and the United States, and all sectors of Taiwanese society.

The symposium itself was a two-stage event. The first stage consisted of three presentations by German, American, and Swedish speakers focusing on a review of the political underpinnings and rationale for initiatives and referendums and their role in modern democracy, and a brief overall history of direct democracy in the United States and Europe. The second stage had two Swiss speakers and a Taiwanese government spokesperson. These experts focused on examples of the use of referendums on constitutional and local issues, and some experiences of referendums on nuclear power and other environmental issues in Europe. They also discussed the design of referendums, including legislation, public education and participation, the role of the media, and other factors guaranteeing the successful implementation of referendums. The Taiwanese government spokesperson presented the situation in Taiwan.

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy is pleased to present these proceedings of the symposium. We hope that these papers can serve as educational and reference material that will help people shape the future of direct democracy in Taiwan.