

Kamil StępniaK

University of Białystok (Poland)

## Is Dysfunctionality of Swiss Direct Democracy Possible?

**Book Review:** Mirosław Matyja, *Dysfunkcjonalność szwajcarskiej demokracji bezpośredniej*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2016, (pp. 212). ISBN 978–83–8019–494–6. Price: 31,14 PLN.

In the case of political and constitutional changes in national systems we must pay attention to look for the most effective democratic system in Europe. This request is an opportunity and duty of a scientist and a lawyer. Seeking a good and integral democratic mechanism is an important task for every person, who values democracy.

For many years the Swiss direct democracy has embodied the best features of constitutionalism and republicanism. The people has have various possibilities to influence policy-making. Among the legal institutions, we can distinguish: referenda, popular referenda, the popular assembly or the popular initiative. In Switzerland, at every level, the citizens (confederation, cantons, municipalities) have a right to intervene in the decision-making process. We must admit that so far, especially in the Polish literature authors mostly positively evaluated a broad civic participation in this state. However, Mirosław Matyja argues that Swiss democracy is also characterized by its deep dysfunction.

The Swiss democratic regime inspires researchers because of its use of direct democracy institutions. Therefore, it is ambitious, that the Author is willing to verify how dysfunction it is. Matyja starts from general concepts and a presentation of models and political solutions in modern democratic systems. The second chapter

presents the genesis and conditions and institutions of Switzerland's political system, and it discusses the impact of socio-political divisions in the country on government's policies. The Author also presents the foundations of the party system and the 'magic formula'.

The third chapter is a description of the mechanisms of direct democracy and the consequences of their application in a democratic state. The Author accurately describes all the possibilities for the participation of citizens in Switzerland. In this chapter Matyja quite thoroughly discusses statistical data concerning ordered referendums and public participation. There were also issues of attendance, which, as it turns out, is not high, which is a legitimate question about the representativeness of the conducted referendums.

The fourth chapter is the key to this book. In it, the author presents concrete examples of the dysfunctionality of the Swiss system in practice. They discussed among other things, the example of the Swiss referendum on the integration of the Muslim minority, or problems with the introduction of suffrage for women. Analysis of these cases shows that despite the friendly system for citizens, direct democracy in Switzerland is sometimes imperfect. This can be seen primarily in the complexity of the legislative process, and the ability to block any decision of parliament through a referendum initiated by the citizens. Such a solution, as the author points out, is sometimes a big hurdle for political activity, whether or not reformist. On the other hand, direct democracy in Switzerland, guarantees a high level of participation of its citizens in decision-making, as well as how to reconcile the interests of different social groups, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

In the reviewed book Mirosław Matyja has proved his hypothesis. The monograph is written in a concise and interesting way, with an important counterpoint on the current deliberations of the Swiss system, which presented it in the light of idealism. It deserves praise a good knowledge of Switzerland's political system. Another advantage is the extensive bibliography, often in German, which makes use of sources directly from the Swiss. On the other hand, you can have doubts about whether some examples cited by the author are sufficient to conclude that the constitutional system is dysfunctional. The book is an interesting scientific work, which should be recommended to all interested in Switzerland and Swiss constitutional law and the parliamentary system of this country.

**References:**

Matyja, M. (2016). *Dysfunkcjonalność szwajcarskiej demokracji bezpośredniej*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

**Author**

Mr Kamil Stępnik

University of Białystok, Department of Constitutional Law. Contact details: ul. Mickiewicza 1, 15–213 Białystok, Poland; e-mail: [kamilstepniak@o2.pl](mailto:kamilstepniak@o2.pl).