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DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN POLAND. BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND CIVIC LOCALISM

Agnieszka TURSKA-KAWA and Waldemar WOJTASIK¹

One of the inherent elements of democracy is citizens' participation in public life. The most frequent ways of realization of political participation are universal elections and direct democracy institutions. The aim of this article is to compare the level of application of direct democracy mechanisms at the local and national level in Poland. The research was inspired by diverse institutional positions of direct democracy instruments in the Polish political system. The national ones are based on the Constitution of 1997, which gives them the status of high significance. But on the other hand, especially regarding formal conditions, it functionally limits their possible application. Local direct democracy institutions are normatively based on lower order acts (laws), which are much easier to amend. Hence, they are more adaptable to changing political and social conditions. The authors' research confirmed the thesis that the use of direct democracy mechanisms is more intensive at the local level. As a continuation of their research, the authors reflect on the determinants of this situation, making six hypotheses.

Key words: direct democracy; referendum; legislative initiative; participatory budgeting; recall procedure.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the inherent elements of democracy, being both its prerequisite and necessary condition, is citizens' participation in public life. If there is no universal political participation, the form of civil society is impaired, which eventually leads to weakening social loyalty to the whole political system (Lipset 1995, 231). The most frequent ways of realization of political

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participation are universal elections and direct democracy institutions. Due to the uncertain effect condition, both forms are regarded as the *sine qua non* of treating the political system in democratic categories (Przeworski 1991, 13). Even in the time of Athenian democracy, making decisions with the use of clay tablets or pebbles (called *psēphos*) led to citizens' participation in the decision-making process, granting it social legitimization, although it did not involve all the citizens but only authorized ones (Wohl 2015, 53).

The aim of this article is to compare the level of application of direct democracy mechanisms at the local and national level in Poland. The research was inspired by diverse institutional positions of direct democracy instruments in the Polish political system. The national ones are based on the Constitution of 1997, which gives them the status of high significance. But on the other hand, especially regarding formal conditions, it functionally limits their possible application. Local direct democracy institutions are normatively based on lower order acts (laws), which are much easier to amend. Hence, they are more adaptable to changing political and social conditions. Our thesis is that the use of direct democracy mechanisms is more intensive at the local level. From the psychological point of view, if citizens use the mechanisms of direct democracy available at the local level, they have the sense of influence on their closest environment. It is important from the perspective of the developing social responsibility for the common good. It is an integral element of civil society: individuals who collaborate, plan, and participate in making decisions that are important for them. Probably the effect of participation in decision-making at the local level is more tangible for citizens than in the case of national level decisions. Firstly, it concerns their vicinity, so they are able to better monitor the consequences of decisions they make. Secondly, the authorities initiating such processes are often well known to the residents, which may also generate a greater desire to engage in the processes. What is important, unlike in the national process, participation in making decisions at the local level is motivated by citizens' greater knowledge on the subject of voting, their greater experience, as well as interest in the results of the final decisions.

The reflection begins with a theoretical discussion of direct democracy mechanisms occurring in Poland. Then, we discuss the functioning of direct democracy mechanisms at both levels. In the conclusion, we make six hypotheses regarding the determinants of the situation we have diagnosed empirically.

2 MECHANISMS OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The contemporary direct democracy is not limited to universal participation in the making of socially relevant decisions. In the simplest approach, two forms of direct democracy can be identified: procedural and sovereign (Ulicka and Wojtaszczyk 2003, 174). The former case mainly involves the citizens' right to influence the authorities. Expressing their expectations and communicating with politicians, citizens can determine the character and form of the adopted solutions. The sovereign form of direct democracy involves the existence of instruments used to establish law or to directly affect the form of political institutions (Lijphart 1977, 176). The collective will expressed by the members of the community obliges the authorities to act with consideration of social preferences.

The scope of using direct democracy institutions as a form of making executive decisions alternative to decisions made by politicians is connected with references to the political system. Its specificity involves both normative and functional limitations. The most important ones are: (1) the availability of direct democracy instruments, (2) political tradition; (3) the form of political regime; (4) previous effects of their application; (5) the significance of the issues to decide about (Fiorino and Ricciuti 2007). Two least obvious references are worth pointing out in this inventory. The form of political regime shows that the issues of relationship between different types of authority (especially between the legislative and the executive) are important for the possible application of direct democracy instruments. In the case of a regime determined by strong competence of executive authority (e.g., the president or prime minister elected in a direct election, supported by a considerable parliamentary majority), direct decision-making may be preferred. The range of issues than can be settled using direct democracy procedures may result from the occurrence of relevant subject exemptions (Lupia and Matsusaka 2004, 463–482).

The inventory of direct democracy institutions is not finite. The development of democratic procedures and the community's self-government at various levels means that new, often innovative mechanisms of direct decision-making sometimes emerge (Matsusaka 2004, 157–177). The original classic ones, such as people's legislative initiative, a referendum, people's assembly, people's veto, a plebiscite or consultations, have recently been supplemented with the recall procedure and participatory budgeting (Toplak 2013, 31–33). In people's legislative initiative, which dates back to the ancient times, it is assumed that a group of citizens can move to change the law. A referendum is the form of making decisions by way of voting, in which the citizens vote for or against a certain solution. People's assembly is a form of making decisions at a specific location and time by all the authorized individuals. People's veto is a form of objection to an already adopted law or decision made by political authorities. A plebiscite is an institution similar to a referendum, but due to the subject (usually issues concerning a territory's belonging to a certain state or voting for or against the ruling authorities), it is weightier. Public consultations are a form of expressing public opinion, although authorities of another level make actual decisions concerning the subject. The *recall* procedure is an instrument of recalling individuals from public offices by way of vote (Musiał-Karg 2012, 32–45). Participatory budgeting is a mechanism of distributing financial resources on the basis of citizens' vote, as they express their preferences regarding the available goals (Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke 2008, 164–178).

However, the application of direct democracy institutions is subject to certain rigors. According to Jack Haman, issues related to having power and putting an appropriate effort in political activity are a permanent limitation of the possible application of direct democracy procedures (Haman 2003, 60). In the case of representative democracy, two stages of decision-making occur. The general part of the problem to decide about, which is presented to all the voters, must have a simple structure so that an average citizen would be able to understand and analyse it. This assumption means that voters can choose e.g., to support a party or candidate in the election on the basis of the knowledge they have. Yet, the level of complexity of decisions to make is often much higher, so an average citizen may not be able to predict their consequences and may not understand the reasons for making them (Bingham Powell 1982, 2–4). In order for decisions made in this situation to be rational and effective, they need to be entrusted to representatives, who should have relevant resources to analyse the consequences of each potential solution. These resources are e.g., time needed for familiarizing oneself with the problem, effort put in its analysis, abilities

resulting from one's competence, and advisory base of political activists (Haman 2003, 60).

Another limitation that can affect the efficiency of direct democracy institutions is legitimization issues. Decisions made by way of referendum may not legitimize political decisions, in accordance with the principle of respecting arithmetic majority. In addition, they may contribute to deepening the divisions in the society and conflicts arising from them. Therefore, referenda in contemporary democracies are relatively rarely used as a decision-making mechanism, with two important exceptions. The first exception is Switzerland and its political system preferring the reference to citizens' will in decision-making (Hessami 2016, 270). The other exception is local referenda, which due to their subjects are often a convenient form of removing responsibility from the authorities and transferring it to all the citizens (Altman 2017, 1215).

Another argument against the use of direct democracy institutions is the character of decision-making process in democracy. It may not seem very relevant, because in social awareness the institutions of direct democracy have attributes of greater weight resulting from the engagement of a large group of citizens in the decision-making process, thanks to which they have social legitimization (e.g., adopting the constitution by way of referendum). On the other hand, however, they may contribute to generating divisions and social conflicts. Therefore, decisions of the parliament or president elected in a universal election, made in accordance with the procedure and with participation of different bodies (e.g., in the legislation process) may have greater social approval than they would have if they had been legitimized in a referendum, which would lead to deep social divisions (Wojtasik 2013, 26–27).

3 NATIONAL LEVEL

General research on Poles' opinion on direct democracy institutions show that political procedures should be based on these institutions to a greater extent (Tybuchowska-Hartlińska 2014, 120). These expectations were also reflected in the formation of a political party called Direct Democracy, which advocates the need of direct democracy basis for the principles of political system (Glajcar, Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2017, 64–68). The analysis of the actual state shows, however, that except for their unconventional forms (recall and participatory budgeting), direct democracy institutions are relatively rarely used. Poles still attach greater importance to universal elections and their effects (Wojtasik 2011, 213–215). The functional division into direct democracy and indirect democracy is based on the Constitution of Poland of 1997: Article 4 section 2 provides that: "*The Nation shall exercise such power directly or through their representatives.*" In practice, institutions of direct democracy established in Polish law are: (1) nationwide referendum, which can be obligatory or optional; (2) legislative initiative for groups of at least 100 thousand citizens; (3) recalling a legislative or executive authority of a local government unit before the end of term by way of referendum; (4) residents of a local government unit expressing in a referendum their will concerning the way of solving problems concerning the community, within the responsibilities and power of the unit's authorities and in the case of important issues common for that community; (5) consultations with the residents of the local government unit, which may be obligatory or optional. Public consultations are a form of obtaining residents' opinion without binding effects; (6) legislative initiative of the members of the local government unit; (7) participatory budgeting.

Nationwide referendum experiences of citizens all over the country are not a motivational factor. In practice, after 1989, there have been only 5 nationwide referenda in Poland, two of which were obligatory (to confirm the Constitution and to give consent to the integration with the European Union). The others concerned universal enfranchisement of the citizens (1996), the ways of using state property (1996) and the ways of financing political parties and introduction of single-member electoral districts into the lower house of the parliament (2015). The participation threshold of more than a half of the citizens with the right to vote was only met in the case of the accession referendum (58.85%). In all the others, the voter turnout was significantly lower, and in the case of the 2015 referendum, it was only 7.8%. The relatively rare use of the institution of referendum at the national level results both from formal factors (complicated procedure of obtaining contest to conducting a referendum, the requirement of 50% voter turnout for the referendum to be valid, and the need to collect at least 500 thousand signatures supporting the motion for carrying it out) and political factors (politicians' reluctance to use forms of direct democracy as mechanisms limiting their power). It must be emphasized that political authorities initiated all the above-mentioned referendum initiatives, not by citizens themselves. Citizens' initiatives (with more than 500 thousand signatures of support) were overthrown in the lower house of the parliament, which must eventually agree to carry out each of them.

These factors mean that the nationwide referendum is not likely to be regarded as a useful instrument of direct democracy in Poland. Strong party dependence of politics has a negative impact on reference to citizens' will as the ultimate way of settling political disputes. Party leaders prefer instrumentalizing the decision-making process by building up the majority in the parliament. This way, they can be sure both of the final decision and the course of working it out. The limited possibility of creating new political leaders through referendum campaigns is also important in this case. The emergence of new leaders during a nationwide referendum would be more probable if the problem to decide about was a socially popular one and not yet tackled by politicians. In this case, social mobilization could lead to creating a new political leader and an environment around the leader as a competition for the existing political parties. In the Polish conditions, an example of such a referendum was the 2015 initiative concerning the introduction of single-member electoral districts into the Sejm. It was proposed by the social movement Kukiz'15 and the presidential candidate Paweł Kukiz. But the way of carrying out the referendum initiative by president Bronisław Komorowski made a large part of the citizens ignore the voting on the subject.

The non-regulatory form of direct democracy at the national level is people's legislative initiative. The Constitution of 1997 regulates the right to people's legislative initiative in Article 118 section 2, stipulating that: "The right to introduce legislation shall also belong to a group of at least 100,000 citizens having the right to vote in elections to the Sejm" Its non-regulatory character arises from two aspects. The first is the facultative character of further legislative procedure: the Sejm will decide whether the legislative initiative will actually lead to law establishment. The other one is the assumption that even if the people's legislative initiative is subject to legislative procedure, its ultimate effects depend on the Parliament. Apart from these limitations, there are also subject exemptions: a bill proposed by citizens may not refer to certain subjects. This applies to the areas the Constitution of the Republic of Poland reserves exclusively for other state bodies (e.g., adopting and changing the state's budget), to amending the Constitution, and to the powers of state bodies that

have been handed over to international organizations or international bodies. This last limitation results from the superiority of European laws, which cannot be changed by national acts. Thus, it excludes the performance of citizens' legislative initiative in this regard.

Since the adoption of the Constitution in 1997 (i.e., since allowing people's legislative initiatives in the present form) until 2015 (the end of the 7th term of the Sejm), 143 attempts of people's legislative initiative were made, 53 of which were successful in meeting the formal requirements and proceeding the legislative initiative. Generally, the bills submitted by citizens are not very effective. In the discussed period, only 11 bills submitted by citizens were actually adopted (seven of which were proceeded together with other bills submitted by other entities). This data shows the relatively low effectiveness of people's initiatives. The impression is even stronger if we compare their number with all the bills in the years 1997-2015. In that period, only 0.9% (53) out of all bills submitted by entities with the right to do so (5,897) were based on people's legislative initiative. On the other hand, the specificity of the Polish political system means that citizens' participation in the legislative procedure is occasional; other state bodies are a more natural addressee of the legislative initiative procedure (Rachwał 2016, 166–171).

4 LOCAL LEVEL

The number of local governmental referenda in Poland, as well as people's interest in such referenda, are surprisingly low. Perhaps this originates in the sense that the mechanism is not very meaningful due to the lack of direct effect on the activities of the authority. They are usually used as part of the current policy, being the instrument of political competition. It is the same with the institution of legislative initiative of members of the local government unit. Political factors are to blame for using it so rarely: such motions are usually made by the opposition trying to achieve their political goals this way. As a result, although the bodies that are the addressees of these initiatives (councils of local government units) accept the motions (since they are legally obliged to do so), later they use procedural obstruction. In incidental cases, the authorities themselves use the procedure of legislative initiative. It happens whenever they need social legitimization of their activities, which they obtain by means of engaging citizens on their side. However, these are not really civil and bottom-up activities. They are rather a form of manipulation with the public opinion.

Social consultations are a more frequent local government level institution of direct democracy – in some cases they are simply required by law. This refers to procedures such as: (1) forming, combining, dividing, and abolishing local government units and determining their boundaries; granting a commune or a village the status of municipality and determining its boundaries; determining and changing names of communes and the seats of their authorities; (2) before adopting a resolution concerning the formation of a commune subunit on the initiative of an entity other than the residents; (3) before adopting the statute of a commune subunit; (4) before moving for the establishment of an additional name of a town in the language of a national or ethnic minority residing in that town; (5) determining, changing or abolishing the official names of towns, town districts, and physiographic objects. Optional consultations are usually organized in order to obtain social legitimization of planned activities.

The function of ensuring control of the authorities and enforcing political liability means that the logic of the electoral act may be reversed (the recall procedure). In the case of identifiable differences proving the local government specificity of performing them, there are no limitations on terms of office of rural commune heads and town mayors, and it is possible to apply the recall procedure in the form of referendum as an instrument of performing non-electoral enforcement of political liability. This latter factor refers to communal councils, town mayors, and rural commune heads. A study by Maciej Marmola shows that Poles would definitely like to extend the application of the recall procedure to other publicly elected offices (Marmola 2015, 115–116). On the other hand, however, the effectiveness of recall procedures so far has been relatively low: only on 82 out of 641 cases the representative authority was effectively recalled (Marmola 2014, 68–77). Rafał Glajcar (2010, 73–77) points to two tendencies in the practice of application of a recall referendum, noticeable after the restitution of the local government in 1990. The first is the stabilization of their number in each term of office, except the years 1998–2002, when there were nearly twice as many attempts to recall local government authorities as on average (196 vs 104). The other tendency is the growing effectiveness of this instrument, from 6.25% of all the recall referenda carried out in the 1990–1994 term to 17.28% in the 2006–2010 term. This may be connected with the departure from the rigid threshold of referendum validity (30%) in favour of a flexible threshold depending on the strength of mandate (three fifth of the voter turnout at the election of the body). Its real reduction could have had two effects: the psychological one and the mathematical one. As for the psychological one, it is easier for citizens to believe that they are able to generate in the recall procedure the voter turnout that will make it possible to actually recall the authorities. The mathematical effect is based on the comparison of two levels of voter turnout, the lower of which is required to recall the body.

Participatory budgeting is another institution of unconventional direct democracy (apart from the recall procedure) that is relatively often applied in Poland. It is noteworthy that it is a relatively new institution both in Poland and globally, established less than 30 years ago (Wampler 2010). The first town in Poland to apply participatory budgeting was Sopot in 2011. The very institution still arouses mixed feelings, especially among politicians. It results from fear of the loss of control of the budget, the belief that the councillors are about to lose the monopoly of making decisions concerning communes' budgets. On the other hand, the number of communes using this institution is dynamically growing. In 2015, it was as many as 80 local governments. Interestingly, the communes that do use it are both big cities (primarily including Warsaw, which spends the equivalent of over 10 million euros as part of participatory budgeting), and small communes where the budgets do not exceed the equivalent of 25 thousand euros. The clear success of participatory budgets in Polish communes seems to be a proof that citizens are more willing to engage in activities that give quick measurable effects (Wojtasik 2010, 158).

Declaratively, Poles express substantial interest in the mechanisms of direct democracy, perceiving them as a necessary support for political structures. The opportunities Poles have for engaging in the decision-making process at the local level, such as referendum or legislative initiative, have poor support. Perhaps it is determined by perceiving those mechanisms as the instruments of political competition, which occurs both at the local and the national level in Poland. Local consultations are organized slightly more often. It is mostly connected with the necessity to carry them out as part of certain procedures. Optional consultations, in turn, are usually carried out in order to obtain higher

social legitimization of the planned activities. Citizens are clearly becoming more and more interested and engaged in unconventional mechanisms of direct democracy, such as recall and participatory budgeting. For one thing, these mechanisms are easier to implement. In addition, from the psychological point of view they give citizens a greater sense of agency: they have more real effects, which the citizens can experience themselves.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The described results of using direct democracy institutions at the national and local level show a much higher potential in the latter case, which confirms the thesis made in the beginning. At the national level, no functional sources of the need to apply direct democracy have been found in democratic procedures. So far, in Poland, its application has been the result of normative obligation rather than the real need of listening to the *vox populi*. At the local level, to the contrary, we can see, not only more intensive use of its procedures, but also adding new institutions (participatory budgeting). Looking for the determinants of this situation, the authors make six hypotheses that determine further research.

5.1 Institutional barriers

The first hypothesis identifies the reasons for the diagnosed situation in the fact that national referendum or people's legislative initiative require much greater financial and organizational resources than do the instruments of direct democracy at the local level. In the analysed cases, the need of collecting a sufficient number of signatures (500,000 for the referendum and 100,000 for the legislative initiative) was often a formal barrier, which some initiatives were unable to overcome. We can speculate, then, that some of the emerging initiatives were not carried out when their organizers became aware of the formal obstacles they would have to face. On the other hand, these barriers are a kind of safety mechanism, which protects the institutions of direct democracy from social and political devaluation. The devaluation could have occurred if the number of submitted initiatives had exceeded the limits of political reason.

5.2 The monopolization of the political agenda

The other hypothesis is that the diagnosed situation is the result of a political factor, namely that political parties and their leaders are responsible for limiting the number of initiatives at the national level. Despite numerous great slogans and programme ideas, in practice they are not interested in limiting their power by letting other entities (including citizens) participate in the decision-making process. The monopolization of the political agenda allows to control political competition processes, and thus to achieve the assumed goals. Introducing the factor of uncertainty (bottom-up citizens' initiatives) into the presented system of relationships means that the predictability of effects expected by politicians may be considerably reduced. The context of political leadership is also an important determinant. New initiatives connected with nationwide referenda or legislative initiatives could be the factor of creating new political leaders, who might pose a threat to the functioning ones.

5.3 Psychological factor

The third hypothesis explains citizens' higher interest in local matters and the resulting higher potential of engagement in direct democracy initiatives at this level with reference to the psychological factor. An important element of this factor is the citizens' perception of how significant is the problem settled as part of direct democracy mechanisms. Local level problems are significantly closer to the citizens, more concrete and related to their responsibility for their proximity. What is more, this closeness means the voters have greater knowledge on the subject and are able to apply it in the decision making process. Local politics is an important sphere, connected with decisions that directly affect the functioning of the person in their place of residence. Citizens perceive such activity as more meaningful, because the initiative may refer to their closest environment, and hence, the quality of their lives. This will be a strong motivational factor, both for taking initiatives and for active participation in them. The greater sense of community involved in activity at the local level needs to be emphasized in the psychological factor. The citizens know each other and can exert stronger mutual influence by referring to common values and creating community goals.

5.4 Local identity

The fourth hypothesis involves a quantitative factor, which points to a much higher number of entities interested in creating their solutions at the local than the national level. Political activity at the local level is too greatly dependent on strong local identities, which are often institutionalized as local movements or associations. They integrate the local community by their activities, motivate them to participate in decision-making processes, and teach the people to take responsibility for their closest environment by encouraging them to participate in decision-making processes. It is often these communities that initiate the application of direct democracy mechanisms at the local level, since they can achieve their goals using those mechanisms. Well-developed local identity is the factor that strengthens the bonds with the entity (e.g., organization or association) that works to cultivate the residents' attachment to the location and regional identity. It is bound to give the sense of community and social representation. It is also a much more active initiator of direct democracy mechanisms as a collective entity with strong mutual support mechanisms and multiplied motivation force. To illustrate this difference, let us point out that the number of NGOs in Poland is more than 125 thousand, and the number of registered political parties is only 67 (as of 2017).

5.5 Historic factor

Lower interest in national level direct democracy institutions among the citizens may also result from the Polish history, which is the fifth hypothesis. Nearly fifty years of control by the Soviet Union, the lack of real political leadership and democratic rules may have led to the situation in which civic competencies have not developed well enough to allow the proper engagement in social matters (Wiatr 2018, 5–6). The processes of democratic socialization since 1989 may not have yet generated the necessary level of civic behaviours. Another historically significant aspect of the current form of civic engagement is the level of Poles' social integration. It may also be affected by the fact that the current territory of Poland is composed of lands that 100 years ago still belonged to the 3 powers of the time: Prussia, Russia, and Austria-Hungary.

Studies on political attitudes and voting behaviours show considerable differences overlapping with the boundaries of the occupants (Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2010, 11).

5.6 Specific structure of Polish religiosity

Our last hypothesis is the conjecture that the nature of religious structure may have an influence of Poles' engagement in social issues. However, it is hard to clearly define the direction of the influence, and this area definitely requires further research. It is important because Poland is a country with considerable religious homogeneity, where more than 90% of the community declare to be Catholics. It is a specific kind of religiosity (Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik 2017, 189–191), serving as a catalyst for citizens' activity. In research on social motivations, scholars do not agree as to the impact of religion. On the one hand, some hold the view that the religious factor is significant in motivating for activity (Putnam 2000; Musick and Wilson 2008, 279), that the sphere of religious axiology is related to social values (Leege 1993, 3–26; Harris 1994, 42–68) and that religious institutions serve socialization functions (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001, 751–770; Greenberg 2000, 377–394). The opposite view stresses the possibility of reducing the level of social activity by religious participation (Wuthenow 1999, 331–363), the competitive character of citizens' trust in their own religious group at the expense of the general social capital (Uslaner 2000, 569–590), or even religious activity reducing citizens' knowledge and social competencies (Scheufele, Nisbet and Brossard 2003, 300–324). Thus, we may make the thesis that due to the specific structure of Polish religiosity, the religious factor will have a strong impact, but it is hard to clearly determine the direction of this impact and its consequences for interest in local and national issues. The analyses may be directed by the fact that religiosity in Poland has the ludic character and by the lack of intensive laicization processes, unlike in many European countries (Burke 2009; Stawrowski 2004). The ludic character of religiosity means that it is dominated by non-liturgical practices. Popular religiosity involves anything that in classic theology was called paraliturgy or services. Such religiosity, although frequently considered to be immature, ensures the sense of meaning and helps form one's identity. In Poland, its fundamental features are the mass character (intensity of religious practices) and ceremonial character (observance of holidays and customs). Another expression of ludic religiosity is its close association with local customs and tradition of the region. It is not individual but is based on a specific community. This could also suggest focusing more activity on local than national issues.

The beginning of 2018 brought more changes in the normative situation of direct democracy institutions in Poland. The Act of 11 January 2018 on amending some laws so as to increase citizens' participation in the process of electing, functioning and control of some public bodies regulated that participatory budgeting would be mandatory in the biggest Polish cities (with powiat rights). The amount of the participatory budget will be at least 0.5% of the expenditure presented in the latest submitted report of budget performance. Some changes were also introduced in legislative initiative in local governments. In a commune up to 5 thousand residents, at least 100 persons can submit a legislative initiative, in a commune up to 20 thousand residents at least 200, and in a commune over 20 thousand residents at least 300. In the case of a powiat up to 100 thousand residents, the minimum of 300 persons have the legislative initiative, and in a powiat over 100 thousand residents, 500. In a province, this right is granted to a group of at least 1 thousand residents.

These regulations give more empowerment to the residents in relation to legislative and executive authorities in communes. They also extend the scope of local government legislative initiative to all the levels of local government.

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