

How Referendums Threaten the Power of EU Democracy

By [South Front](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

In April, Dutch citizens voted against the European Union Association Agreement with Ukraine. In early May, the Hungarian government confirmed the decision to hold a referendum on the European Commission's plan to distribute asylum seekers among member states. In June, the United Kingdom will hold a vote on whether to leave the European Union altogether. In all cases, EU citizens are being asked to decide on issues connected to the process of the EU integration. Considering the democratic legitimacy of the European Union is being questioned, a referendum is a tool to save the loyalty of citizens.

According to some experts, the current spate of referendums in Europe, to a large extent, is a result of the upcoming British vote. This version argues London proved that referendums can be used to extract concessions from Brussels. Thus, governments will likely continue to use referendums to demand concessions from the EU or to justify domestic decisions.

On the other hand, it means some sides of the Continental integration can be frozen or even reversed with a popular vote. This situation is result of the ongoing political, economic and migration crisis in the EU and is strengthened by the lack of legitimacy of the EU bureaucratic core in Brussels.

- In the migration case, governments can use popular opposition to the relocation scheme to justify their rejection of the plan in Brussels. Hungary's attitude will be stronger if it's able to coordinate actions with other states.
- Popular political parties could use referendums as a part of their electoral campaigns or as a tool to implement decisions, ignoring the opposition of the establishment. France's National Front has promised to hold a vote on the country's EU membership if it wins the presidential election in 2017. Italy's Five Star Movement has also stated it would hold a referendum on the country's membership if it's elected.
- Interest groups or nongovernmental organizations also can try to push their agendas by this way. However, only a handful of EU members have mechanisms that allow for citizens to organize referenda.

There are enough issues in Europe that could be decided by a referendum. This fact threatens the power of the EU bureaucracy. However, ignoring the people's right to decide, it only triggers a wave of new referendums across the continent. If there is no another option, more and more governments in Europe will threaten to put their membership in the EU or the eurozone to a vote so as to resist measures that undermine their national wealth

and sovereignty.

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