

► Kremlin-backed Black Sea pipeline that many see as a direct rival to the EU's own plans in the region. The outgoing Italian prime minister and former European Commission president, Romano Prodi, also said he had turned down (for now, at least) a Russian offer to head the South Stream consortium.

In practice a new PCA is unlikely to make much difference. Despite the obsolescence of the old one, trade between Russia and the EU has more than tripled since 2000. In negotiating a new one, Russia would, on past form, use its bilateral ties with big countries to get its way in what ought to be multilateral negotiations. And it is not clear that any new agreement will stick. Russia has explicitly said that it will not ratify the energy charter it signed in 1994, which would have required it to give third parties access to its gas pipelines. As Katinka Barysch, of the London-based Centre for European Reform, notes drily, "the Russians have a somewhat different approach to law, so whether you can aim to solve all problems with a legal document is open to doubt." ■

Direct democracy in Germany

When voters want a say

BERLIN

If you thought Germany did not do referendums, think again

CAMPAIGNERS for Tempelhof airport lacked neither enthusiasm nor cash. Sky-blue posters urged Berliners to vote yes in a referendum to keep open the airport, a symbol of the Berlin airlift of 1948-49. In vain: too few voters turned out on April 27th to make it valid. Though 60% of those who voted said yes, at least a quarter of eligible voters had to give their approval. So Tempelhof will probably close in October. On the same day the citizens of Schwerin voted to oust their mayor for mishandling an investigation into the starvation of a five-year-old girl. And the Bavarian branch of the trade union confederation plans to start collecting signatures on May 1st for a referendum on a minimum wage. Direct democracy, it seems, is becoming part of Germany's political scene.

Germans lag behind the Swiss, who routinely take law-making into their own hands. Referendums and plebiscites still carry a whiff of Weimar and of Hitler's exploitation of public emotion. The constitution permits them at national level, but the Bundestag has never enacted further laws to make them possible. Yet in states and municipalities, direct democracy has taken off. Since unification in 1990, referendums in these two tiers have



A Dakota, but not enough voters

become possible in all 16 states. The number of local initiatives has jumped from a handful in the early 1990s to 300 a year.

To German business, this looks like a threat. Around 14% of initiatives seek to block private-sector investments, often mobile-phone towers or shopping centres. Power projects are also targets, increasing fears of a possible energy crunch. In November voters in Ensdorf, in the Saarland, blocked the construction of a €2 billion (\$2.9 billion) coal-fired plant. In Brandenburg voters threaten to phase out lignite mining. "Almost every power project faces opposition from citizens' initiatives," complains Michael Feist, president of BDEW, a club of energy and water companies.

Enthusiasts think direct democracy is spreading because the traditional type is ailing. Membership of political parties has slumped, as has trust in politicians. Nearly half of Germans think elections give them no say over government policies, according to one 2006 survey. Some 80% want referendums at national level. The young are indifferent to party politics but mobilise over single issues, says Gerald Häfner of Mehr Demokratie, a lobby group. In municipalities that may mean swimming pools and pedestrian zones. State-level initiatives deal mainly with education and culture (a referendum in Schleswig-Holstein rejected German spelling reform) or the mechanics of democracy (Bavaria voted to abolish its Senate in 1998).

Loth to share power, politicians argue that ordinary citizens cannot be trusted with too much. Most states do not allow votes on such issues as spending and taxation. The type of quorum that doomed Tempelhof exists only in Germany, says Mr Häfner. The minimum number of signatures required to launch a referendum has been cut, but it is still a tenth of the electorate, on average. Even victory is no guarantee of success. Legislatures can sometimes overturn referendum results, as Schleswig-Holstein's did for the spelling reform, and courts have modified them.

Defenders of direct democracy insist that it improves decision-making. Switzer-

land's taxes and spending are lower than otherwise, and its labour productivity higher, because the Swiss can vote on fiscal issues, says Lars Feld of the University of Heidelberg. Resistance may be ebbing. The Christian Democratic Union, the most sceptical big party, was an enthusiastic backer of the Tempelhof referendum, notes Volker Mittendorf of the University of Wuppertal. Hamburg, where the party is forming its first state-level coalition with the Greens, will seek to make referendums binding on the legislature. Bavaria's ruling party, the Christian Social Union, credits direct democracy with giving citizens a way to disagree with the government on single issues without voting for the opposition. Tempelhof may close, but direct democracy will soldier on. ■

Turkish politics

An ineffective opposition

ISTANBUL

The sad irrelevance of Turkey's main opposition leader

DURING last July's election campaign, Turkey's mildly Islamist prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pledged to resign as Justice and Development (AK) party leader if he did not do well enough to govern without coalition partners. His biggest rival, Deniz Baykal, made a bolder promise. If his party failed to win, said Mr Baykal, he would swim all the way to the island of Rhodes.

In the event, AK romped back with 47% of the vote, enough to rule alone. Mr Baykal's pro-secular Republican People's Party (CHP) limped in a distant second, with 21%. Nobody really expected the 69-year-old to swim to Rhodes, but even his most ardent supporters thought Mr Baykal might at last step down. Since taking charge of the party in 1992, the American-trained economist has not won a single