



After The Storm: How to Save Democracy in Europe

Luuk van Middelaar

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The deep economic and financial crisis that hit many countries in Europe brought the issue of democracy in the European Union from the circles of experts into the public arena. Eurozone members, in particular, have experienced how interdependent they have become: the fate of each of them is affecting the fate of all. Under the grip of heavily contested bailout programmes, some of them even felt they were losing all control over their destiny. As a result, issues of solidarity, identity and accountability within and between countries and institutions came to the fore in unusually stark terms. While reflecting a wider decline of trust in politics, the May 2014 European Parliament elections confirmed that public disenchantment with the Union is at an all-time high. Expectations, however, point in different directions: some people want 'more' Europe, others 'less', and many both depending on the issue. In at least one country a sizable share of the population believes that membership of the club is incompatible with life as a sovereign nation. At the same time, new forms of democratic practice are tested (such as the citizens' initiative, the Spitzenkandidaten-system) and others being considered (more involvement of national parliaments, a eurozone parliament). In this context it is particularly appropriate, indeed urgent, to reflect on the fundamental political challenges facing the continent where democracy was invented. Many of these were discussed without taboo in a series of conversations that took place in 2012-2013 between Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council, and European intellectuals from eight countries. Against this background, the editors are inviting circa 20 leading public voices to write about the future of democracy in Europe: the diagnosis, the stakes, the best way forward. What can self-government and majority rule mean in today's Europe, itself in the globalised world of the 21st century? And how can this be relevant for the rest of the world?

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