

Book Review: re:generation Europe: Ten Proposals for Another Europe by Floris de Witte

In re:generation Europe: Ten Proposals for Another Europe, Floris de Witte sets out a vision for another Europe, one that breaks with the purely technocratic management of European affairs, one that listens to its public and is sensitive to its younger generation. While questioning whether EU leaders would accept such radical change, Simeon Mitropolitski welcomes the call to reform the European Union through cherishing diversity, public engagement and youth engagement and recommends the book to scholars of Europe and the general public alike.

re:generation Europe: Ten Proposals for Another Europe. Floris de Witte. Palgrave Macmillan. 2019.

In his book [re:generation Europe: Ten Proposals for Another Europe](#), Floris de Witte, Associate Professor in the Department of Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science, sets out a vision for another European Union, one that breaks with the purely technocratic management of European affairs, one that listens to its public and is sensitive to its younger generation. The *raison d'être* of this book, to no surprise, is Brexit, a long and winding process of disintegration of Britain's formal institutional bonds with the EU. The author claims that Brexit has larger significance beyond this particular national case: that it represents drama involving national and EU authorities, both struggling, often without harmony, to provide legitimate answers to new acute challenges, such as the financial crisis and the refugee crisis. This review will touch upon the main points of the book, on both levels of diagnostic and cure, and will discuss its strengths and the questions it raises.



The book itself is divided into two analytical sections, which I will call diagnostic and cure. The first includes the Introduction, plus Chapters Two through Five. The concluding Chapter Six represents the cure, or to use de Witte's words, '*Ten Proposals for Another Europe*'. The first analytical section, the diagnostic, is focused on the current state of EU affairs following Brexit, or to be more precise, following an important step within the rather lengthy and painful saga of Brexit, a moment in which Britain went from being mostly 'in' the EU, with some important qualifications such as not joining the Schengen Area or the Euro, into being mostly 'outside' the EU, also with important qualifications. How did this happen? And what went wrong? These are the main questions de Witte asks, writing that he loves Europe and believes in European cooperation, and I am probably jumping ahead by stating that I share the main conclusions of the diagnostic he presents.

His main points are summarised in the Introduction: the EU does not feel natural but artificial; it does not feel local but distant and unreachable; it does not feel fresh but aged, tired and guarded (2). Its institutions, processes and policies are still largely the same, even though the challenges that it faces, the complexity of the world in which it operates and its salience are larger than ever before (2-3). Being himself a supporter of European integration, the author does not suggest stepping back from already achieved levels of cooperation or a return to times before the current European project. Therefore, once he draws the lines of the current state of affairs, he offers his ten proposals for another Europe, one based on bottom-up civil engagement and on more economic equality and opportunities.

The proposals are summarised in Chapter Six. Instead of mentioning them in the same order as the author presents and justifies them, I will merge them into larger categories depending on the relative weight of material and cultural elements. On the one pole, we see proposals that require only modest financial investments but have important cultural consequences in order to bring Europe symbolically closer to its citizens and the citizens from different European countries closer to one another. For this pole I will use as an example *Proposal 10: A Day for the Future, a new public holiday for all Europeans*, in which not the past but the future of Europe is celebrated (133).

On the opposite pole, we have proposals requiring very significant financial resources, like *Proposal 2: European Basic Income*. A Basic Income, given intensified attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, would mean that every European receives a guaranteed and unconditional monthly income that allows each individual to have a decent life without having to rely on work (106). Between these extremes are located other proposals, such as free interrail passes, free school lunches, more cultural exchanges and investments in renewable energy sources and in start-up hubs. All of them have the main desired or significant side effect of bringing Europeans symbolically closer to one another and closer to Europe.

I find the author's general idea of trying to reform Europe along three main lines appealing, these lines being cherishing diversity, public engagement and youth engagement. In so doing, this project takes the EU as it is from an institutional point of view. No major reforms are conceived in terms of key actors or decision-making authorities. Also, no proposal assumes the need for an increased political weight for the European Commission regarding national governments. In this sense, all ten proposals easily fall within the public policy domain. This apparently simple shift in policy agenda looks easy to design and not so complicated to execute.

From a realist point of view, however, I do not consider it very feasible that the technocratic EU elite will accept such a policy shift that allows more popular voices in the room where major decisions are made. If there is a lesson coming out of Brexit, it is that no matter how painful European 'divorce' is, it may be less costly for Brussels than radical internal reforms. Brexit has not yet changed European or British internal political decision-making procedures, even if it was to be expected that the mentality of 'we' against 'the others' would freeze both camps, at least for the duration of the divorce. I also find it questionable whether the proposals would indeed strengthen European bonds; it may, in fact, be the opposite, given the opposition in many EU countries to new uniform regulations that do not take into account the national specificity of each member state.

On this note I invite scholars of Europe to discuss de Witte's book, not just in light of his specific proposals, but also regarding his broader idea that the EU can be brought closer to its citizens, that there can be *another Europe*. However, the circle of potential readers extends beyond those researching Europe. Accessible language without overemphasis on technical terminology makes de Witte's book an interesting read for the general public too.

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