

# JIM'S

a reading list  
to stimulate debate

# READING CORNER



## Top Reading Recommendations for 2024

selected by TEPSA Secretary-General Jim CLOOS

### THE NUTMEG CURSE by Amitav Ghosh

The book links the legacy of colonialism to the growing threat of human activity for the climate. It starts with the story of the ruthless campaign of the Dutch to ensure and preserve their monopoly on the cultivation of nutmeg in Indonesia. The latter is a perfect illustration of the more general functioning of Western colonialism and its long-term effects up to the present day. Seeing the earth primarily as an exploitable resource ultimately leads to disaster. It is a pity that towards the end of the book Ghosh indulges in long developments on the theory of "vitalism" and the realm of the 'magical'.

### THE FATEFUL YEARS: MEMOIRS OF A FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN BERLIN, 1931-1938 by André François-Poncet

An excellent account of 1930s Germany, written masterfully and with sound judgement. Poncet witnessed Hitler's rise to power and the country's subsequent transformation. He knew members of the Nazi regime's leadership and paints some astonishing portraits. The story of his final encounter with Hitler at the Eagle's Nest on 18 October 1939 is a

stunning tale. As is often the case with diplomats, he struggled to get his warnings about Hitler's ambitions heeded in Paris. A first-hand report of history in the making.

### LEADERSHIP: SIX STUDIES IN WORLD STRATEGY by Henry Kissinger

Kissinger finished this book at the age of 99, a year before his death at 100. It is a masterly study on leadership and international politics, through the portraits of six leaders who shaped the destinies of their respective countries in the second half of the twentieth century. They all shared a strong sense of duty, a readiness to confront opposition, and a clear vision for the future. The strategies they used varied in line with their personalities and the circumstances of their countries: Adenauer (modesty), de Gaulle (will), Nixon (geopolitics and national interest), Sadat (transcendence), Lee Kuan Yew (excellency), Thatcher (conviction).

### NOT ONE INCH: AMERICA, RUSSIA, AND THE MAKING OF POST-COLD WAR STALEMATE by Mary Elise Sarotte

A meticulous and balanced analysis of how the relations between the West and Russia developed after the fall of

the USSR through initial hope, false starts and misunderstandings, and growing estrangement, to reach the present state of naked enmity. Sarotte tries to understand whether a different trajectory would have been possible or whether the very nature of Russia under Putin dictated the outcome. Both theses have fierce defenders. The issue of NATO enlargement to the east looms large in this context. In an encounter with Gorbachev in 1990, State Secretary Baker wondered aloud whether a deal could be struck around the idea of a united Germany entering NATO but with the latter not moving one inch further to the east. As we know, the history of the last 30 years has gone in a very different direction. Sarotte provides a wealth of details on how this came about, and it is for the readers to draw their personal conclusions.

### **THE NEW MAP: ENERGY, CLIMATE AND THE CLASH OF NATIONS** by Daniel Yergin

A book well written and full of insights and figures on energy, climate change and geopolitics. Yergin dwells a lot on the shale gas revolution in the US, which, in a very short period of time, completely changed global energy dynamics, with the US moving from being a big importer of energy to becoming the biggest producer of oil and gas in the world. He then looks at the Russian map, with its policy of total control of energy circuits and its imperialist designs in its neighbourhood, which have led to a growing rift with the West. The Chinese map is rooted in the will to draw the lessons from the nineteenth "century of humiliation", notably by pursuing an ever more assertive strategy in the South China Sea. Finally, Yergin looks at the recent history of the Middle East and the battle for the control of energy sources. There is no specific chapter devoted to Europe and the European Union, but European concerns and the enormous challenge of the Green Deal are frequently mentioned across the book.

### **BETER WORDT HET NIET: EEN REIS DOOR DE EUROPESE UNIE EN HET HABSBURGSE RIJK** by Caroline de Gruyter

A personal journey through the Habsburg Empire and the European Union, with an eagle-eye out for the many similarities between them. It is instructive and often amusing. The title clearly refers to Stefan Zweig's book on the end of the Habsburg, *The World of Yesterday*. Let's hope the future does not hold its own Stefan Zweig in store, writing the regretful and nostalgic story of the demise of the European Union!

*This book has not (yet) been translated into English.*

### **OUR EUROPE: BANQUET OF NATIONS** by Laurent Gaudé

A free-verse epic poem on the recent history of Europe is a surprising thing. Gaudé calls on us to dream of a European utopia and show greater enthusiasm for it. But he also expresses frustration about the Union's shortcomings, occasionally lapsing into a superficial criticism of "bureaucratic Europe"; not making concrete efforts to realise one's dreams means they remain... dreams. If you want to unite 27 very different states, you need to get your hands dirty. Despite this minor reservation, I hope Gaudé will be read by many Europeans, and especially by young Europeans.

### **AM ENDE DER GEWOHNTEN ORDNUNG: WARUM WIR MACHT NEU DENKEN MÜSSEN** by Sophie Porschke

The shake-up of the global order and the crisis of power. We live in a world of interregnum: the old is dying, the new cannot yet rise. Europe must find its way in this new world: more realpolitik, but without losing its DNA - how to do it? Rehabilitating power without its excesses. It reminds me of a quote by Fritz Erler (former SPD politician): "He who does not give power to right, submits to the right of power." Inspiring, even if I do not agree with some of it - or, maybe,

because of this!

*This book has not (yet) been translated into English.*

**THE CODE BREAKER: JENNIFER DOUDNA, GENE EDITING, AND THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE** by Walter Isaacson

After his excellent history of the invention of the computer, Isaacson now turns to genetics. He does so with a fascinating mix of storytelling, factual reporting and analysis and a highly pedagogical approach. The discovery of a new way of gene editing (CRISPR) is an absolute revolution and opens amazing perspectives and... possible nightmare scenarios, too. This is the technology behind the new anti-COVID vaccines; it is directly inspired by the way bacteria defend themselves against the attacks of viruses.

**LES INGÉNIEURS DU CHAOS** by Giuliano da Empoli

A brilliant essay on the puppeteers behind Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Viktor Orbán, Benjamin Netanyahu, Matteo Salvini, and Beppe Grillo. Their names are Steve Bannon, Dominic Cummings, Davide Casaleggio, Arthur Finkelstein... They turn the flaws and vices of their leaders into assets, play on people's anger, and heighten the desire for revenge. They are helped in their sinister work by the excesses of 'woke' culture. A must-read if you want to understand the modern world.

*This book has not (yet) been translated into English.*

**LE LABYRINTHE DES ÉGARÉS: L'OCCIDENT ET SES ADVERSAIRES** by Amin Maalouf

A book about the West, dominated by the USA, and its increasingly numerous adversaries. Something is changing. A good recap of the opposition between the West and the great rival empires of China, Russia (formerly the USSR) and

Japan. On the subject of the sack of the Summer Palace in then-Peking in 1860, Maalouf quotes Victor Hugo: "One day, two bandits entered the Summer Palace. One looted, the other set fire to it. And we returned to Europe, arm in arm, laughing. Such is the story of the two bandits. We Europeans are the civilised ones, and for us the Chinese are the barbarians. This is what civilisation has done to barbarism... I hope the day will come when France, freed and cleansed, will return this booty to despoiled China." Something to think about!