

TEPSA'S READING CORNER

a reading list to stimulate debate

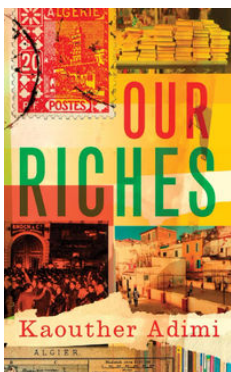


In this edition, **Jim Cloos** shares:

Reading recommendations for 2025

In this section I present 13 books that are relevant in different ways to the work TEPsA is doing; some touch upon the history of Europe, others provide insights about key partners of the European Union (EU), and yet others focus on issues that are important for the future of Europe and the EU.

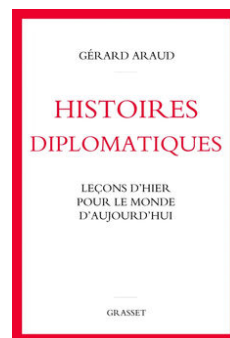
'Our riches' by Kaouthar Adimi



An exceptionally good book about a young Frenchman from Algeria (Edmond Charlot) who creates a modern bookstore and publishing house (*Les vraies richesses*) in Algiers in the 1930s. He meets Albert Camus who helps him, along with Jean Giono and other writers of the time. During the war, Charlot is conscripted and later ends up in Paris, where he founds Les Editions Charlot after World War II (WWII). Initially successful, it soon goes bankrupt, due to competition from major publishing houses, constant financial difficulties, and chronic paper shortages. Adimi sets

this story against the background of French colonialism. She provides vivid accounts of the horrific events of Sétif in 1945, when a celebration of peace turned into a massacre of Algerians demonstrating for independence, and the anti-Algerian pogrom in Paris in 1961 orchestrated by the former Vichy official Maurice Papon. Relations between France and Algeria have remained fraught until today, with periods of cooperation alternating with bouts of estrangement.

'Histoires Diplomatiques' by Gérard Araud



Araud describes major historic events such as the Succession War of Spain, the Peace of Amiens, the Congress of Vienna, the Ems Dispatch that led to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq and tries to draw lessons for today. He pleads for a return to a more *Realpolitik*-oriented foreign policy. He highlights the necessity of understanding the other, including and above all your enemies,

and criticises today's tendency to demonise the opponents and to refuse contact with them. Raw emotion is understandable but can, in the eyes of Araud, lead to perverse effects. This is an interesting contribution to today's difficult debate concerning the war in Ukraine, among others.

'Les Leçons du Japon: Un pays très incorrect' by Jean-Marie Bouissou

Jean-Marie Bouissou

**LES LEÇONS
DU JAPON**
Un pays très incorrect



Pluriel

A must-read if you want to understand Japan, one of Europe's closest partners but also a very enigmatic country for Europeans. As Bouissou writes, "It is a very politically incorrect country that always surprises us."

The former senior French civil servant who now lives in Japan with his Japanese wife discusses Japan's "shadows" (social conformism, the inferior social status of women, relatively high poverty rates, and a rather inflexible justice system) and the "lights" (high social cohesion and civic-mindedness, a great feeling of security, a love of aesthetics, a very efficient public transportation system). He explains that while the French want to change the world, the Japanese want to heal it. He provides fascinating insights into the ways Japan manages organised crime, demographics, migration, and sports. He admires the Japanese religious syncretism, with the peaceful coexistence of Shintoism (for life), Buddhism (for death rites), and Confucianism (for society).

'Le bateau blanc' by Xavier Boutet

This is a very readable book about key events of Estonian history in the 20th century, and more particularly about the events leading up to WWII, the Soviet occupation after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Nazi occupation in 1941 and the return of the Soviets in 1944. It is dedicated to Otto Tief, a

professor and politician who tried to reestablish the Estonian Republic when the Wehrmacht withdrew in 1944. The Soviets quickly put an end to it, deporting Tief and his colleagues to Siberia. The "white ship" refers to a ship promised by the leader of a sect in 1861 to take his followers to Crimea; it never arrived — just like the ship meant to take Tief and his government to Sweden in 1944. This is a most interesting foray into the history of a country that today enjoys a remarkable revival as a member of the EU.



'L'ami américain' by Eric Branca



Quite a shocker written by a staunch Gaullist and sovereigntist about the United States' influence on European politics and its "friendly" domination.

Branca highlights Roosevelt's intention, at the end of WWII, to subject France to a "trusteeship", like the status given to Germany. The American President was deeply suspicious of General de Gaulle and repeatedly tried to undermine his status. He had the support of Jean Monnet, who knew and admired both Britain and the United States very well and worked very closely with and for them. The author expresses this a bit more brutally, calling him "a servant of the Americans and the British." One does not have to be a sovereigntist nor to agree with his interpretations to admire the extensive research done by Branca and the intriguing and sometimes surprising information he provides. His book is worth reading at a time when America's own evolution compels us to reassess Europe's relations with it and raises the issue of [a more autonomous and "Gaullist" EU](#).

'Guerre et pluie' by Velibor Cović



A gripping account by this Bosnian Croat who today lives in Brussels about "his" war (which was not his at all) at the time of the breakup of Yugoslavia. It gets under your skin, showing the cruelty and dirtiness of war.

In the case of Cović, the effects of the war seep through his damaged skin. The author pulls no punches but at the same time he has a great sense of humour; at times he reminds one of Hašek's 'Good Soldier Švejk'.

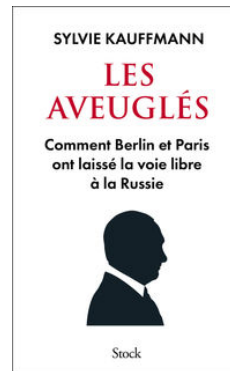
'Superpower Europe' by Marc de Vos

A surprisingly optimistic account of today's Europe, well-argued and well-researched. De Vos provides interesting supporting evidence for Europe's potential evolution towards becoming a superpower, provided the political will is there. This is a call for Europe to become more geostrategic and to develop its strategic autonomy. The description of the EU's autonomous trade measures taken between 2019 and 2024 to defend its core interests is most instructive. The author also looks at the ongoing efforts towards a stronger European defence capacity. The book is a most useful contribution to the present debate about Europe's future.



'Les aveuglés' by Sylvie Kauffmann

A book about the recent history of relations with Russia; well-written, well-researched, and highly informative. Kauffmann talks a lot about Germany and is critical of its role. However, I do not share the view that Merkel was "blind." In European Council meetings she was very clear



sighted about Putin and Russia, but she considered that as a German Chancellor she had to do everything possible to try and bring Putin back to reason. Kauffmann underestimates the negative role of the American

neoconservatives, obsessed with preserving Russia as their "preferred enemy." But overall, a very readable and interesting account of a sad story, covering the same ground as Mary Sarotte in 'Not One Inch', but from a more European angle.

'Cold Blood' by Chris Kraus

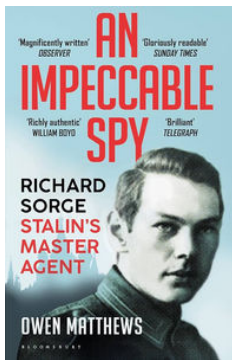
A revelation, gripping, harrowing, with a dark sense of humour. Two brothers (the Solms), Baltic Germans from Riga, build their careers first in Nazi Germany, then as spies for the Federal Republic of Germany (the West enlisted the "lesser evil" (ex-Nazis)

to combat the "greater evil", Stalinism. The book plunges into moral abysses and is replete with adventurous entanglements. Koja, the younger brother, lies in a hospital in the Federal Republic of Germany and remembers. He shares a room with the "Swami", a pacifist and a drop-out of society who is horrified by Solms's revelations. A document of contemporary history and human weaknesses.



'An impeccable spy' by Owen Matthews

The book delves into the life of Richard Sorge, Stalin's master agent; it drew praise from the likes of John Le Carré, Ian Fleming, and Tom Clancy. Kim Philby, who knew a thing or two about spying and treason, considered Sorge first among modern-age spies. This is a real page-



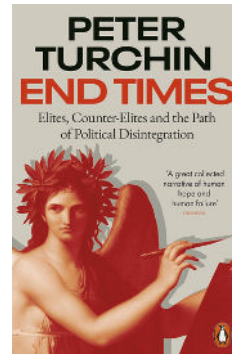
turner; it is also a fascinating account of world politics in the first half of the 20th century. Matthews did extensive research including in the Soviet archives. Sorge managed to penetrate both the top German establishment and the Japanese élite, thanks to his skill, his charm and his daring. He warned Stalin of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, but his warnings went unheeded. He was more successful with his intelligence on whether Japan would join in the attack on the Soviet Union or not after 1941. Knowing that Tokyo was moving towards an attack in the south to secure Indonesian oil allowed Stalin to withdraw troops from the east and to strengthen his defences in the west. He was finally arrested in Tokyo in 1941 and later executed.

'China: Dangerous Rival or Cooperation Partner' by Gerhard Stahl

Gerhard Stahl reflects on how EU-China relations can develop in a changing world with geopolitical conflicts. He asks the right questions at a time when too many Europeans still cling to the illusion of a 'back to the future' approach hoping for a forever protective America. The book was written before Trump's victory and return to the White House. Now more than ever Europe must develop a more autonomous stance including vis-à-vis the US and defend its own interests and values. Stahl presents a convincing case for pursuing an interest-dominated China policy rather than an ideological one. He provides most valuable insights into the way China functions and how Europe could interact with this new superpower.



'End times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the path of political disintegration' by Peter Turchin



Turchin develops a theory of integration and disintegration of societies, which he calls *cliodynamics*. He examines a host of historical examples of disintegration. He concludes that the West is now at a dangerous part of the cycle because of the explosive mix of growing inequality (since the 1970s) and a surplus of elites aiming for top jobs. It makes for stark reading, but not everything is lost; societies can and sometimes do find remedies, for instance by reforming unjust taxation systems and adopting redistributive policies.

'Europe: Geoliberal order and the test of war' by Richard Youngs

A thought-provoking book on the turmoil in the world and the challenges this poses to Europe, particularly in terms of geopolitics. He uses the term "geoliberal" to convey the idea that the EU must become more geopolitical while preserving its liberal DNA: quite a challenge.



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Editing and formatting: Allegra Wirmer (TEPSA)

Jim Cloos is TEPSA Secretary-General. In February 2021, after a long European career, he retired from his job as Director General in the General Secretariat of the Council. He has been an avid reader in many languages since his childhood (his father was a schoolteacher, and the family lived in an apartment above the school and the library!). He is known for having told his staff that reading a good novel was sometimes more useful for understanding society and the world than struggling through tons of bureaucratic jargon. He has eclectic tastes and reads all kinds of books, except poetry, alas. As an adolescent he read 'Huckleberry Finn' four times (in German); later, he did the same with 'War and Peace' (in Russian).

