

Western Europe

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Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin. BY TIMOTHY SNYDER. Basic Books, 2010, 544 pp. \$29.95.

This magisterial work chronicles in horrifying detail the mass murder of civilians by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from 1930 to 1945 in the “bloodlands” that lay between them: Poland, the Baltic republics, Belarus, and the Ukraine. Snyder’s account is engaging, encyclopedic—and controversial. Whereas many accord Hitler more blame than Stalin for such atrocities, Snyder treats the two as comparable. The numbers are similar. Hitler is customarily thought of as pioneering systematic extermination, but Stalin predates him by nearly a decade. German concentration camps are often referred to as a uniquely calculated, even “industrial,” form of butchery. Yet camps account for only a few million of the 14 million deliberate and systematic civilian deaths carried out by the two countries. Most victims of both governments were shot or driven into the wilds to die of starvation and disease. Many still insist that Stalin, believing that communist transformation would falter in the face of opposition from national minorities and rich kulaks, espoused more pragmatic views than his maniacal German counterpart. Yet Hitler was just as results-oriented, believing that military victory and fascist rule would elude Germany unless minorities were eliminated. For Snyder, what mattered most in the end was the commonality that both leaders sacrificed millions to grandiose totalitarian projects.

A Journey: My Political Life. BY TONY

BLAIR. Knopf, 2010, 700 pp. \$35.00.

This book is nearly unique among modern political memoirs in that the author is said to have written it. The resulting prose is at best cloying and chatty, at worst cliché-ridden and convoluted. It recounts few political events that recent British memoirs have not already described. On Iraq it is evasive. Yet it is worth the read because it reveals, better than any book of its kind, how modern politics really works. To judge from Blair’s frank and surprisingly cynical admissions, politicians are often ignorant, scared, and burdened by the past. Their environment is hostile, as illustrated by Blair’s blunt asides on the small-mindedness of nongovernmental organizations, the hypocrisy of the Tory opposition, and the antagonistic incompetence of his buddy Gordon Brown. To achieve anything, leaders must corner electoral opponents with clever rhetoric that manipulates, even misleads, the public. In the end, many historically important matters are decided on little more than gut instinct and personal morality. No one can win at this game forever. This helps explain why a man who entered office with the reputation of being an instinctive politico, able to read the public mind with uncanny clarity, ended up—for all his achievements—a deeply disliked public figure.

Facts Are Subversive: Political Writing From a Decade Without a Name. BY TIMOTHY GARTON ASH. Yale University Press, 2010, 464 pp. \$35.00.

Oxford’s Garton Ash is no dusty don producing authoritative tomes grounded in archival sources, statistical charts, or

revisionist reinterpretations of the past. His virtues are journalistic—most notably, a brilliant eye for spotting a memorable detail in an exotic locale—yet his vision is broader than most reporters or columnists. He knows his history and literature, and he combines reportage with passionate political commitment. To be sure, these 48 short essays published over the last decade indulge some journalistic vices. They were written in the moment, and some have thus been overtaken by events: there are ruminations over the proper response to weapons that Iraq did not have, criticisms of an “Enlightenment fundamentalism” that Garton Ash now admits is illusory, and confident predictions about the spread of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution that never came true. Moreover, the essays are selective, focusing on flashy subjects that make for engaging interviews: heroic revolutionaries, sordid politicians, and exotic nationalists. Economic interests and electoral calculation, the bland bread and butter of modern politics, play little role. Still, one would like to think this is how history is lived, and the result is engaging. These vignettes are highly recommended for those who cannot wait for the proverbial owl of Minerva to spread its wings.

*The European Union and Democracy
Promotion: A Critical Global Assessment.*

EDITED BY RICHARD YOUNGS.

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010,
216 pp. \$60.00.

Some consider Europe’s democracy-promotion policies to be a model for the world. Others consider the EU’s efforts—and perhaps all such policies—ineffective. This slim volume is the newest among many assessments of Europe’s attempts to promote good governance, human

rights, and democracy. Even if the book lacks rigor in establishing comparative standards and metrics, it is informed by scholarly literature and provides useful case studies of EU efforts in Iraq, Morocco, Ukraine, and elsewhere. The result is sobering. Local domestic political structures, geostrategic concerns, and energy policy tightly constrain European policymakers. They have to be pragmatic, accepting the inherently limited and secondary role of any international intervention. Europe tends to compromise, the book suggests, by focusing on improving governance at the expense of improving democracy.

1939: Countdown to War. BY RICHARD
OVERY. Viking, 2010, 176 pp. \$25.95.

Overy argues that “nothing in history is inevitable”—not even the outbreak of World War II. This concise, clearheaded text seeks to prove the point by describing 11 days in 1939, from August 24, when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, to September 3, when France and the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. With events and information moving faster than they could be processed and decision-makers suffering from exhaustion and stress, both sides acted with “growing irrationality.” Hitler believed the assurances of Joachim von Ribbentrop, his foreign minister, that the French and British were bluffing, and so expected to prevail quickly against the Poles alone. French and British leaders sought to redeem their “national honour” by extending a guarantee to Poland and deterring Hitler, and so gave little thought to how that guarantee might have to be honored in practice. Overy’s narrow focus willfully obscures the legacy of World War I, Hitler’s unbounded ambitions, the failed strategy of appeasement, and other complex causes

Recent Books

that perhaps made war inevitable. Still, it makes for provocative reading.

Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe.

EDITED BY ANDREA MAMMONE
AND GIUSEPPE VELTRI. Routledge,
2010, 280 pp. \$130.00.

The scandals, speeches, sex, and partisan scheming of Italian political life have always grabbed media attention. Yet the central question of Italian politics often goes unasked: How did the most successful country in postwar Europe become a basket case? In 1987, with much fanfare, Italy's per capita income overtook that of the United Kingdom; in 20 years, if current trends continue, it will be overtaken by Romania's. The interdisciplinary group of authors in this collection sets aside short-term factors and explores long-term structural reasons for *Italia malata* (ailing Italy). They offer new insights into well-known problems: the poor productivity of small firms, a lethargic legal system, weak universities, rampant corruption, the absence of meritocratic advancement, and the continued underdevelopment of the south. They also highlight problems known only to experts: little government support for families, the spread of organized crime outside of Naples and Sicily, low levels of social trust, and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Western Hemisphere

RICHARD FEINBERG

The New Brazil. BY RIORDAN ROETT.

Brookings Institution Press, 2010,
178 pp. \$29.95.

For the corporate executive facing his or her first long flight to São Paulo, here is

the perfect briefing book. A seasoned student of Brazilian politics, Roett swiftly and expertly reviews the country's Portuguese past, twentieth-century strife, and more recent triumphs. Without ignoring Brazil's many remaining challenges, Roett views the glass as more than half full. He is confident that the continental giant of 190 million citizens is finally on the path to democratic prosperity, regional leadership, and global influence. Especially admirable are Roett's assessments of the successful presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva; the four-page concluding chapter is a gem of tight historical interpretation. Roett is a fan of Brazilian foreign policy—"tough but pragmatic"—even as he criticizes Brazil's failed policies toward Honduras and Iran. But he probably underplays the anti-U.S. currents in the Brazilian Foreign Ministry and its tendency in international policy forums to prefer clever maneuvers to constructive contributions. In that immaturity, Brazil has company from China, India, and Russia, all emerging-market economies that must learn that with power comes responsibility.

Even Silence Has an End: My Six Years of Captivity in the Colombian Jungle. BY

INGRID BETANCOURT. Penguin
Press, 2010, 544 pp. \$29.95.

In February 2002, Betancourt, a senator running for president of Colombia, was kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. A dual Colombian-French national, she is feted in France as a courageous activist who took great risks in the pursuit of peace but provokes controversy in Colombia. Was her kidnapping the result of her government's