Fate in My Hands: The Death Penalty in the Soviet Union
BY YANA SKOROBOGATOV. University of Chicago Press, 2026, 296 pp.

Skorobogatov is the first historian to examine the death penalty in the Soviet Union during the post-Stalin era, from the mid-1950s to 1991. In those decades, the state no longer wielded capital punishment as a political weapon, reserving it mainly for those convicted of premeditated and aggravated homicide. Drawing on more than a hundred death row cases, Skorobogatov traces a striking shift in the language of the inmates' letters of appeal. Until the late 1970s, those facing execution turned to the state as the ultimate moral arbiter. In seeking clemency, they portrayed themselves as model Soviet citizens "out of a socialist realist novel," as Skorobogatov puts it: exemplary workers, courageous veterans of the Great Patriotic War, and good neighbors. Later, however, the condemned increasingly cast themselves as victims of abuse and complained of procedural violations and bureaucratic negligence. The pleas now adopted "legal talk" and demands for due process. This new language echoes a broader turn toward alternative pursuits, spiritual and otherwise, in late Soviet society as faith in the communist state faded.

Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

For and Against a United Ireland
BY FINTAN O'TOOLE AND SAM MCBRIDE. University of Notre Dame Press, 2026, 192 pp.

Many observers believe that Irish unity is a cause whose time is coming and that a vote on whether the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should merge is all but inevitable. Any such vote is likely to be as polarizing as the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence: when it comes to national unity, compromise is difficult. In this essential book, two Irish public intellectuals set forth the opposing sides of this controversial issue. The result is impressive. The reader is struck by the variety of arguments mustered on both sides and by the richness of historical background, quantitative data, and insights into Irish institutions and culture. One reason why the arguments seem at once persuasive and nuanced is that, rather than each author advocating one side, both authors co-wrote both sides of the argument. Another is their emphasis on arguing the case mostly on material grounds, with an eye to how national unity might shape economic opportunities, social welfare, health care, and education. Unity might very well allow Ireland to increase economic integration and economies of scale in the provision of government services while retaining considerable local autonomy. Only near the conclusion

do the authors seriously consider what may be the real threat to continued peace and prosperity in both parts of a future unified Ireland, namely, the temptation of Irish politicians, now quiescent, to construct and exploit real or imagined cultural differences for electoral advantage.

Enver Hoxha: Twentieth-Century Tyrant
BY ROBERT C. AUSTIN AND ARTAN R. HOXHA. Reaktion Books, 2026, 336 pp.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the decline of empires and the rise of new ideologies created over one hundred new nation-states, many led by idiosyncratic individuals. Among the oddest was Enver Hoxha, who ruled Albania from 1944 to 1985. Like Hitler and Stalin, he rose from obscure mediocrity, in his case as a provincial schoolteacher who squandered educational opportunities during a decade in France and Belgium and dabbled inconsequentially in radical politics. During World War II, both the United Kingdom and Tito's Yugoslavia supported him as a figurehead for a communist insurgency against the Nazis, then successively tried and failed to depose him. In the late 1940s, he entered office beholden to no one and suspicious of everyone. Like Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, Stalin, and other communist despots of that era, he created an Orwellian state. A peculiar personal ideology justified agricultural collectivization, successive elite purges and cultural revolutions, a lifetime commitment to Stalinism, and almost complete isolation from the world. Nearing death, at the tail end of the Cold War, he sought in vain to assure the continued ideological purity of Albania after him.

The Rise and Fall of American Europe
BY GLYN MORGAN. Polity Press, 2026, 160 pp.

This slim volume offers a sobering analysis of transatlantic relations after the end of the Cold War and the rise of the "Make America Great Again" movement in the United States, concluding that a 75-year-old "American Europe" is now collapsing. In this extreme and sometimes idiosyncratically realist view, transatlantic relations are reduced to military dealings. European unification, in Morgan's understanding, was little more than a project conceived and funded by U.S. diplomats to bolster an anti-Soviet military alliance. With the Soviet Union gone, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe becomes inevitable. MAGA Republicans are particularly vocal in their criticism because of their ideological antipathy to Europe's welfare states and liberal values. Morgan closes with a long analysis of policy options for reforming or replacing current NATO institutions, measures that look neither promising nor likely, owing to European disunity and weakness. Surprisingly for a book about twenty-first-century order, it hardly touches on economic relations in areas such as energy, arms, high tech, entertainment, pharmaceuticals, financial and digital services, in all of which the European Union remains active

and U.S.-European links robust. Such issues, not military defense, may well be the critical battleground among the United States, China, and other great powers in the decades to come.

Staging Nuremberg: How the United States and the Soviet Union Fought Over the Portrayal of Nazi Crimes
BY SYLVIE LINDEPERG. TRANSLATED BY CLAUDIA GORBMAN. Columbia University Press, 2026, 400 pp.

In this engaging book, a leading French historian of cinema reinterprets the Nuremberg trials that followed World War II as an effort to score propaganda victories to be shown on film. Both the Soviet Union and the United States sought to claim credit for prosecuting the Nazis more vigorously. They also disagreed on the larger payoff of the trial: the Soviets simply wanted to demonstrate communism's ideological purity by convicting all the defendants, whereas Western powers wanted to demonstrate the superiority of liberal democratic rule of law by allowing the occasional acquittal. The public presentation of the trials was stage-managed to a considerable degree. Lawyers refilmed their speeches before an empty courtroom to brush up both their clothing and their delivery. In the manner of a TV legal drama, boring and lethargic days of wrangling were boiled down to a few dramatic moments of lively rhetoric. Soviet and Western broadcasters suppressed sections of the proceedings when Nazi defendants, notably the senior leader Hermann Göring, got the better of cross-examiners.

The Borders of Responsibility: Migration Control in the Mediterranean Sea
BY KIRI OLIVIA SANTER. Duke University Press, 2026, 274 pp.

European countries strive to exclude migrants from across the Mediterranean, yet they rarely use outright force or measures that contravene international law. Instead, Europe has adopted new laws and rules, including, in June, the strict Pact on Migration and Asylum, intended to allow member states to block the entry of migrants indirectly. To that end, the European Union has also struck deals with its Mediterranean neighbors, notably Libya and Turkey, to help interdict migration, house migrants in camps, and repatriate them to third countries. In legal terms, the EU has blurred the precise location of borders, permitting European governments to reject and block migrants on beaches and borderlands without violating international law. Information about EU and national migration expenditures and policies remains vague; legal procedures at both levels are labyrinthine, costly, and not subject to oversight from regional courts. In this ethically engaged policy analysis, Santer, an anthropologist, charges European states with liberal hypocrisy for restricting free migration and overlooking humanitarian consequences. Her description of how policy functions is worth reading, regardless of one's position on migration.