



# EJIL: Talk!

## Blog of the European Journal of International Law

[Home](#) » [Announcements and Events](#) » Favourite Readings 2019 – Couch Vacation

### Favourite Readings 2019 – Couch Vacation

Published on [December 16, 2019](#) Author: [Johann Justus Vasel](#)

Sharing: [Follow](#) Like Share Tweet [Share](#)

As in previous years, EJIL's Review Editor, [Christian J. Tams](#) (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/law/staff/christiantams/>), has invited EJIL board members and (associate) editors to offer short reflections on their favourite books of the year 2019. No strict rules apply — the posts are meant to introduce books that left an impression, irrespective of their genre. Today we have selections from **Johann Justus Vasel**. You can read all the posts in this series [here](https://www.ejiltalk.org/tag/favourite-readings-2019/) (<https://www.ejiltalk.org/tag/favourite-readings-2019/>).

When reflecting towards the end of the year on the piles of essays and books one has waded through, my limited powers of recollection force me to think that many works are ephemeral or at least fungible. So what was actually a “good read”? It's hard to spell out the criteria, and maybe the term is also misleading. In my understanding a work qualifies to be a “good read” if I deem it to have a larger and lasting impact, if it changes or enriches my perspective. This year I selected three books from the political science arena, but they all elucidate important legal aspects. I hope that you will find them as meaningful as I do.

#### **Luuk van Middelaar, *Alarums and Excursions: Improvising Politics on the European Stage* (Agenda Publishing, 2019)**

While it reads like a thriller, this book provides one of the most lucid and profound analyses of European politics in recent years. Middelaar shares his insider knowledge as the former political adviser to the first President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, in tracing and characterizing the fundamental changes of the crisis-ridden European Union. He elegantly blends a birds-eye perspective and microscopical perceptions, diary-like memories and fundamental insights from political theory to display the metamorphosis of the Union. European integration, once marked and motivated by de-politicization and de-dramatization, has turned into an increasingly political endeavour due to unprecedented threats that seemed to require visible gestures. Middelaar poignantly shows that this transition from governance to government, from rule-based to event-politics, from backstage to front stage, is also characterized by a decade of improvisation. Accordingly, the book begins with a quote by Miles Davis, praising the virtues of improvisation. Let's hope that the EU does not pass away at the premature age of 65, like the “king of cool”, and instead succeeds with magical impromptus (think of Schubert) and creative improvisations (again, think of Miles). In any case, this perspicuous, arresting, and insightful book on Europe is a must-read for every practitioner, student and scholar interested in the Union.

#### About the Author(s)

##### Johann Justus Vasel



**Johann Justus Vasel** received his doctorate from the University of Hamburg, did his legal traineeship

at the Berlin Court of Appeal and completed his master's degree at New York University. He is a currently a Max Weber Fellow at the EUI (Florence), teaches European and public international law at the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) and serves as the Associate Editor of the European Journal of International Law (EJIL). [Read Full](#)  
[More posts by the Author »](#)

#### EJIL: *Live!*

[New episode is now live.](#)  
(<http://www.ejil.org/live.php>)

#### Subscribe to EJIL: Talk! for email updates

Email \*

#### Recent Comments

**John R Morss** [Thankyou](#)

[Henning a very useful and timely contribution to a very important debate. Going off at a bit of a tangent, Vattel \(who the auto... –](#)  
**Jan 20**

**Heiko** [Germany is on the side of the Saudis. Isn't that much worse? –](#)  
**Jan 20**

**Kishan Datta** [These are really](#)