This volume originated in an initiative of the three editors who organized through the Association Internationale de l’Histoire Contemporaine de l’Europe (AIHCE) two conferences commemorating the year 1956, one devoted to „Europe in 1956“ and the other to „Global 1956“. Thanks to these two approaches we have here a very original book centred on new researches and global thinking. From the European point of view we rarely think about 1956 on a global scale or tend to interpret it exclusively on terms of Cold War polarization. The chronology at the end (p.309-313) helps also to elaborate a very precise timing of the events of that rather stormy year. The editors have divided the papers received in four relevant parts following the topics chosen for the conferences: Cold War, Whither Communism?, Old and New Problems, Global Challenges. Unfortunately this architecture relegates the non European themes in the two last parts but it may have been impossible to do otherwise. Still the papers fit in their parts and the result is highly satisfactory from the formal point of view as well as regarding the scientific content. The historians gathered here offer very different perspectives following their own specialities and the major contribution of the book is to enhance new researches on specific fields like the history of the sport, or to offer analysis based on new archives. Thus in the Cold War chapter, we have the combination of new approaches with the paper by Carole Fink (Cold War Culture and Politics in Europe in 1956) which introduces the concept of generations which is very relevant for the case of Eastern Europe but also for the West as she convincingly demonstrates. New archives enable also an insight look into the activities of the private sector as shown by Volker Berghahn’s paper on the Ford Foundation (1956: the Ford Foundation and America’s Cultural Cold War in Eastern Europe) which was one of the actors of the Détente. Still this paper tends slightly to follow the actual tendency of the American historiography pretending that the collapse of the Communist regimes originates only in the activism of the West i.e. the United States, this is at least contestable. The third and last contribution of this section by Norbert Wiggershaus (Elements of NATO’s Nuclear War Scenarios in 1956) elucidates the balance of terror as it was elaborated from the 1950s on with the emergence of the Warsaw Pact, the arms race paradoxically eliminates the risk of a war even if the danger of escalation remains: the military and moreover the atomic threat plays an important role in the propagandas on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The second chapter explores some relatively less known aspects of the Communist World, to begin with the process of decision-making which led to the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Thanks to the publication of new archives since 1996, the inside story of the Hungarian revolution has made a considerable progress. If nowadays everyone agrees on the inevitable character of the intervention, its timing and the struggle among Soviet leaders still has some shadows which Peter Kenez (Khrushchev and Hungary 1956) tries to clear. Another rather mysterious part of the story lies in the attitude of Tito which Andrey Edemskiy’s paper (Tito and Khrushchev after the 20th Party Congress: the New Nature of Soviet-Yugoslav Relations) very interestingly elucidates by showing the stubbornness of the Yugoslav leader and his refusal to align with the block. Finally the impact and consequences of 1956 in Poland are examined by Pawel Machewicz (The Polish 1956), especially the contrast between the June uprising and its resolute nationalistic and religious nature and the October movement which goes along with the party leadership. Leaning on the still efficient apparatus, Gomulka succeeds where Nagy fails. The local archives are explored in this case thanks to the Institute for National Remembrance where the funds have been recently transferred.

Global problems are mainly the subject of the third and fourth parts and may give at first sight a less coherent impression, but they are nevertheless connected through the
Cold War and decolonization topics. Since the Korean War, the Cold War has expanded worldwide and the outcome of World War II has paved the way to the contestation of the colonial powers. The paper by Mathieu Segers (The Federal Republic of Germany and the Common Market: Controversy, Crisis and „Chancellor-Politics”) recalls the first concrete steps towards European Union and shows again the importance of the nuclear factor, both France and Germany find their interest in „control through cooperation”, the politics of Adenauer’s ‘Westbindung’ meets with Mollet’s European ambitions and French economic concerns. Instrumentalization is also the subject of Motti Golani’s contribution (Israel and the 1956 Sinai War: Between Relevancy and Anachronism): Israel needs a protector and oscillates before the Suez crisis between a very short Soviet rapprochement, a traditional Anglo-French inclination and a desire to enter the American sphere of influence. But Golani shows that both the beginning and the issue of the crisis follow the British and French timetable. Here’s war an instrument in the search for alliances and it is mainly the French who are interested in such a combination. The colonial implications mentioned in this article make a perfect transition to the next one by Bill Nasson (Contesting Racism in South Africa). Attempts at decolonization happen practically everywhere in Africa at the end of the 1950s and the first independences occur from 1956 on but the case of South Africa is particular for the new leadership engages in the Apartheid movement, contested by various groups around the Freedom Charter but Nasson very interestingly points at the debate between multiracial and non-racial society which has still its echo today.

The global challenges of the fourth part are again only apparently divergent: the main common ground is decolonization as recalled in the speech held by McMillan in Cape Town on February 4th, 1960. The „wind of change” which makes the title of William Keylor’s paper (The Wind of Change in 1956) blows from Asia where an almost unknown plot is staged against Kim il-Sung to Africa. Keylor remarks very relevantly that during the Suez crisis, France and the United States had a reverse opposition to the situation of today’s Middle East crisis: then was France Israel’s main support and the US advocated the liberation of Arab peoples because they didn’t want to appear on the side of a colonial power in the climate of the Cold War when colonization was a main target of the Soviet propaganda; nowadays stands France for the right of the Palestinians and is of one Israel’s major critics. Among the new challenges of the 1950s are oil and sports, the first one playing a significant role in the Suez crisis which reveals the new importance of oil, making it a tool in the nationalistic argumentation of Nasser as it is still today in Latin America. The decline of the American share in the production as consumption rises is the key to Raymond Stokes’ contribution (Oil as a primary Source of Energy) which also shows how oil becomes a factor of decolonization and non-alignment. The Olympic Games are another tribune of the decolonization process even if the Melbourne games remained a white males’ affair. Keys’ paper (The 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games and the Post-war International Order) explores a field of research not yet sufficiently considered. She demonstrates how the 1956 Games were more touched by the Hungarian crisis (boycotts and bloody rivalry) than by Suez or the decolonization process. Still is Melbourne the first Soviet triumph in the matter of medals and the tensions of 1956 make in the future the IOC an actor of the Cold War as well as a field of conquest for the new Nations. This global development doesn’t leave the Holy See untouched and the Vatican is engaged in the battles of the Cold War as well as in the decolonization process which is shown in the contribution by Peter Kent (Religion and the Changing World Order: The Roman Catholic Church and the Global Crisis of 1956). On the one hand Pius XII remains intransigent and refuses to compromise with the Communist regimes and imperils by that the churches of Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the Pontiff has an ear for anti-colonial discourse by nominating more native clerics. The choice between anti-communism and anti-colonialism characterises the last years of the Pontificate. The pacific coexistence is definitely the work of his successors.

Beyond the crisis of 1956, the Détente is on
her way and in all topics mentioned, the following years show that the tensions of the 1950s are certainly not forgotten, but both West and East make a step toward each other in order to preserve the international balance of powers. The Cold War becomes more a question of propaganda on every subject and a worldwide agenda in which other problems are encompassed such as decolonization, European integration and other long terms processes which began during the 1950s. The present volume has the merit of giving a global and comparative look on this evolution.