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LETTERS

The Economist, 25 St James's Street, London SW1A 1HG
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Going west

SIR—You imply in your survey of Central Europe (November 18th) that the closer people are to the West, the more civilised they are. Really? Western Europe has brought death and destruction to the East for centuries—think of Ancient Rome, the crusades, Napoleonic France and 20th-century Germany. The apparently cultured people of Central Europe closed their eyes when millions of their Jewish compatriots were rounded up by the Nazis. Those “rough” Balkan people, as the Bulgarians, did not. Post-communism created a yearning for the West’s material wealth, but not for its supposedly superior cultural values. The cradle of western democracy is to be found not west of Vienna, but south of Bulgaria (in an orthodox Christian EU country). And Bulgaria, judging by its politics and economics, is no more backward than Slovakia and Hungary, which you seem to think more qualified for membership of the European Union.
Staunton,
Virginia

VLADIMIR GARKOV

West would then have been plain for all to see. However, the French and the British are reluctant to extend the benefit of what is in effect a guarantee to the Poles, who have a turbulent history of quarrelling with their neighbours. Would a war between Poland and, say, Lithuania or Belarus really threaten the West’s vital interests, however undesirable that war may be? This is reminiscent of the “*Faut-il mourir pour Dantzig?*” debate that raged throughout France during the phoney war. By the same reasoning, one should let the Czech Republic into NATO as soon as practicable, as it occupies a key strategic location within Europe—and, critically, does not share a common border with any part of the former Soviet Union.

DOMINIC DE LA BARRE
Luxembourg D’ERQUELINNES

SIR—The Polish elections help make your point about the Habsburg legacy: the more *gemütlich*, cosy, Catholic Lech Walesa won in the former Habsburg lands; the modern, slickly packaged Alexander Kwasniewski carried most of the rest of the country.

Amherst,
Massachusetts

JOSEPH LAKE

Star struck

SIR—Your response to the “winners take all” syndrome (Economics focus, November 25th) is commendably neo-classical. The

rewards to superstars are market-determined; there is no obvious reason to suspect market failure—other than a possible prisoners’ dilemma; therefore these rewards can be seen as market-clearing and mostly (socially) efficient.

But the classical economists recognised an important third function of the price system: social justice. Modern economists should pay closer attention to the social legitimacy with which these telephone-number salaries are regarded. Earnings of sports and entertainment personalities might, perhaps, reflect the popular social esteem in which these people are held, but the same is far more difficult to argue for many business executives, securities traders and lawyers.

The overthrow of socialism may in effect have eliminated respectable concern for the perceived justice and legitimacy of our economic system. Is it beside the point, however, to reflect that this overthrow was based (*inter alia*) on the increasingly apparent lack of social legitimacy of the overthrown system? I suggest that a society which seeks to ensure that people are worth what they are paid will ultimately outlast one that simply relies on crude market forces to pay people what they can get.

Newcastle upon Tyne

DAVID HARVEY

Israel’s mission

SIR—Rob Kent (Letters, November 25th) would have Israel abandon its historical mission as the state of the Jewish people. When he has found a way to restore to the Jewish people the life and property lost over the past 2,000 years to anti-Semitic repression and violence, he might question the need for the creation, 47 years ago, of a state for them.

Lawrence,
New York

ROBERT KANTOWITZ

Heads of state

SIR—Using the frequently cited example of Mary Robinson, Ireland’s president, Bagehot argues that the election of a head of state need not bring in a “party hack” (November 25th). He forgets that in 1976, Cearball O’Dalaigh, the then president of Ireland, resigned after being called “a thundering disgrace” by the minister of defence for exercising his con-

stitutional right to refer a bill to the Irish Supreme Court. He was in effect driven from office by a government minister.

The question of whether we wish to dispense with the monarchy resolves itself into the question of whether we wish to grant this sort of power to ministers and party leaders. Frankly, I do not think we need a referendum to discover the answer.

Oxford VERNON BOGDANOR

Pre-war Bosnia

SIR—In your article on Bosnia (November 25th), you say that in February 1992, before the war had started, Lord Carrington and I “drafted a constitution that would have turned the country into a confederation of Swiss-style cantons. The Muslims refused to accept what they considered to be the disintegration of Bosnia.” Not quite.

After several rounds of talks our “principles for future constitutional arrangements for Bosnia and Hercegovina” were agreed by the three parties (Muslim, Serb and Croat) in Sarajevo on March 18th as the basis for future negotiations. These continued, maps and all, until the summer, when the Muslims reneged on the agreement. Had they not done so, the Bosnian question might have been settled earlier, with less loss of (mainly Muslim) life and land. To be fair, President Izetbegovic and his aides were encouraged to scupper that deal and to fight for a unitary Bosnian state by well-meaning outsiders who thought they knew better.

Brussels

JOSE CUTILEIRO
Secretary-general
Western-European
Union

EMUsing

SIR—You suggest that, as the name for an alternative European currency, “Euro” would be unbearable (“Marked”, November 18th). I disagree. In fact, it is quite in keeping with the antipodean name of its originating organisation, the EMU. As any Australian school-child knows, the euro is a small, endearing marsupial, like a small wallaby. Perhaps Europe’s financial bureaucrats are trying to send a subtle message?

Palo Alto,
California

DAVID HENKEL-WALLACE

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