

Solbes and the euro

SIR—Your leader on Ireland (“Ireland’s euro-sins”, February 17th) fails to take into account the fundamentals of the EMU model. The notion of national but co-ordinated economic policies is not only embedded in the Maastricht treaty but is also necessary to ensure an appropriate policy mix against a background of a single monetary policy. The coherence, consistency and predictability of the euro-area’s economic policy management is important for the credibility of our currency over the medium term. Big or small does not make any difference here. The commission will act according to the treaty any time inconsistencies of a similar nature appear.

PEDRO SOLBES
EU Commissioner
for Economic and
Monetary Affairs

Brussels

Arab information

SIR—You claim that “the fear that Arabs ‘in the street’ can force governments to action” is long gone (“Sharon’s Israel”, February 10th). This is wrong. The crossborder influence of satellite television, like Qatar’s Al Jazeera station, as well as the Internet, has broken completely the monopoly on the control of information previously held tightly by Arab governments. This has had a powerful impact on the diplomatic behaviour of Arab leaders since the start of the latest Palestinian *intifada* last September. To ignore popular

feeling could risk local demonstrations on local grievances, legitimised by displays of support for the Palestinians.

London SIMON HENDERSON

SIR—Your article on the reaction of the Arab world to Ariel Sharon’s election contains an error in military history (“Fear of Sharon”, February 10th). You say that “Egyptians remember that it was Mr Sharon who flouted a ceasefire during the 1973 war, counter-attacking across the Suez Canal to turn Egypt’s initial success into near-defeat.” In fact, there was no ceasefire until Israel had already been on the west bank of the Suez Canal for four days. The first ceasefire was broken by Egyptian units that had been surrounded and were trying to break through to their own lines. By any military standards, Mr Sharon and his compatriots had turned the Egyptian attack into a complete defeat. Only pressure from Henry Kissinger kept the Egyptian 3rd Army from being destroyed totally as the ceasefire became final.

Delran,
New Jersey DAN POLLAK

SIR—Milton Hirsch (Letters, February 17th) quotes Arthur Balfour. Could I remind him of a passage in the Balfour Declaration that tends to be forgotten by Israel’s apologists. It stipulates that nothing should be done “which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” It is

precisely this which successive Israeli governments and Jewish settlers in the occupied territories have been doing for decades.

London PATRICK WRIGHT

Bath control

SIR—The Japanese bathhouse owner who balked at admitting a recently naturalised foreigner (“Bathroom blues”, February 10th) is in company that is easily recognisable. London’s gentlemen’s clubs, America’s country clubs, nightclubs and other private businesses often screen their members. But the Japanese bathhouse owner on the rural island of Hokkaido is surely atypical. As a resident of Japan for 26 years, I used neighbourhood bathhouses in my student days and was never rejected. Estate agents often declined to present me to landlords, but you persevere until you earn acceptance.

Though it is possible to acquire nationality here, Japanese still chiefly tie the concept to one of blood, not residence. Thus, there is not a satisfactory Japanese word for “citizen”. But having worked for Japanese companies, obtained a permanent-resident’s permit and bank loans, purchased a house, and married and raised children whose Japanese mother can confer nationality, I do not think the tired argument that Japan is closed holds much bathwater.

Yokohama BRUCE ROSCOE

Diplomatic immunity

SIR—Brazilian diplomats are unused to defending their country’s interests (“Trade beefs”, February 10th). After industrialisation began in Brazil in the early 1950s rapid growth was the outcome of a state-led strategy based on protection and subsidy. Trade was seen as an evil that perpetuated technological, financial and military dependency on the countries of the north. Under this ideology a school of foreign-policy thinking emerged at Brazil’s Ministry of Foreign Relations. Its influence was strengthened as industrialisation advanced and diplomatic instruction and careers became more structured.

In the early 1990s a so-called

neo-liberal revolution struck in Brazil. If the turn in economic policies was rapid and effective the same cannot be said about ideological change in the higher echelons of the diplomatic service. In spite of a general recognition of the quality of their instruction, Brazilian diplomats are still generally critical of the idea that freer trade is intrinsically good for the country. That ideological bias, in turn, reduces their willingness to seek to reduce trade barriers erected against Brazilian exports by industrialised nations.

CARLOS PIO
University of
Brasilia

Brasilia

After a fashion

SIR—As you say, the main achievement of Rose Marie Bravo at Burberry is to have rejuvenated a brand that has needed it for some time (Face value, February 3rd). Burberry has improved its presentation in the media, brought in new designers to improve style and fit, regained control of overseas licences and cut the cord with the Asian market making it a trendier British brand. Other problems, such as the Asian grey market, were on Burberry’s agenda well before Ms Bravo came on board.

As for the transformation of Burberry’s image, this also started before Ms Bravo joined. It had been obvious for years that Burberry needed a facelift and new advertising campaigns with younger models and well-known photographers had been launched already. Ms Bravo pushed this further and moved the image to a very much younger and trendier market.

Frankfurt SANDRINE HARRIS

SIR—Sometimes, lack of public acceptance of a brand is a result of unfortunate associations of which the maker may be unaware. Some years ago, a friend bought a Burberry raincoat but his wife dissuaded him from wearing it. It seemed that she had heard that it was of the type favoured by flashers.

Colinton,
Canada JOHN ROBERTS

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Brasil e a OMC

“Ótima a matéria de Celso Pinto publicada no **Valor** de 21/2 à pág. A2, ‘O Brasil aprendeu a brigar na OMC’. Segundo minha experiência, as autoridades norte-americanas nem pensaram que seu país seria desafiado na OMC mas, sim, o processo vale para todos.

Pode interessar que elas estão despertando à realidade de que algumas potências comerciais, inclusive o Brasil, insistem em exportar quando não chegam a servir satisfatoriamente seu mercado nacional. Formulam-se perguntas sobre por quê não podem se servir primeiro. Relativamente poucos passam fome nos ‘ricos’; a infra-estrutura é adequada e assim por diante.

Na questão das patentes, o ministro Serra precisa as quebrar porque despencou o real. Será que realmente se podem culpar os ‘ricos’ e/ou os laboratórios internacionais? Será interessante saber como a questão entrará no jogo no futuro.”

LOUIS RIGGIO

Diretor Executivo - Accuracy Associates International Hollywood, FL, EUA

“A propósito do excelente artigo de Celso Pinto, ‘O Brasil aprendeu a brigar na OMC’, envio carta que escrevi ao editor da revista ‘The Economist’ e que foi publicada em 22/2, na qual

abordo o problema sob uma ótica mais acadêmica que a dele.

‘Os diplomatas brasileiros não estão acostumados a defender os interesses de seu país na maneira necessária pelas novas regulamentações implementadas após o final da rodada Uruguai do GATT em 1993. Isto resulta de um simples fato: a ideologia de desenvolvimento econômico voltada para dentro que o país implementou a partir dos anos 50 também influenciou a profissão do diplomata. Agora que o país está começando a levar a sério a competição internacional — como resultado da necessidade de se atrair investimentos externos devida a crise externa dos anos 80 mas também como resultado dos ganhos de competitividade que seguiram as reformas pró-mercado da década de 90 — as fracas habilidades de negociação dos diplomatas estão mais evidentes.

Se as mudanças recentes nas políticas econômicas foram rápidas e efetivas, o mesmo não se pode dizer sobre a mudança ideológica nos altos escalões do serviço diplomático. Apesar da reconhecida qualidade de sua instrução, os diplomatas brasileiros ainda são bastante críticos à idéia de que o comércio livre é intrinsecamente bom para o país. Este viés ideológico, por seu lado, diminui seu empenho em procurar reduzir as barreiras tarifárias que foram levantadas

contras as exportações brasileiras pelas nações industrializadas. Assim, o problema da defesa dos interesses comerciais brasileiros parece ser menos relacionado aos arranjos institucionais que restringem as decisões sobre a política comercial e mais relacionado com o compromisso ideológico de seu corpo diplomático com ideologias opostas ao comércio livre.”

CARLOS PIO

Professor — UnB Brasília, DF

Deus é brasileiro!

“O fim do racionamento foi possível não graças ao trabalho eficaz desse governo medíocre, e sim aos céus, que enviaram chuva. Bem que costumamos dizer que ‘Deus é brasileiro’. Isso, mais uma vez, foi provado.”

FERNANDO AL-EGYPTO

Petrópolis, RJ

Correção

Diferentemente do publicado em 21/2 à pág. A8, na reportagem “Inflação recua, mas menos que o esperado”, o IPC-Fipe, na segunda quadrissemana, fechou a 0,30%, ou seja, 0,04 ponto percentual abaixo da taxa apurada na quadrissemana anterior.

Diferentemente do publicado em 18/2 à pág. D3 na coluna Vaivém, Cláudia Costin assumiu o cargo de CEO da Promon Intelligens.