

Reply

Greece's democratic spirit

As a British citizen of Greek origin who lives both in Greece and Britain, I read your article Has Greece finally escaped the grip of catastrophe? (20 July) with great interest. It was well balanced in quoting some Greek politicians who realise Greeks can no longer live beyond their means and also accurately described the punitive aggression that the EU has levied on Greece in its series of bailout packages.

One interesting new factor that emerged this year is the 80% levy on the water bills that Greeks have to pay, which is taxed at 24%. This was a result of a European directive to lend the government money to build water reservoirs in Athens, Thessaloniki and Volos. It hits all users of this basic utility very hard, and the miracle is that Greeks have paid it. Indeed, it is an illustration of the general, if reluctant, acceptance Greeks have adopted of the austerity that has hit the country.

Greece needs Europe, but perhaps Europe needs Greece. At a time when populist rightwing governments are emerging elsewhere in Europe, Greece is an example of faith in democracy.

Tina Marinos
Pessada, Greece

World Cup aftermath

Prior to the Russian World Cup, negative reports warning fans about the big bad wolf got lots of exposure. A glum and unfriendly public and racist hooligans were some of the awaiting perils. But post-match tweets and reports didn't bear out the prophecies. Instead, visitors were unanimous in praise of Russia and how the World Cup panned out.

This has not deterred the animus of writers who continue to see Russia as the evil empire. Of such humour is Shaun Walker's article (13 July). He provides authenticity by mentioning host venues and Russian citizens' names. The shadowy characters speak guardedly about the completion of infrastructure but also mention what we're supposedly all aware of: in Russia nothing gets done without corruption. Negative



Portokalis / Alamy

quotes are attributed to known government critics with the assurance they'll never be refuted. Par for the course are a few statements from prominent jailbirds. Convicts in Russia become "dissidents".

The question is then asked: what happens once the circus leaves town? The answer, culled from earlier predictions, is that the magnificent football stadiums will crumble into ruin as Russia once again puts on its glum exterior. *O tempora! O mores!*

Chris Rezel
Rosebery, NT, Australia

The value of empathy

Oliver Burkeman (13 July) reports a survey suggesting that, if one person disagrees with another politically then they will probably mistrust that person's judgment in unrelated fields. He goes on to suggest why this may even be rational: if a dermatologist is Republican, and Republicans tend to deny manmade climate change, then the dermatologist's judgment about some skin conditions may be equally eccentric.

However, other reactions to political disagreement are less defensible. There is a tendency, stemming from an inability to empathise with values different from our own, to misexplain differences in terms of dishonesty or the peculiarities of a group. Wouldn't we have been more immune to the appeals of populism if we had better empathised with Hitler's appeal to the values of belonging and personal pride -

which he spun as nationalism, racial identity and the idea that he would make Germany great again?

Tim Miles
Scarisbrick, UK

Brexit ignorance abounds

The crisis that has arisen over Brexit, and the effect it will have on the manufacture of Airbus aircraft wings (20 July), must drive any thinking individual into despair. Is there anyone in the British government with an understanding of manufacturing? Is there no one who understands the amount of time, expertise and sheer hard work that is required to sustain such industries? Is there anyone in the government with qualifications in engineering? I doubt it very much.

And so the country staggers on, led by a group of people who, if they had to go out and work in industry for a living, would soon be on the breadline. What have the British done to deserve such chaos?

Derek Malpass
Hohenthann, Germany

Briefly

● I read with alarm Anna Clark's report on the trials of Flint, Michigan, residents to get a glass of clean water (20 July). But there is no reference to the charges faced by those incompetent officials who wilfully endangered public safety. Or have they settled into their retirement?

Mark Paskal
Clovelly, NSW, Australia

● Your endless reporting on Trump and Brexit is boring me to smithereens. Your 20 July issue had 15 articles on the two subjects and it was the same the week before. Surely you can write about the many other countries in the world?

Oliver Kerr
Adelaide, South Australia

● Nothing will halt the sixth extinction (13 July) except a massive cull of the vast herds of *Homo sapiens* infesting the planet. Lions eating rhino poachers is a munch in the right direction.

Douglas Porteous
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

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The world's view on ... the heatwave



Asian Correspondent 'Frequent heatwaves'

"As global carbon emissions continue to rise and predictions suggest the world will be unable to hold global temperature rises this century to below 2C above pre-industrial levels, widespread heatwaves are very likely to get worse and become more frequent."

The Local, Sweden 'Fighting future fires'

"Sweden's primary concern should not be to purchase specialised water bombing planes, but to promote investment in more firefighting resources for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Only when we have access to massive firefighting resources can we feel safe, as wildfires may easily break out in many countries simultaneously. It is EU co-operation that will be necessary to manage the fires of the future. Buying a plane must be part of a bigger strategy."

National Post, Canada 'No coincidence'

"The sustained and searing temperatures hitting Britain, Africa, Canada and Japan cannot be a coincidence. The heatwave of 1976 may have been a freak, experts said, but the serious heat was confined mainly to the UK and western Europe; now it is happening all at once across the planet."

New York Times 'Climate change'

"Heatwaves can be linked to climate change in several ways: increased greenhouse gases hold more of the sun's heat, raising temperatures. A hotter climate changes the way air and ocean currents move around the planet, which can further increase temperatures."

Observer