

'Last chance for Maastricht' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (14 December 1992)

Caption: On 14 December 1992, commenting on the conclusions of the Edinburgh European Council, the German daily newspaper the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung describes the efforts undertaken by the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the French President François Mitterrand to avoid a breakdown in the Maastricht Treaty.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Fest, Joachim; Jeske, Jürgen; Müller-Vogg, Hugo; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 14.12.1992, Nr. 290. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Letzte Chance für Maastricht", auteur:Hort, Peter , p. 1.

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Last chance for Maastricht

by Peter Hort

This is a black day for Europe. The bold plans for the European Union, begun in a spirit of hope in Maastricht last December, may well now collapse through failing confidence and introversion. Many people in Europe are afraid of losing their homeland to a world controlled and administered by distant bureaucrats. The Danes and the British are undecided whether or not they will finally agree to this step into the unknown. In addition, the EC governments are once again arguing about money: at home, financial burdens and economic difficulties are piling up, exchange rate turbulence simply feeding doubts about monetary union. France refuses to accept the agricultural compromise in GATT — and the battles and rapes in the Balkans are still being dismissed with a shrug.

At the ‘crisis summit’ in Edinburgh, it must have seemed important to the 12 Heads of State or Government to put in at least a few props to shore up the Community structure that was under threat. They were successful for the time being in the particularly endangered areas. After a dramatic night of negotiations, in which, at times, the whole future financing of the Community seemed likely to collapse, Prime Minister John Major was able to present a notably successful outcome. For one thing, his negotiating success provided him and, indeed, the Community with some breathing space: things could have been far worse. Breathing a sigh of relief, the Twelve may note that they are still on the road to their ultimate goal of European Union, that further money will flow principally to the poorer Member States, but also to the new German Federal *Länder* in the east. The Federal Chancellor may also be satisfied that the number of German Members in the Strasbourg Parliament will, at last, be increased.

Initially, of course, emergency surgery was needed on the Treaty that had been wasting away for months. Many have already given it up — some with pleasure, others with sadness. In order to save Maastricht, EC negotiators have made extensive concessions to the Danes — many say too extensive. In a sort of ‘gentlemen’s agreement’, binding under international law and yet not requiring ratification, they have been assured that they can opt out for an indefinite period from all the important parts of the Maastricht Treaty. Concessions that, to a lesser degree, the British secured after considerable effort a year ago under the Treaty have now been granted to the Danes outside the Treaty, with a handshake just as if it were horse-trading. Let the legal eagles argue as to whether or not Community law has been bent beyond recognition by this: what counts is the political will to save the Treaty, whatever the cost.

Anyone who thinks that this show of strength was unnecessary really underestimates the dangers that might stem from a breakdown in this almost incomprehensible, incomplete and thoroughly risky ‘super-treaty’. The Community’s myocardium — reconciliation between France and Germany — might be affected, with incalculable consequences for the generally peaceful order that has existed since the war. What is more, a reunited Germany without strong alliances would be insufferable to itself, to France and to the other Member States. That is why ‘Maastricht’ has, over a period of time, become a symbol of the interlocking of the nations. Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand are struggling to maintain the Treaty against the tendency towards disintegration that is gradually surrounding them. They are not, however, prepared to bow to threats: if the Danes and the British have not ratified the Treaty by the middle of next year, they will complete the European Union without them.

They are totally serious in this. Nevertheless, the rebels may rest easy. For the time being, the family of Twelve stays together, and, in January, accession negotiations will begin with Austria, Sweden and Finland, by which London and Copenhagen set particularly great store. Whether this speeds up the ratification process remains to be seen, as does the effect of the special settlement with Denmark. Should the Danes actually approve the Treaty next spring, it will presumably not go unnoticed in the third and final round of voting for ratification in the British House of Commons. However, should the Danes vote ‘No’ a second time — an eventuality that no one should exclude — ‘Maastricht’ will have been wrecked, because it can be implemented only by all 12 Member States or not at all. A total schism would then threaten, and what had been a marriage contract might well turn into divorce papers. In Edinburgh, it was made clear that Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand would then put into effect their plan for a ‘little Europe’ of six,

eight or ten states willing to integrate, a possibility that they have already discussed from time to time.

It has not got to that stage yet. In Edinburgh, the final attempt was made to save the Europe of the founding fathers and their dream of a European federal state. Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand feel that they are all the stronger as the heirs of Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer at a time when the dream seems to be fading and not to have the strength to withstand reality. With each new Member State that joins the Community, a new European image emerges, more colourful and diverse than the old one. And only when the fledgling democracies of Central and Eastern Europe become full members will a multispeed Europe — or a Europe with various degrees of integration — have become reality. Perhaps this is the only way that the Old Continent can survive.