

'Norway's emotional "No" from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (27 September 1972)

Caption: On 27 September 1972, in its coverage of the negative outcome of the popular referendum in Norway on the country's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung leads on the European and domestic political repercussions of this refusal.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Dürrmeier, Hans ; R Herausgeber Heigert, H. 27.09.1972, Nr. 222; 28. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Norwegens emotionales Nein", auteur:Schröder, Dieter , p. 4.

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Norway's emotional 'No'

By Dieter Schröder

The Norwegian voters' 'No' to EEC accession will, for the time being, mean a political crisis only for Norway and not for the European Community. The Norwegian referendum may nevertheless have consequences for the EEC and for the future shape of Europe. The Community of the Ten, whose reality had already been taken for granted, has overnight shrunk to nine, and if the Danes also say 'No' next Monday, there will be only eight. It will be difficult for the European Summit Meeting in Paris to overlook this fact with a smile and get on with its agenda. The concept of European unification is likely to suffer further damage if problems arise not only from deepening, that is to say movement towards a greater sense of community, but also from enlargement.

Although there is no doubt that the Norwegian referendum was decided by the heart, by the fears of the farmers and the fishermen for their existence, this should nevertheless not reassure the EEC. This 'No' was aided and abetted not only by the tactically astute Norwegian EEC opponents but also by the Members of the EEC Council of Ministers themselves, who obstinately resisted the perfectly understandable need for protection of Norway's agricultural and fishing industries. Although Prime Minister Trygve Bratteli had been dragging EEC negotiations out, he eventually had to sign an Accession Treaty that fell short not only of his own expectations but above all of those of many of his voters. At that time, Mr Bratteli had a majority of only one vote in the Storting in favour of EEC accession anyway. If the EEC had truly wanted Norway to accede, it would have been perfectly possible for it to assist him in his balancing act. Although the referendum is not binding for the parliamentary decision, Brussels as well as Oslo were aware that, in the case of a 'No', some wavering Members would have moved into the camp of the EEC opponents.

In Brussels, Paris, Bonn and, recently, also in London, it is easy to talk about defending the principles laid down in the Rome Treaties. Smaller neighbours such as Norway and Denmark, however, can allay only with difficulty the suspicion that eventually — as in the case of the common fisheries policy — the interests of the bigger countries will nonetheless coincide with the principles. It was this fear of the EEC juggernaut and of the capital of the large countries that led the Norwegian fishermen and farmers to maintain their 'No'. In their opinion, their interests are better defended outside the EEC. The fishing industry, whose main customer is the USA at all events, can now without any opposition call on Oslo to follow the example of Iceland and introduce the 50-mile protection zone. The farmers, struggling to cope with an unfavourable climate, cannot receive the same kind of protection from the EEC as they are guaranteed by the Norwegian welfare state. Nevertheless, the attitude of the fishermen and farmers is short-sighted, because Norway is also quickly changing into an industrial society, and accession was very important to the industry. The reproach, however, that interests had been favoured over principles must not be directed exclusively at the farmers and fishermen; the Paris Summit Meeting would have to discuss this subject in a broader context.

In view of the close ties between Denmark and Norway, the Danes may now be expected to vote against EEC accession next Monday as well (and their 'No' would be binding). Although Great Britain and Germany are the main customers of Danish agriculture, in Denmark, as in Norway, the partly politically motivated feelings against the EEC are very strong. If Norway and Denmark were to remain apart, some very serious dangers would result from this: the traditionally democratic element, as the British view it, will be weakened, as will the EEC's inner balance. Anti-marketeers might gain the upper hand at the Labour Party Conference as early as next week, and commit a future Labour Government to *withdraw* from the EEC. Such a decision would further harm the future of the EEC. Most of the EEC opponents in Norway and Denmark are also against NATO membership and will now try to enforce withdrawal from NATO. The neutralisation of the whole of Scandinavia would, however, severely weaken NATO's northern flank. For the time being, however, Norway is undergoing the most serious government crisis since the end of the war, and it will be difficult, after Mr Bratelli's announced resignation, to find a way out of this, as the Storting parties, deeply divided on EEC matters, will not be able quickly to form a coalition capable of governing.