

'L'Europe oui, Maastricht non' from Der Spiegel (14 September 1992)

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L'Europe oui, Maastricht non

Rudolf Augstein

If anyone wants to know why the battle over the Treaties of Maastricht has now degenerated into a round of scare mongering, they should take a look at what is currently happening in France.

François Mitterrand speaks of a 'battle that will be harder than I had expected' when talking about the referendum that he himself has set for 20 September. His Prime Minister, Pierre Bérégovoy, is of the opinion that:

A 'no' would lead to a division between France and Germany. The Germans would then regain their autonomy and, in future, look more to the East than to the West.

The former Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, is quite blatant in immediately bringing up the heavy artillery:

We must not make 20 September into another political Munich.

He also feels obliged to protect Germany from 'its demons', while the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, suggests that Helmut Kohl's generation will be the last pro-European one in Germany, because it will be succeeded by the Rostock skinheads.

Now, of course, we are aware that France, too, was and is possessed by 'demons' of which there is every reason to be afraid. What has to be worrying for us, however, is the fact that the so frequently invoked friendship between France and Germany barely exists in actual practice.

Germany will ratify the Treaty of Maastricht without any ifs and buts, not for economic reasons, which are predominantly against it, but because Chancellor Kohl is bowing down twice before the tricolour 'to be on the safe side'. The European card is the trump in this country, whatever it may look like.

In France, this is not so certain. The great Charles de Gaulle, the archetypal statesman, called a completely unnecessary referendum in 1969, lost it and subsequently resigned as a matter of course. Now this has been turned around

Since, thanks to some serious mistakes, Mitterrand is not exactly at the pinnacle of his popularity, it is being suggested by the *Figaro* columnist, Jean d'Ormesson, that he should resign if the French approve Maastricht.

Politicians, however, are not normally made that way, and especially not monarchs. Why should this one, who has the street where he lives closed off so that he is not affected by the traffic, think of resigning when he is bringing off something that he considers to be right from the French perspective? That would not only require magnanimity, it would also be politically unwise.

The everyday ordinary French people are not afraid of Germany. And why should they be? For the first time in its history, Germany is a territory within secure borders, without any special claims, and is more of a republic than the constitutionally rather fuzzy France.

It is true that Mitterrand made a mistake, although he — allegedly — always carefully calculates absolutely everything, as he is fond of saying. Now the idea of turning the French 'yes' into a 'no' against Germany is somewhat shabby and also not very clever.

It only shows that it is not Mitterrand's primary concern to create a viable and realistic Europe, according to the reproaches of Jean-Louis Debré. His father, Prime Minister under de Gaulle, made the somewhat demagogic claim that de Gaulle would vote 'no', but Laval, the Vichy Prime Minister courtesy of Hitler, would vote 'yes'.

'German dominance in Europe' is the prediction of the former President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Well, the dominance of a Japanese Sumo wrestler and an American cowboy has also been chalked up in big letters before now, but then soon erased again.

In the capitalist system, the competent will always get ahead, but this is very far from achieving 'dominance'.

Germany will not leave NATO, as France has done, and will most certainly not abandon the USA. As the *International Herald Tribune* has speculated, the German-French Eurocorps is, at best, suitable for securing the EC against attack from Austria or Switzerland. The Germans do not need it, but apparently 'la classe politique' [the political élite] in Paris does, so that it may at least symbolically retain a very expensive finger in the German pie.

The position of France is fraught with prejudices and not an effective advertisement for the long term in this country. We do not desire 'grandeur' either for the Germans or for the French, nor are we interested in 'gloire'. The fact that there are too many Germans must now be more of a concern for us than for others.

What happened in the past cannot be undone, neither can it be artificially cemented. Young people in Germany forget, like young people elsewhere too, not least those in France. However, they will have to carry the can for any problems that are not solved now, when the Maastricht wheeler-dealers are no longer in business and have all retired to tend their gardens.

Financial sacrifices are the only guarantee that the Germans may expect from post-Maastricht Europe, so says Mitterrand, so says Giscard. They both use the word 'sacrifice'.

Yet it is not at all certain that the newly tough French will not have to pay up, too. It would not be the first time since Richelieu that they would rather harm themselves than grant any kind of advantage to the Germans; this is in the manner of Frederick the Great, who was willing to accept damage to Prussia if only he could put one over on Saxony.

The politicians should therefore bear in mind the remarks made by Hans D. Barbier in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*:

Economic trends, capital markets and investment decisions also live off the trust of the citizens, and those in power set about their work with energy and confidence.

The citizens here — 'our people outside' — really feel that they have had the wool pulled over their eyes for long enough. No, we do not owe thanks to Mitterrand (as de Gaulle has taught us), but loyal friendship.

The shrill campaign being pursued in France against the high-interest policy of the Federal Bank should not make an impression on it. The fact is that the stability anchor for the patchwork quilt that is Europe is now located in Germany. 'It may be', writes *Newsweek* on the subject,

that Europe will be grateful to the Germans one day. Inflation in the major countries of the EC has dropped to below 6 %, primarily because of their strict monetary policy and the restrictions of the EMS (European Monetary System) ... So why not put the Federal Bank in charge of discipline? After all, it has helped Europe to get this far.

When we read in *Die Zeit* that the President of the Federal Bank, Helmut Schlesinger, should 'broaden his horizons', this uncouth remark will be attributable to another colleague at *Die Zeit* named Helmut Schlesinger still has one more year that he can use to hold out against the inflation mentality of many other Europeans. Given that we are militarily 'tied in', we do not want to have the Federal Bank 'tied in' as well.

So, there will be no Europe? Yes, there will, but it will be a different one. Mitterrand's well-known deviousness will not make the re-negotiation of the Maastricht Treaties, thanks to the Danes, any easier. He has proved to be their 'first dissident' (Karl Schiller).

And how is that? After publicly defending an independent European Central Bank which had the discipline of the German Federal Bank, he is suddenly talking about the 'cold monster of the administration' (of which he is a part). According to him, the final decision in monetary policy should not lie with an 'abstract power' (which he embodies). If not, then with whom? 'In the hands of the Council', where each state can 'take part in joint decision-making'.

The actual nature of such decisions has been described by the French Minister of Transport Jean-Louis Bianco:

The only people with something to lose from monetary union are the Germans: they have to share the power of the mark.

State Secretary Klaus Köhler, the only expert at the Maastricht negotiations on the German side, may be feeling pretty stupid. The ink on the document is not even dry before Mitterrand makes it known that he is already going to renege on all his promises.

Maastricht has not brought the Europeans closer together, it has moved them farther apart. Like us, the former Ministers Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua, who are not expecting a 'no' from the French, but do consider it a possibility, want one Europe. However, this includes due respect for each and every country that belongs to the Community, among whose number, of course, they count Germany and France.

So we should put our hope in Séguin and Pasqua, in the French referendum, where a few thousand yes or no votes from people who, with the best will in the world, do not understand anything about the subject, could be decisive. It is impossible to want a state without wanting it. Britain will remain the Trojan Horse of the USA, and in questions of security we will always prefer the English-speaking world to the French. What Kohl and his Genscher/Kinkel/Waigel/Lambsdorff cohorts are offering us is a 'face lift' for the President in Paris and is purely cosmetic.

The nation state can be abolished, if we want to do so. But the French do not want to do that. They should try, if they can, to manufacture better and cheaper cars than the USA, Japan and Germany. But they will have to stop expecting special treatment and give up their permanent special role.

Since the time of Charlemagne, there has often been a giant among states in the history of Western Europe. But to create a monster artificially in clear recognition of its monstrosity, in the knowledge of its absolute unwieldiness is more than a serious mistake. And all that just to show gratitude to a 75-year-old politician and to oblige a country that has become economically and demographically weaker. That is pure nonsense.

The balancing act between the USA and France, which was not even managed really successfully by the great white chief Konrad Adenauer, is now at an end. Our politicians do not have the class to say 'no', and it would be too late for that anyway, in this instance. They will reject any choice between two conflicting principles, and they will reject every alternative as immoral, before trying to talk their way out of it with the

excuse that they really wanted to say 'yes-and-no'. This is the state of *our* political élite.

Founding a state in the way that this was done in the 19th century, something managed at that time by Italy, the German Empire and the USA, is an undertaking that cannot be imagined today, not without a war. Of the three major countries in the EC, Britain and France do not want this kind of unitary state. A civil war, such as Abraham Lincoln waged in 1861, not so much to free the slaves as to preserve the Union, is something that we cannot imagine at all today, for very obvious reasons.

However, in those days, the objective was clear. Now, by contrast, we have to join with the pragmatic British, who admittedly regard European unification as an unstoppable process, but, on the other hand, would not see a 'no' in the French referendum as a disaster. The development of European cooperation would not be stopped by it, according to a statement by Prime Minister John Major.

Certainly not. For the round of scare mongering for the French referendum has been artificially manufactured — by the weakness of Mitterrand in domestic matters and the additional external factor of German unification. The fact is, the caravan is moving on.

PS: In the television discussion in front of 22 million of his compatriots, François Mitterrand served up a French political culture that must surely be the envy of all.