

'A marriage of convenience' from Le Monde

Caption: On 4 October 1972, in its coverage of the 'yes' vote following the popular referendum organised in Denmark on the subject of the country's accession to the Common Market, French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the results of the ballot.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. FAUVET, Jacques. 04.10.1972, n° 8 622; 29e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Un mariage de raison", p. 1.

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A marriage of convenience

The Danes have now voted clearly and overwhelmingly in favour of joining the Common Market, thus removing the last obstacle to the birth of an enlarged European Community on 1 January next year. Of course, there will only be nine instead of the ten members that had been hoped for a year ago. While the resounding Danish 'yes' vote does not dispel the unpleasant impression left by Norway's 'no' last week, it nevertheless marks a new beginning.

Danish 'yes' campaigners had been worried about the effects of Scandinavian solidarity after the negative outcome of the Norwegian referendum, but in Denmark economic realism won the day. Voters most sympathetic to Oslo may well have been put off by the spectacle of the almost insoluble political crisis that followed the victory of the anti-Europeans in Norway. But the real reasons for the Danish vote are to be found in the country's specific situation. More industrialised than Norway but, at the same time, a big exporter of agricultural products to Britain and Germany, Denmark lies at the heart of northern Europe. It would have had greater difficulty than Norway in living outside the Community, even though some of the consequences might have been mitigated by an association agreement.

As it is, the coalition of farmers, industrialists and mainstream political parties (both Conservatives and Social Democrats) easily defeated the nationalist and far-left groups. Even in Copenhagen, a majority voted 'yes'.

Presumably confident that his main task has been accomplished, Mr Krag has decided to hand over the reins of government to another man.

But there is a fly in the ointment: the 'yes' vote was overwhelming, but it does not seem to have been delivered with any great enthusiasm. There is little sign of the momentum generated by great ideas, which were conspicuous by their absence during the referendum campaign. The younger generation has little interest in the European cause as such, and seems to have taken some of the Norwegian opposition's arguments on board. In short, the mathematical success of the 'yes' vote in no way dispels last week's criticism by Mr Mansholt of the negative image which Europe and its 'undemocratic' Community machinery has created among the general public.

Denmark's 'marriage of convenience' with Europe will not be frictionless. The Danes are probably ready to cooperate loyally with their eight partners, but they are by no means inclined to accelerate the integration process, least of all its political aspects. In this respect they are similar to the British and French, but they could find themselves at odds with people, especially in smaller countries like their own, who are calling for progress towards supranationality.

Moreover, Denmark is part of the Scandinavian world, both geographically and historically. In the future, it may well face difficult choices between its obligations to the EEC and its duties to what it considers to be, despite everything, its true family.

Still, even within the Europe of the Six there is no shortage of countries still struggling with similar contradictions ...