


The signing of the Single European Act

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The Single European Act (SEA), which was finalised and adopted in December 1985 by the Foreign Ministers of the Ten on the basis of the political agreement which was so painfully achieved following the Luxembourg European Council of 2 and 3 December 1985, next had to secure parliamentary approval in Denmark and Italy, where questions were being asked as to the Act's constitutional validity.

On 21 January 1986, the Danish Parliament rejected the draft Act by 80 votes to 75. In so doing, its Members called for the reopening of intergovernmental negotiations. Faced with the categoric refusal of its European partners, the Danish Government then called a national referendum on the Act as a whole. On 27 January, without even waiting for the final results of the referendum in Denmark, the Council fixed 17 February 1986 as the date for the signing of the SEA. On 13 February, however, it fell to the Italian Government, shortly followed by the Greek Government, to inform its partners that it would not be able to sign the Treaty before the Danish result was known.

On 17 February 1986, only Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom signed the SEA in Luxembourg. On 27 February 1986, 56.2 % of the Danish population voted in favour of the Treaty. The following day, it was the turn of Denmark, Italy and Greece to sign the Single Act in The Hague. Now signed by the Twelve, the SEA still needed to be ratified by the national parliaments during 1986 and 1987, according to the constitutional requirements of each signatory State. The SEA could not enter into force until the first day of the month following the deposit of the final instrument of ratification. The Single European Act, which amended the European Communities' founding Treaties, came into force on 1 July 1987.