

'EEC: a sign of failure' from Le Soir (18 February 1986)

Caption: Denmark, Italy and Greece failed to sign the Single European Act on 17 February 1986, in Luxembourg. For the Belgian newspaper Le Soir, this highlights existing divisions between the European countries on the issue of reforming the European Community.

Source: Le Soir. 18.02.1986, n° 41; 100e année. Bruxelles: S.A. Rossel. "C.E.E.: un signal qui fait "flop"", auteur: Waersegger, Serge de , p. 16.

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EEC: a sign of failure

The political signal that the Europeans should have been sending to their Danish partners to demonstrate the extent of their determination to proceed with the indispensable reform of the European Community was lost in the Luxembourg fog on Monday.

Last December, the countries of the EEC reached an agreement about a draft treaty reforming certain aspects of the European Community. It was a timid reform, but it was one that was indispensable in order to attain three essential objectives: the reinforcement of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy, the establishment of a Europe of research and technology, and, above all, the transformation of the current common market into a large area without borders. This compromise was the absolute bare minimum, according to the most committed Europeans, notably Belgium and Italy: disappointed by the draft's lack of scope, Italy had even expressed general reservations about it. However, for the Danish left-wing anti-Europeans, who hold a majority in the country's Parliament, the Folketing, it was still too much. They felt that the text, particularly with its strengthening of the powers of the European Parliament, was an attack on Danish sovereignty. Accordingly, the Folketing rejected the draft treaty. The Danish Government — in the minority, but convinced of the text's merits — has not given up, and has organised a referendum for 27 February.

At the request of the Netherlands Presidency, the Danish Government decided at the same time that the draft treaty would be signed, in spite of everything, on Monday 17 February, in Luxembourg. In this way, a political signal is being sent to the Danish anti-Europeans to make them understand the determination of Denmark's partners and, by the same token, how Denmark may well become isolated if it continues to reject the draft. It was also intended to give a helping hand to the Danish Prime Minister, who confirmed that rejection of the draft treaty would oblige the country to contemplate the prospect of withdrawing from the EEC. This explains the publication of a document showing how expensive such a withdrawal would be, not only financially, but also in terms of employment.

Nevertheless, as the days went by, the significance of this signal changed, and it got lost in the fog of various, even opposing, motives.

Inasmuch as the Danish population had been asked to give its opinion, did not the signature ten days before the referendum seem rather like an exercising of undemocratic pressure on the free choice of our Scandinavian partners? This was the line taken by the Greeks, who decided not to attend the signature ceremony. Conversely, if it is necessary to prove one's determination to see this reform adopted, while at the same time expressing one's belief that it is insufficient, would it not be better to wait until the Danes have approved the text before signing? This is the path chosen by Italy, at the instigation of its Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. Finally, annoyed at having been relatively neglected during the negotiation of this 'unsatisfactory' treaty, the European Parliament chose to be represented not by its President, Pierre Pflimlin, nor by Altiero Spinelli, the Chairman of the parliamentary committee on institutional reform, but by its Vice-President, Siegbert Alber.

In the eyes of Luxembourg which, holding the rotating Presidency of the Twelve, presided over the treaty negotiations, the signature was to be fairly significant. In the final analysis, it was no more than a procedure, carried out in a hurry. Legally, it was not even a signature: the text has merely been 'opened for signature' so as to allow Greece, Italy and Denmark to join their nine partners later.

The political signal thus became a display of division and indecision.

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