

'Accession negotiations officially concluded' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (31 March 1994)

Caption: On 31 March 1994, the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung reports on the progress of negotiations concerning the fourth wave of enlargement of the European Communities and describes the new voting pattern within the Council of Ministers.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. FACK, Fritz Ullrich; FEST, Joachim; JESKE, Jürgen; MÜLLER-VOGG, Hugo; REIßMÜLLER, Johann Georg. 31.03.1994, n° 76. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Beitrittsverhandlungen offiziell abgeschlossen", p. 5.

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Accession negotiations officially concluded

now. Brussels, 30 March. In a joint meeting held on Wednesday, senior officials of the 12 European Union Member States, together with delegates from Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden, officially concluded negotiations on the accession of the four countries to the EU scheduled for the beginning of 1995. Representatives from the 16 countries and the European Commission approved a declaration on the still controversial issue of the future blocking minority in the Council of Ministers and on further procedures with a view to the Intergovernmental Conference for the revision of the Maastricht Treaty scheduled to be held in 1996. In connection with the Union's intended institutional reform, the Conference will also review the future weighting of votes as well as the qualified majority in the Council of Ministers. The compromise regarding the blocking minority, reached at the weekend in Ioannina and approved by all 12 Member States by Tuesday night, is to be effective from the date of enlargement until the entry into force of the reforms approved at the Intergovernmental Conference. The Secretary-General of the Commission, David Williamson, expressed some reservations about the rules which, according to the Commission, would complicate the planned deepening of the European unification process.

Despite the conclusion of the accession negotiations, doubts still remain in Brussels as to whether the four countries will actually be able to accede on the scheduled date of 1 January 1995. Apart from the European Parliament, which will take a decision on accession in early May, all the national parliaments will also have to ratify the Treaties. In addition, accession referendums are planned in the three Scandinavian countries and in Austria. A statement from Brussels also pointed out that, apart from the United Kingdom, where arguments regarding the blocking minority have resulted in a serious difference of opinion in the ruling Conservative Party, other EU countries, such as Italy and Belgium, might also cause delays because of their cumbersome legal procedures.

With the declaration that they adopted on Wednesday, the EU countries are also trying to dispel any reservations that the European Parliament might have about the Ioannina compromise. Accordingly, Parliament is to take part, as the official representative of the Foreign Ministers, in the work of the body that is expected to be appointed at the EU Summit in Corfu in late June. That body will base its work on reports on the Maastricht Treaty from the Council of Ministers, Parliament and the Commission. With a view to further EU enlargements, the group is to devise 'options' regarding the future number of votes and the blocking minority. In the Council of Ministers, Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom currently have ten votes each, while Spain has eight, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal five each, Denmark and Ireland three each, and Luxembourg two votes. In the expanded Council of Ministers, with a total of 90 instead of 76 votes, Austria and Sweden will receive four votes each, with Finland and Norway each having three votes.

The declaration also confirms that, in 'qualified majority' decisions, the blocking minority will increase from 23 to 27 votes, which still corresponds to 30 % of total votes. In instances where more than 23 but fewer than 27 opposition votes are expressed prior to a decision, the Member States should endeavour to reach a consensual agreement within a non-specified, 'reasonable timeframe'.