

'Denmark rejects the Maastricht Treaty and disrupts the process of European unity' from El País (3 June 1992)

Caption: On 3 June 1992, the Spanish daily newspaper El País speculates as to why the Danes refused to ratify the Treaty of Maastricht.

Source: El País. 03.06.1992. Madrid. "Dinamarca rechaza el tratado de Maastricht e interrumpe el proceso de unidad europea", auteur: Martí Font, Josep Maria.

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Denmark rejects the Maastricht Treaty and disrupts the process of European unity

The 'no' camp in the ratification referendum wins by 44 000 votes

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Denmark yesterday rejected the Maastricht Treaty, thereby disrupting the process of European integration. The referendum on the Treaty, for which 82.9 % of the electorate turned out, resulted in victory for the 'no' camp by the narrow margin of 50.7 % of the vote as against 49.3 %. The result is a clear rap over the knuckles for the Danish political class which overwhelmingly supported the ratification of the Treaty and which, last night, was left astonished as it had not thought for one moment that the 'no' campaign might win.

The Prime Minister, the Conservative Poul Schlüter, denied that he would offer his resignation or call new elections. Both the parties which form the governing coalition in Copenhagen, namely the Conservatives (KF) and Liberals (V), as well as the Opposition, consisting of Social Democrats (S) and Radicals, in other words over 80 % of the Parliament, had backed the campaign in favour of European union, as did the trade union movement. The strength of that alliance was clear to see in the street. The 'no' campaign, however, was supported only by the fringe parties: the Socialists, the ecologists and the nationalist extreme right. In the end, just over 44 000 of the 3.5 million voters who turned out made the difference.

One of the key aspects underlying the defeat of the 'yes' camp lies in the failure of the Social Democrat Opposition to convince its traditional voters to vote in favour of European union. Schlüter and other members of the Government made as much clear as soon as the result started to emerge in an attempt to absolve themselves of responsibility.

Social Democrat vote

It is, however, true that only 40 % of traditional Social Democrat voters voted 'yes'. Regardless of patronage, the breakdown of results by electoral districts clearly showed that the 'no' vote won convincingly in working class districts, whereas the 'yes' vote did so only in the wealthiest areas of the country, with the small exception of the far right's strongholds.

The reason for that, say some observers, lies in the fact that, as far back as 1986, when the referendum on the Single European Act was held, the Social Democrats were openly against the Act. On that occasion, despite everything, the Danes approved the Treaty by 56 % to 44 %.

The Liberal Henning Christophersen, a Vice-President of the European Commission who was very active in the 'yes' campaign and raised the issue of job losses, could not hide his surprise last night. 'The European Commission,' he admitted, 'had no contingency plans for this eventuality, there is no Plan B.' The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, also a member of the Liberal Party, acknowledged that the Danish political class 'has underestimated the wishes of the people' and pointed to a parliamentary 'crisis' as a result of the difference in scale between what the parties wanted and what the voters wanted. 'These are difficult times,' he said, 'and we shall have to wait and see what our partners in Europe think.'

The arguments of the 'no' campaign focused on the small countries' loss of control in a European Community dominated by large states such as Germany or France, and that argument appears to have won over the voters. Among the older generation which had lived through the Second World War and the Nazi occupation, the spectre of a Germany with a murky past still lives on.

Although not shared by the younger Danes, such fears do nothing to reduce the impact which an economically-powerful Germany wielding political supremacy might have on their country.

In economic terms, Denmark has reaped considerable benefits from Community funds since its accession to the EC in 1972 [*sic*: 1973]. Agriculture has been the main sector to benefit. Currently, Copenhagen still receives *surpluses* from Brussels, 2 000 million kroner's worth (32 000 million pesetas), to be precise, in 1991,

but the trend towards equilibrium will be complete next year when the surplus will be practically nil.

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