

'The EU's new members, Sweden and Finland, more serious than enthusiastic?' from Le Monde (6 January 1995)

Caption: On 6 January 1995, the French daily newspaper Le Monde describes the state of mind in which Sweden and Finland acceded to the European Union.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Colombani, Jean-Marie. 06.01.1995, n° 15 535; 51e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Suédois et Finlandais, des nouveaux membres de l'UE plus sérieux qu'enthousiastes", auteur:Debove, Alain , p. 4.

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The EU's new members, Sweden and Finland, more serious than enthusiastic

Stockholm

By our Northern Europe correspondent

The blue flag with its 15 yellow stars was raised in front of the Foreign Ministries in Stockholm and Helsinki on 1 January. But no New Year fireworks greeted official accession to the European Union. The accession debates leading up to the Finnish referendum in October 1994 and the referendum in Sweden the following month exhausted public interest. The most determined opponents of the EU have fallen into line, at least for the time being, and some of them are now members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where they are looking for more respectable anti-Maastricht allies than the associates of Philippe De Villiers and Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Despite their leaders' talk of a 'historic date', the peoples of the Nordic countries are primarily interested in the fine detail of their membership of the Brussels club. Some foods like pork will be cheaper, while the price of rice and bananas will go up. Tourists will now be allowed to bring in up to 15 litres of beer duty-free, apart from wine and spirits, and to go through the gate reserved for 'EU nationals'.

As members of the European Economic Area (EEA), which linked the Twelve with the countries of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), Sweden and Finland had already brought their legislation largely into line with that of the EU. So actual accession has not had a great impact on the public mind. 'No need to panic,' ran the Stockholm evening daily *Aftonbladet*, 'the European flag will not fly over the royal palace, and French will not be a compulsory school subject!'

Rights and obligations

On 2 January another newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, ran the headline 'Good morning, citizens of Europe!' and included a special supplement, 'The New Sweden', with a great deal of information on the European Union and the way in which it works. More encouragingly, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, the large daily paper for Malmö and the south of the country, where the 'Yes' vote won a big majority in the November 1994 referendum, wrote: 'Well done, Europe, here we come!' It, too, published a special section on the workings of the Brussels machinery. In a more serious vein, *Svenska Dagbladet* explained that accession 'brings both rights and obligations'.

The Swedes and Finns made meticulous preparations for joining the Union. The economy, unemployment, enlargement to include the countries of Eastern Europe, protection of the environment, consumer interests, and the 'democratisation' of the EU itself are the issues on which they will be making their voices heard. For Helsinki, the 'Nordic dimension' and environmental issues like the ecological disaster in the Kola Peninsula, where the Russians have stored nuclear waste, are also important.

Who will represent the Nordic countries at EU Council summits? In Sweden, which is a constitutional monarchy, it is taken for granted that this task falls to the head of the government. In Finland, however, the issue has not yet been decided: the President of the Republic, whose powers have been eroded over the last decade to the benefit of Parliament, is giving parliamentarians who want the Prime Minister to attend European summits a hard time. The present Head of State, Martti Ahtisaari, is not prepared to confine himself to attending, along with his Head of Government, only those Council sessions that deal with foreign policy and security.

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