

‘Danish “no” and referendum in France’ from L’Europe en formation

Caption: In spring 1992, the federalist journal L’Europe en formation analyses the situation in Europe after the refusal by the Danish people to ratify the Treaty on European Union and speculates on whether this Danish ‘no’ vote will have an impact on the referendum in France.

Source: L’Europe en formation. Printemps 1992, n° 284. Nice. ""Non" danois et référendum en France", p. 3-6.

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Editorial

On the very morning of the Danish referendum on the Treaty of Maastricht, a last-minute opinion poll gave 59 % 'yes' and 47 % 'no' (not counting the undecided and those abstaining). Late in the evening of 2 June, it was revealed that the 'no' votes had won, with 50.7 % of votes cast — against 49.3 % of 'yes' votes — and with a turnout as high as 82.9 %. A few days later, 81 % of Danes polled by the *Berlingske Tidende* expressed support for staying in the Community; 32 % of those who voted 'no' said that they had actually voted against the political system in Denmark and 13 % against the right-wing government.

In any event, it would be an understatement to talk of 'surprise' or 'stupefaction' in Copenhagen and in other European capitals. Danish polls on Maastricht had indeed been negative for some time, and then indecisive and contradictory. But on 12 May, the Folketing (Parliament) had ratified the draft treaty by a large majority (130 for, 25 against and 20 abstentions) following a lengthy debate that was broadcast in full on the radio. Only the extreme left and extreme right had voted against. The government, trade unions, employers and the press had been mainly in favour. But in the confines of the voting booth, the negative feelings ultimately triumphed. There was the fear of Brussels bureaucracy colliding with a certain notion of grass-roots democracy. There was the rejection of a system whereby ministers take decisions without scrutiny and behind closed doors on laws that closely affect citizens and hence their way of life. Then there was the democratic deficit that has not really been compensated for by the European Parliament's complicated co-decision procedures.

Of course there is some truth behind these criticisms; they are not just the expression of parochialism. But, as Emanuele Gazzo said in his editorial for *Agence Europe* on 5 June, it is also true that successive governments in Copenhagen 'have lied to the Danes by leading them to believe that joining the Community merely meant having a place in the market, a market that included their main clients, meaning of course Germany but above all Britain.'

Indeed, in their overwhelming majority, these distant descendants of the Vikings never agreed to join anything more than a 'common market' when 56.7 % voted in favour of the Treaty of Rome on 2 October 1972. They had even more reservations over the Single Act (on 27 February 1986, 42 % voted 'yes', 32.7 % 'no' and 25.3 % abstained), although Denmark, a small country with an open economy, had gained a lot from EEC membership and from the Community budget, of which it was a net beneficiary.

The great mistake made by the Danes, who are allergic to any transformation of the European economic and trading community into a political community and maybe even a monetary community, was to think that, being the first EEC country to decide on Maastricht, their rejection would be enough to render the treaty null and void, thus forcing their partners to start again from scratch or at least to totally change their script.

Denmark's partners reacted otherwise ... Meeting in Oslo on 4 June on the sidelines of a NATO session, they formally excluded any renegotiation and even any change to the agreed timetable. In the autumn, when the referendums and parliamentary procedures have been completed, the Eleven will, in the words of Roland Dumas, 'ask Denmark the crucial question: Do they or do they not want to take part in the joint undertaking?' If the answer is a definitive 'no', the Treaty will just have to be adapted to this state of affairs and the procedures will be launched again, maybe at a faster pace. The earlier version would differ from the new one only in terms of the references to Denmark.

It would seem that Roland Dumas does not foresee a further mishap of the Danish variety. His view was substantiated by the prompt reaction of the President of the French Republic following Copenhagen's defection since, on the morning of 3 June, Mr Mitterrand made it known that 'the ratification of the Treaty itself would be put to popular vote.'

So now we now have the prospect of a referendum on Maastricht being held in France. This could be combined with a referendum on the constitutional reform that would be needed in order to adopt the draft on

European Union if it failed in Parliament, which is possible since the issue of voting rights for European Community citizens, in particular, is a divisive issue in French politics.

Of course, Mr Mitterrand is playing double or quits himself here. If he wins support, this will amount to a re-endorsement by popular vote, willingly or unwillingly, while not so long ago his ratings were at an all-time low. On top of that he will be seen as having achieved the 'major undertaking' of his second seven-year term. Parliamentary elections, coming on the heels of a positive referendum vote, will restore the socialists' fortunes. The foul-up in the regional elections will be just a bad memory.

For the moment, in any case, while Denmark's eleven partner governments have held the line, the Danish 'no' vote has encouraged opponents of Maastricht to persevere in all Community countries. Shouldn't they be encouraged by the fact that the Danes 'dared' to say no from the outset? In Ireland, where there will be a vote for or against Maastricht on 18 June, the 'no' camp will be energised. In the United Kingdom, a hundred or so Conservative MPs have signed a petition calling for a rejection of the Treaty. In Germany much of public opinion has reservations (there's the Deutschmark, Brussels bureaucracy, the rights of the Länder and the democratic deficit). In France the announcement of a referendum has fuelled opponents of the Treaty — while deepening the divisions within the opposition — and whetted the President's appetite. He has (finally) invited the country to a 'proper briefing on Europe'.

Amongst EC candidate countries, the Danish 'no' vote came as a rude awakening, particularly in Scandinavia, where only 33 % of Norwegians and 45 % of Swedes would now support Community membership. This Nordic gloom did not prevent Mr Kohl and Mr Major, during a meeting in Bonn on 5 June, from agreeing on the need to speed up negotiations for the accession of those members of the European Free Trade Association that have asked to join the Community.

Clearly, while the Danish 'no' has provided a needed wake-up call, much still remains unclear. During this trying time, the Eleven have demonstrated their determination to prevent a break-up of the Community, but the crisis is not yet behind us. It has upset all our firmly-held beliefs about the Community and it once again demonstrates the weaknesses and shortcomings of the federalist movement in the European integration process.

L'Europe en formation