

'A multi-speed Europe' from Le Monde (4 June 1992)

Caption: On 4 June 1992, following the Danish refusal to ratify the Maastricht Treaty, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the impact that this decision will have on future enlargement of the European Communities.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Lesourne, Jacques ; Réd. Chef Colombani, Jean-Marie. 04.06.1992, n° 14.727; 49e année. Paris: Le Monde. "A plusieurs vitesses", p. 1.

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A multi-speed Europe

Democracy does not depend on the size of the majority. In Denmark, some tens of thousands of votes sufficed to spell victory for the opponents to the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, and now the whole structure of the Community hangs in the balance.

Whatever legal solution diplomats may find to prevent the economic, monetary and political aspects of the European integration process from being blocked altogether, the Danes' vote is a warning shot which will inevitably have implications for the approach of other Member States. Maastricht's opponents will see this as a source of encouragement and grounds for argument at a time when the public was already tending to blame a Europe that is more restrictive than expected for a dissatisfaction with which, more often than not, it is unfamiliar.

The Danes' attitude is surprising at a time when applicant countries are queuing up at the Community's door; Nordic solidarity, by which the Danes set great store during the campaign for the Single European Act, has been weakened, since the Swedes and the Finns, and most probably the Norwegians in the autumn, are declaring their intention to join the Community.

'We have lost one Denmark and found ten new countries,' is what François Mitterrand seemed to be saying at the recent Franco-German summit, confirming that, temporarily back down to 11, the Community would soon find itself 'numbering 12, 13, 14, 15'. Yes, indeed, but the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty does not make the question of enlargement any less critical, because the risk of this or that aspect of European integration being rejected will be all the greater, the more Member States there are. What was possible to tackle with 6, even 9 or 10, is no longer feasible with 12 and will be even less likely if, one day, the Community has over 20 members.

At the same time, it is difficult for the founder members to refuse to admit EEC countries which fulfil the democratic and economic criteria and are committed to complying with the rules. The only solution is a multi-speed Europe, whether they decide to call it 'variable geometry Europe' or 'Europe of concentric circles', or even 'Europe à la carte'.

Countries with more or less casual relations in various domains would gravitate around a central core of states with the strongest ties in the broadest spheres of competence. It is manifestly France and Germany — which have been the keenest advocates of integration in all areas — that must form this hard core, providing that their alliance is not exclusive.

If it can convince the public that the deepening and widening of Europe are not contradictory; if, far from prompting a slow-down, it were to encourage the most determined to advance, while adjusting their relations with the latecomers, the defeat of the 'Europeans' in Denmark might be salutary.