

'An understandable decision' from Le Monde (30 November 1994)

Caption: On 30 November 1994, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the decision of the Norwegian people who, for the second time in their history, have voted against joining the European Community.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. COLOMBANI, Jean-Marie. 30.11.1994, n° 15.503; 50e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Un choix respectable", p. 1.

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An understandable decision

And why not? Twenty-two years after the question of joining the Community was first put to them, the Norwegians have again voted in a referendum to remain outside the European Union. Their decision is both final and perfectly understandable. Why criticise a people simply because they do not want to join a club, especially since they were well aware of all the facts when they made their choice? The lively, but always civilised, debate preceding Monday's ballot lasted for several months, and the voters were able to weigh up the pros and cons of EU membership at their leisure. Of course, there were traces of nationalistic sentiment here and there, but the basic message of the 'No' camp was quite different.

Believing, rightly or wrongly, that entry into the EU would put their way of life at risk, those Norwegians who voted 'No' did so, above all, in order to protect the 'sense of well-being' which they hold so dear. They were also keen to defend certain economic interests, especially their oil and fishing industries. To put it simply, the Norwegians feel that 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' The decision will not really have any major consequences for the future of a country which is already a member of NATO and whose stable economic development seems assured. Oslo will, however, have to alter its approach to relations with its Nordic neighbours, who, with the exception of Iceland, have all voted to join the European Union.

Nor should the EU find it too difficult to accept the result of Monday's vote. Some will doubtless regret the fact that the Norwegians will not be joining them at the table and will therefore not be able to share their 'savoir-faire' with the rest of the guests. Others will feel that it would, at all events, have been difficult to work in the long term alongside a nation so fiercely attached to its independence.

The Norwegian referendum heralds the end of the first wave of this latest round of EU enlargement. On 1 January, the Finns, Swedes and Austrians will officially become members. The European Union's borders are set for the next few years, before preparations begin to open the door yet again, with the former Communist countries of Central Europe particularly in mind. The team is ready, and all its members, both new and old, have committed themselves. Now they must show their determination to tackle the task ahead, whilst remembering to wish the Norwegians 'Good Luck!'