


Denmark's accession

Source: CVCE. European NAVigator. Etienne Deschamps.

Copyright: (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/denmark_s_accession-en-93a02713-333e-4599-9052-6eca6a924026.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



Denmark's accession

Whereas in Ireland, opposition to accession was relatively weak, given the economic advantages that the country hoped to draw from its membership of the European Communities, the situation in the Scandinavian countries proved to be very different. Protestant by tradition, the Nordic public mistrusted the interventionism and centralism of the European institutions, seeing it as being potentially harmful to the Scandinavian democratic and social pattern. It was also more sympathetic to the intergovernmental model of international cooperation than to the supranational approach of the EEC. Pursuant to their respective constitutions, Denmark and Norway had to submit the decision on accession to the European Communities to popular referenda, since entry automatically involved the surrender of certain areas of sovereignty to Community institutions.

Denmark and Norway have always been very loyal to their national independence and to Scandinavian solidarity. They had been members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and of the Council of Europe since 1949, were part of the Nordic Council — created in 1952 with Iceland and Sweden — and, since 1960, had been founder members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). However, this situation was not altogether satisfactory, since EFTA involved neither agricultural nor fisheries products, which were of prime importance to Denmark and Norway.

In the aftermath of the tariff measures taken the previous year during the 'Kennedy Round' of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden — with trade between them continually growing — opened negotiations in April 1968 with a view to creating, in two stages and at the latest by January 1974, a customs and economic union to strengthen Nordic economic cooperation, to be known as Nordek.

Often presented as a way of gaining access to the EEC, Nordek was supposed to make it easier for the Nordic countries to gain access to a wider European market and develop their trade with the rest of the world. Danish leaders, who proposed the establishment of joint institutions, also saw this plan as a convenient alternative route, after the veto used by France in 1967 against British, and so indirectly against Danish, membership of the EEC. The United Kingdom was in fact the principal market for Scandinavian exports. The Danes succeeded in putting agriculture, a key sector in their economy and exports, on the agenda of the Nordic negotiations. Their objective was, in particular, to ensure the protection of national producers by introducing a system of Nordic preference and by fixing reasonable prices. The Danes went even further and made the regulation of the agricultural sector a condition of their participation in a full Nordic customs union, which Sweden sincerely hoped would be established. The final report on the draft treaty, based on an intergovernmental approach, was published on 17 July 1969. It did not question the membership of Denmark, Norway and Sweden of EFTA, of which Finland was an associate member. It provided for the possibility of setting up the customs union from 1 January 1972. Although significantly inspired by the Treaty of Rome, the Nordek Treaty laid down that the Council of Ministers had to adopt decisions by unanimity. The terms of the draft treaty also envisaged the creation of a Standing Committee — made up of government officials recruited from the various national administrations — and specialist committees, as well as a Consultative Committee consisting of representatives from the industrial and agricultural sectors. A report on energy and industrial policy, dealing in particular with the joint construction and sale of nuclear reactors, accompanied the draft treaty.

However, some points of discord remained. The Scandinavian countries did not have a common approach to the role that was to be allocated to Nordek. Denmark and Norway, who kept the EEC as their focal point, were in no hurry to move the negotiations forward until such time as they had definite knowledge of the fate of their applications for accession to the European Communities. Sweden, on the other hand, did not want to waste time and held the view that the creation of a Nordic economic union would not prejudice the process of enlargement of the Communities. Plans were drawn up for a Nordic Investment Bank, which was eventually established in 1975. The setting up of a Nordic common agricultural market from 1974 was also proposed. Finland, however, who feared that a policy of rapprochement to the EEC might harm its good relations with its neighbour, the Soviet Union, gradually made known its reservations about this plan for Scandinavian regional integration. On 24 March 1970, the Finnish Government left the negotiating table for

good. On 20 July 1970, Finland went further by signing a protocol with the USSR which extended by twenty years the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance that had bound the two countries since April 1948. Denmark then proposed that negotiations should continue without Finland with a view to establishing a new agreement renamed Skandek. Sweden and Norway declined the offer, questioning in turn the compatibility of the proposed treaty with their neutral status.

Despite these attempts at rapprochement, Denmark and Norway maintained their different economic interests that were largely a result of their respective geographical situations. In 1970, the applications from the two countries for accession to the EEC sounded the death knell of the Scandinavian economic union project, which was finally abandoned in 1971. The Council of Ministers of the Nordic Council immediately set up its own permanent secretariat with offices in Copenhagen.

Danish agriculture

Danish agriculture proved to be just as efficient as that of the Netherlands. As a major exporter of butter, Denmark hoped to benefit from its membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), all the more so because its principal markets, Britain and Germany, were members of the EEC or were preparing to join. In reality, agriculture ensured that there would be massive foreign investment in the country, which gave the opportunity to eliminate the balance of payments deficit and to finance industry. However, the Danes were wary of any undue surrender of sovereignty to the Community.

For their part, the Member States of the EEC were not prepared to accept competition from Danish agricultural products without a suitable period of transition, designed to ease the arrival of Danish butter onto the European market.

The referendum in Denmark

The Danish referendum took place on 2 October 1972. There was higher participation in the vote than in Ireland (89.5 %) but the percentage of those opposed to entry was also higher: 63 % 'yes' against 37 % 'no'. So the country's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) was approved in spite of the negative result from the referendum in Norway one week earlier.