

‘Sweden, Finland and Austria reach agreement with the Twelve on the terms for their accession to the European Union' from Le Monde (3 March 1994)


Caption: On 3 March 1994, the French daily newspaper Le Monde outlines the agreement secured two days earlier in Brussels following the negotiations with Austria, Finland and Sweden on accession to the European Union.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. LESOURNE, Jacques. 03.03.1994, n° 15.270; 50e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La Suède, la Finlande et l'Autriche s'entendent avec les Douze sur les conditions de leur entrée dans l'Union européenne", auteur:De la Guérivière, Jean , p. 3.

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Sweden, Finland and Austria reach agreement with the Twelve on the terms for their accession to the European Union

Brussels (European Union)

From our correspondent

Unless their electorates decide otherwise, Sweden, Finland and Austria will form part of the European Union in January 1995. Final negotiations on accession terms that had begun in Brussels on 25 February ended in compromise agreements on Tuesday 1 March. Norway was not party to those agreements, and separate negotiations with the Twelve will resume on 8 March.

The bitterness of the debates and their technical and often complex nature caused many delegations to doubt the final favourable outcome, but there is no escaping this essential fact: Europe will be enriched by the accession of Sweden, a country deemed to be a model of social cohesion, Finland, whose freedom has for so long been overshadowed by Moscow, and Austria, still sidelined in the Old Continent where it used to play such an important role.

Why did the discussions take so long? On the one hand, the twelve Member States were divided between their financial interests and the potential impact of a fourfold refusal to give in to the lure of the European idea on an electorate which had recently been asked enthusiastically to adopt the Treaty of Maastricht.

On the other hand, the applicant countries, perhaps keen to join the club only to be like their neighbours, were determined to pay as little as possible for accession and were convinced that too many 'concessions' on their part would be rejected by their electorates, should a referendum be held.

The Four were quite convinced that they would be 'net contributors', as they say in Euro-speak, that is, they would on the whole pay more to the Union than they would receive. This led to their insistence that their most northerly zones should receive regional aid and to bitter negotiations so that agricultural frontiers were opened up in stages.

'Net contributors should be so from the outset; the applicant countries must contribute to the budget in relation to their wealth. There is no way that the French taxpayer should be asked to subsidise their entry ticket', declared Alain Lamassoure on Monday evening. At that time, the Minister for European Affairs claimed that, while it might be possible to extend the midnight deadline, there was 'no question of continuing the talks on Tuesday morning'. Nevertheless, in the morning, he was still there, like everyone else, on the top floor of the Charlemagne Building where the Council meets in Brussels.

Transitional measures

Despite some obvious ill feeling, France was not going to be responsible for a breakdown in negotiations. Germany was now taking control, determined to find a solution, at least with regard to Austria. Austria, however, was still hesitating, anxious to avoid the environmental threat of an increase in HGV traffic across the country in the name of European free trade, simply because the Union was incapable of taking the measures required to promote rail transport to prevent this problem from arising.

In the end, Vienna won a small victory by securing an extension of the agreement that, since 1 January 1993, has limited the number of HGVs permitted to drive through the country, the remainder having to be put on trains. In theory, this agreement should cease to be valid after accession to the Union. Last Tuesday's compromise allows for an automatic extension from 1995 till 1998 and a virtually automatic extension for the following three years.

Sweden wanted a reduction in its future contribution to the Community budget, fixed by the Twelve at ECU 765 million per year. The Member States finally accepted an increase in aid to Swedish agriculture

which would amount to ECU 435 million during the first four years following accession. This sum would be added to the transitional financial package already put in place to help integrate the agriculture of the applicant countries into the Union system.

How the institutions work

Sweden would not reach its permanent rate of contribution to the Community budget until 1999. Mr Lamassoure was satisfied that this compromise did not undermine basic principles, since the provisions were simply temporary measures. Finland had already secured the status of 'less-favoured area' for 85 % of its territory, thereby becoming eligible for Community aid.

An additional ECU 255 million for Finnish farmers ensured that the agreement was finalised.

The question is, can five days of continuous discussions result in a solid agreement? In the search for a compromise, misunderstandings may have been swept aside that will resurface one day. On Tuesday afternoon, after the agreement of principle with Sweden was announced, a Council official admitted nonchalantly: 'The only people who can really tell you the technical content of the agreement are the negotiators themselves, but, at this moment, they are probably asleep. And I am not sure that, when they wake up, they will have a very clear idea of the situation.'

The energy devoted to *Arctic agriculture* or to import certificates for herring and salmon trout should not lead us to neglect the possible effects on the way that the Union's institutions operate. How much voting strength will the new Member States have in the Council? The debate — at present within the Twelve — on the possibility of a blocking minority has not been resolved. Discussions that were to take place in 1996 on the complete reorganisation of the institutions and their future shape have not yet started among the Twelve.

The Union has upheld the clause in the Treaty of Rome that made Europe open to all credible applicants. It has not totally upheld the ruling 'Maastricht, take it or leave it', but concessions made to the applicant countries in the form of derogations have been kept to a minimum.

What will happen when Hungary, then its Eastern European neighbours, or Turkey, Cyprus or Malta undertake the Brussels 'marathon' in their turn? Beyond the complex issues of bartering, the Union must face up to the conceptual problem of finding a replacement for the 'Rhine model'.

Jean de la Guérivière