

'Shadows over Europe' from the Luxemburger Wort (28 September 1972)

Caption: On 28 September 1972, daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort displays concern over the possible consequences of the negative outcome of the Norwegian popular referendum on the country's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 28.09.1972, n° 223; 125e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Schatten über Europa", p. 1.

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Shadows over Europe

R. N. The nocturnal cheers of the Norwegian 'No' voters have faded away, but consternation about a highly confusing situation has remained, and this as much in Oslo as in Brussels. The difficult, almost unanswerable, question in everyone's mind is, 'What now?'

There is no point in trying to analyse with hindsight why this referendum turned out like this, why only some 75 % of registered and eligible voters took part in the referendum, and why the number of 'No' votes to EEC accession was so high. Norway is, of course, still a young state, having gained independence only in 1905 and whose inhabitants regard Community experiments with scepticism and the understandable fear that they might, after barely seven decades, lose afresh the structures that their country has built up during that time. It remains hard to understand, though, why it was precisely the farmers and fishermen who were so determined to fight accession to the European Community, because they would have benefited the most from it.

Brussels, in the meantime, has also been looking for a culprit for the negative outcome of this referendum. Some — would you believe it — even want to put the blame on the French President, Georges Pompidou, whose proposal last week to give Spain the prospect of accession to the EEC would have angered the Norwegians in their firm sense of democracy. Such an idea, however, seems to be too far-fetched to stand up to proper argument. It seems that, at the time of Pompidou's proposal, the die had already been cast in Norway.

Whatever the case may be, the disadvantages of the referendum seem far greater for Norway than for the Community. Figures prove that Scandinavia is dependent on commerce with the European Community. Some 50 % of Norwegian exports go to EEC countries. And there is no alternative to this. The Eastern Bloc would be only too happy to stand in, but there are also problems on top of problems on that side. Norway's trade with COMECON has amounted to date to a meagre 2.5 %. An increase would be illusory because the Eastern Bloc lacks both hard currency and products capable of competing with the West with which to pay for its imports. There is, therefore, little to gain in this direction in the future.

The consequences of the referendum for Norway's domestic policy are far more serious. Trygve Bratteli, the Social Democratic leader of a minority Government and absolute advocate of EEC accession, has threatened to announce his Cabinet's resignation before Parliament next week. The logical course would then be for Mr Bratteli's predecessor in office, the obstinate EEC opponent, Per Borten, who had been ousted in March 1971 for EEC indiscretions, to form the new Government. The question is, however, how and with whom? In his former four-party Government, Mr Borten held only 76 of the 150 seats in the Norwegian Parliament. The Conservatives, although holding 29 seats and therefore the numerically largest party after the Social Democrats, have recently been giving him the cold shoulder. They firmly took sides with Mr Bratteli's minority Government during the EEC debate. The Norwegian Constitution, however, does not provide for the dissolution of Parliament followed by early new elections. A long and probably serious domestic policy crisis is ahead.

The Norwegian decision might also have a fatal impact on the referendum in Denmark on 1 October, the outcome of which, unlike that of its neighbour, will be binding. If Denmark is to join the EEC, Prime Minister Jens-Otto Krag in Copenhagen will have to secure a two-thirds majority in the referendum. Although Denmark has in all this time been more inclined towards the EEC and more open to a European union than Norway, the Norwegian result might still make the Danes change their minds because they, too, are first and foremost Scandinavians and only secondly Europeans. Shadows are in any case looming over Copenhagen. The Danish krone is already unstable, the Stock Exchange in the Danish capital will remain closed until after referendum day, and Prime Minister Krag is threatening to devalue the krone if his countrymen refuse to let him swear allegiance to the European Community.

The confusion could hardly be more complete. Finland is also ultimately contributing to this. Two and a half years ago, the Finns dealt the deathblow to the Nordic Customs Union because they feared, without admitting it, that Denmark was using it to accede more easily to the EEC. Helsinki is now no longer even

considering adoption of the Association Treaty with the EEC. It is certainly making no move to present it to Parliament.

An EEC of the Ten currently seems like pie in the sky, and we shall most probably have to make do with a Community of Eight. For economic as much as other reasons, however, the EEC must not now turn its back on Norway the cold shoulder now. A solution will have to be found, possibly through an Association Treaty, not least — why try to conceal it — for reasons of general and defence policy. Such an Association Treaty would, however, be far less advantageous to Norway than full membership. Industry, as well as fisheries, will be seriously affected, and agriculture all the more so because it will probably be excluded from the Treaty altogether.

However, before these negotiations can begin, Norway will first need a government again. And this may well take some time.