

'A warning' from Le Monde (27 September 1972)

Caption: On 25 September 1972, the Norwegians vote in a referendum against the country's accession to the European common market. Two days later, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the consequences of this Norwegian refusal for the process of enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. FAUVET, Jacques. 27.09.1972, n° 8 616; 29e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Un avertissement", p. 1.

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A warning

The Norwegian voters' clear rejection of the treaty of accession negotiated between their Government and the European Community has put Norway itself, as well as neighbouring Denmark — and indeed all supporters of European unification — in a difficult position. The referendum was, of course, not binding, and its outcome could, in theory, have been overturned by Parliament. This eventuality has now been ruled out. On Tuesday morning, the Norwegian Government decided not to submit the treaty to Parliament. The idea of a 'Europe of the Ten' is already history.

But can we even speak of a 'Europe of the Nine'? Danish voters are going to the polls on Monday, and this time the referendum is binding. They will be tempted to take the same path as their Norwegian brethren, with whom they have very strong historical and cultural ties. Denmark is closer in all respects to the Six than is pastoral Norway. It is Europe's bridge to the rest of Scandinavia. A 'no' from Denmark would deal an even more serious blow to the 'greater Western Europe' idea that is the driving force behind enlargement of the Community.

The outcome of the Norwegian referendum marks the beginning of a serious political crisis in Oslo. Norway's Prime Minister, Trygve Bratteli, had already announced on 24 August that he would resign if the vote went against membership, and he will no doubt have done so by next week. But the opponents of the Common Market, a mixed bunch of leftists, nationalists, farmers, and back-to-nature enthusiasts, can only form a minority coalition. As the Norwegian Constitution makes no provision for an early dissolution of Parliament, the issue cannot be settled until the next general election in autumn 1973.

Norway's 'no' is also a warning to all Europeans. The fact that a country which exports more than half its produce to the Community refuses to become a member, at the risk of considerable economic hardship — among other things because it fears the livelihood of its 50 000 fishermen will be threatened 10 years from now — speaks volumes about the state of mind of the broad masses of people after almost 15 years of 'European construction'. The race for economic growth, which determined the course of the Common Market during the 1960s, no longer seems such an attractive ideal. Coming after the lack of enthusiasm demonstrated by the French in the April referendum, and at a time when European governments are finding it so hard to adopt common approaches to the major issues of the day, this latest setback proves that no idea, no matter how great, is irreversible.

In the meantime, Norway's rejection of membership will shift the balance in the enlarged Community away from the maritime and Nordic states towards the countries of continental Europe. France, no doubt, will not be too disappointed at this outcome. Last week, Mr Pompidou announced that his country was now more than ever in favour of Spanish membership — a statement that may well have shocked many voters in Norway, where there is considerable hostility to the Spanish regime. As for Britain, it will now have a little less support from within the new Community for its 'offshore' aspirations.