

## 'Danish dynamite' from Der Spiegel (8 June 1992)

**Source:** Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. Augstein, Rudolf ; R Herausgeber Dr. Kaden, Wolfgang; Kilz, Hans Werner. 08.06.1992, Nr. 24; 46. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein GmbH. "Der dänische Sprengsatz", p. 154-157.

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**Last updated:** 06/07/2016



## Danish dynamite

**Big Bang in Denmark: by voting against the Maastricht Treaty, the Danes scrambled the timetable for European Union. Is this a signal for other States to rise up against Brussels centralism and to put a halt to further integration? Bonn and Paris in particular are now pressing for the other eleven to carry on.**

Even at their most recent bilateral meeting in La Rochelle, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand were quite satisfied with themselves and with Europe. If little Denmark were to reject the Maastricht Treaty in the referendum, the other eleven would, according to the German Chancellor and the French President, just press ahead without them.

Mitterrand complacently pointed to the many applicant countries that would like to join the Community sooner rather than later: 'Soon there will be 13, 14 or 15 of us again'.

Casual words came easy to the Franco-German allies. Two weeks ago, no one wanted to believe that a majority of the four million Danish voters could actually dare to obstruct the 'moving train' (Kohl on Europe) on its journey to a united future.

As a result of the Common Market, Denmark had, after all, experienced an economic miracle. The prospects of an enlargement of the EC to include the neighbouring Scandinavian States appeared to paint an even rosier picture for the economic and political future of the Danes.

On the other hand, a 'No', which politicians, trade unionists and industrial leaders depicted in colours of doom and gloom for the citizens, is bound to jeopardise the country's strong currency, drive away investors and cause a sharp rise in unemployment. In that case, what reasonable Dane should vote against Europe?

On Tuesday evening, the impossible happened: 1 652 999 Danes, i.e. 50.7 %, snubbed the European Community, with 46 269 more 'No' than 'Yes' votes.

On the warm summer's night, thousands gathered spontaneously at Copenhagen's City Hall Square for a beer-fuelled celebration. Above all, young voters, women and Social Democrats were decisive in the vote against Maastricht and against an enforced European Union with its Brussels-based centralism — in the words of Foreign Minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, a disappointed Liberal, a 'regrettable own goal'.

The shock result from Copenhagen left the old continent with a bad hangover. There was no longer any sense of arrogance or self-confidence. The opponents of European unification had triumphed.

In Britain, Margaret Thatcher thanked the Danes for their 'No to the Eurocrats' and called for a referendum to be held on the Maastricht Treaty in Great Britain as well. Prime Minister John Major hinted that the debate on ratification, already determined by the House of Commons, would be postponed. At the same time, concern is growing that now the Irish, who will decide on Political as well as Economic and Monetary Union in a referendum on 18 June, might use their veto against Maastricht.

Even the spirited Mitterrand has become afraid. Now he, too, no longer wishes to rely solely on ratification of the Treaty by the Parliament. Instead, the people themselves are to decide on Maastricht in a referendum — with a large majority, he hopes, giving a clear 'Yes' to further European integration.

After the initial confusion, the politicians have apparently returned to their former determination. 'Undeterred', promised the new German Foreign Minister, Klaus Kinkel, they would push ahead on the path to Political Union.

A survey of his fellow Foreign Ministers in the other ten capitals revealed that they, too, are determined to carry through ratification as planned. The EC Foreign Ministers wished to make a statement to that effect at a crisis meeting on the margins of the NATO meeting in Oslo.

However, the spirited call of ‘onward, even without Denmark’ could not be maintained quite so easily. On the day after the referendum, the legal experts in Brussels were busily examining all the possible options for ways to proceed with Europe. A senior EC official said ‘It has dramatic effects and is incredibly complicated.’

It is clear that the Maastricht Treaty, as submitted for ratification, may be put into effect only by all 12 signatories. If even just one refuses, the whole process of concluding the Treaty must be repeated.

At the same time, on the basis of the pre-Maastricht legal position, Denmark is still a full member of the European Community. The various Ministers from Copenhagen continue to sit around the Council table when decisions are being taken on new environmental directives, the harmonisation of excise duties or industrial policy measures.

Therefore, in all policy areas for which the Community is competent under the Treaties of Rome, a country is involved that has opposed the objective of the Community — Political Union.

Self-critically, the Eurocrats who had helped to draft the Maastricht Treaty blamed themselves for an error of omission following the surprising ‘No’ from Denmark. They had simply neglected to insert a ‘take it or leave it’ clause. In other words, anyone who does not approve the Treaty is not to remain a member of the EC.

At breakfast on Wednesday morning, the Portuguese Foreign Minister, João de Deus Pinheiro, the President-in-Office of the Council, and the French President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, considered how the crisis could be handled. They came up with four possibilities:

- The Maastricht Treaty would be renegotiated in order to make it more appealing to the Danes.
- An EC Conference would agree on a Maastricht II that can be put into effect even by less than 12 members.
- Denmark would be given special status within the Political Union determined in Maastricht.
- Denmark would voluntarily withdraw from the European Community, and, as a member of the association between the EC and EFTA, share in the benefits of the common market in the European Economic Area.

When the two leading Europeans analysed the individual possibilities, the idea of renegotiating the Treaty very quickly fell by the wayside. The Danish ‘No’ could not be attributed to specific parts of the Treaty. It reflected a vague unease with a politically centralised monster, in which the little nation would lose its sovereignty and identity. However, that cannot be eliminated by renegotiation.

In addition, there are fears that, if the package were untied, other countries would come up with new reservations and wishes.

However, on closer inspection, all the other possibilities proved to be inappropriate. For example, Denmark would have to renounce full membership and be satisfied with a lesser status in the Community, such as association. It would be even more unrealistic for Copenhagen to rejoin the ranks of the EFTA countries.

It appeared most realistic at first to amend the Maastricht Treaty at an Intergovernmental Conference in such a way that it can be ratified and put into effect by just 11 States. However, when the Council legal experts analysed this alternative for the first time, it quickly became clear that, rather than a quick fix, the

Community could expect time-consuming legal wrangling.

Even if the complicated legal problems are successfully resolved, the psychological damage that the Danes have caused is already becoming apparent. Copenhagen has highlighted a theme of Euroscepticism that exists not only on the Baltic. In an ARD telephone survey last Wednesday, 81 % of the 70 000 callers said they were opposed to a united Europe.

With the Danish 'No', the architects of Europe, above all Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand, have been forced to close ranks more tightly and to raise the requirements for newcomers. Applicants for accession, such as the neutral Swedes, Austrians and Finns, can no longer hope to be able to play a special role in the future common security policy. The message is now clearer than ever: take it or leave it. According to Portugal's Foreign Minister, João de Deus Pinheiro, 'The enlargement of the Community is not jeopardised, but the applicants have to realise that the Maastricht objectives must be accepted in full and not only in part.'

After countless telephone calls to their colleagues in the EC capitals, Pinheiro and Klaus Kinkel were largely agreed how the Danish bomb might be defused.

The EC partners are relying not only on the Danes' understanding; they intend to use due pressure to ensure that Copenhagen gives way and backs down.

The declarations made by the Scandinavian neighbours that they would adhere to their accession plans despite the Danish vote were welcome. They showed that Denmark's 'No' to the Treaty did not deter other countries from sharing in the benefits of the Community. Little Denmark, which earns 35 % of its gross national product through exports, would very soon be surrounded by full members of the EC.

It was also agreed that the Maastricht Treaty should be ratified in the other countries as soon as possible. This should make clear to the Danes that their referendum cannot halt the move towards a Political Union.

Mercilessly, according to a Kinkel official, they also intend to confront them with the 'ultimate sanction, Denmark's exclusion from the EC'.

When all the others have approved the Maastricht Treaty, when the negotiations for the accession of Denmark's neighbours have begun and Denmark is threatened with exclusion, the people will be asked again.

The leader of the Danish Government, Poul Schlüter, has already indicated in Brussels and Bonn that he is prepared to organise a new referendum. Admittedly, for the Danes it is then no longer a question of Maastricht but, as a Delors official has said, of 'all or nothing'.

In addition, the leader of Sweden's Conservative Government, Carl Bildt, who supports the European Union plans unreservedly, brought the new position of all the Scandinavian EC applicants down to the critical point: 'It now sounds like Hamlet: to be or not to be.'