

'Ceremonial signing of the new Treaty on Union' from the Luxemburger Wort (7 February 1992)

Caption: As the Treaty of Maastricht is signed on 7 February 1992, the daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort analyses the repercussions of the European Union on the Twelve.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. dir. de publ. Heiderscheid, André ; RRéd. Chef Zeches, Léon. 08.-09.02.1992, n° 33; 145e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Neuer Unionsvertrag feierlich unterzeichnet", auteur:Freudenberg, Tobias , p. 1.

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The European Community and Maastricht

Ceremonial signing of the new Treaty on Union

Historic Treaty on European Union despite various shortcomings: President of the EC Council of Ministers, Anibal Cavaco Silva, described the substance of the document as a reasonable balance between ambition and caution.

by T. Freudenberg (Maastricht)

In Maastricht last night, two months after the EC summit and in the same venue, the building that houses the Government of the Netherlands Province of Limburg, the Foreign and Finance Ministers of the 12 EC Member States signed the Treaty on European Union. The Portuguese Prime Minister and current President of the Council of Ministers of the EC, Anibal Cavaco Silva, together with his predecessor, the Netherlands Prime Minister, Ruud Lubbers, under whose Presidency the Treaty was concluded, had themselves come to the 'Province House' in Maastricht in order to attend the signing ceremony. Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Jacques Santer, was also there. In addition, the Presidents of all the EC institutions had been invited.

At the signing ceremony, the current President of the Council, Portuguese Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva, declared that the outcome of the sometimes hotly debated negotiations was 'a reasonable balance between ambition and caution'. The EC would, in future, be able to act more energetically on the international stage.

The Netherlands Premier, Ruud Lubbers, under whose overall control the talks were concluded, declared: 'This is a historic moment for the almost 340 million citizens of the European Community, a moment of satisfaction and of hope.' Europe was moving towards an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.

Assessments of the Treaty, though, are rather varied. In particular, the newly elected President of the European Parliament, the Christian Democrat Egon Klepsch, was somewhat critical: the Treaty contained 'weaknesses, shortcomings and uncertainties', he said in Maastricht. He took the view that it might not succeed in creating a European Union capable of overcoming the challenges of the day, and it might not create the framework required to accommodate new members. For that reason, the Treaty could be regarded only as an intermediate step that must be followed by further steps.

In the opinion of Egon Klepsch, Maastricht had not risen to the challenge, especially with regard to the powers of the Community's elected representatives: 'We had asked for a real strengthening of the European Parliament, so that it could at last play an appropriate role in the decision-making process of the European institutions,' he said. Parliament would now review the outcome of the negotiations 'fundamentally and in detail', and its Members would vote on the Treaty in Strasbourg in April.

The document, which runs to over 300 pages, still has to be ratified by the 12 national parliaments. In addition, a referendum is required in Denmark and Ireland. The European Parliament will debate the Treaty at its April part-session in Strasbourg. Although its assent is not essential, the vote will send out a signal. The Belgian and Italian Parliaments have made their assent conditional on a 'yes' vote from the MEPs. The fact that Klepsch, in his speech yesterday, spoke about putting the finishing touches to the Treaty means, though, that he is counting on a 'yes' vote.

However, Klepsch also criticised the structure of the Treaty: he found fault with the concept of the 'three pillars' on which the Treaty is constructed. It basically reduced the foreign and security policy sphere as well as the internal and judicial policy sphere, newly incorporated into the Treaty, to mere cooperation between governments. Consequently, these areas were not subject to monitoring by the EC institutions. At the same time, however, national parliaments would have fewer opportunities to exert any influence if governments were going to take decisions in these areas behind closed doors in the EC Council of Ministers.

Despite these shortcomings, it was noticeable that those attending the ceremony were aware that this was a historic moment. There is now no going back on the road to European Union. 'Recalling the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent', says the Preamble to the Treaty, 'firm bases for the construction of the future Europe' need to be created. With this Treaty, the European Community has finally grown up; the dream of combining its members into a union, of which the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, spoke in 1950 when the EC was founded, has now come within reach.

The Treaty includes details about the introduction of a common currency. At the same time, environmental protection, social cohesion, the right to education and consumer protection are also set out in the list of 'Treaty objectives' — in this way, these subjects are awarded constitutional status at European level. Another new subject is 'European Union citizenship', which should help every citizen of a Member State to secure equal rights throughout the Community. Jean Monnet, who had said that a united Europe would be achieved only through a series of small steps, was remembered in Maastricht. The Treaty on European Union is certainly a big step. As for eliminating the shortcomings that remain, that will be the responsibility of the approximately 340 million citizens of the new Union, together with their elected representatives.