‘Footing the Maastricht bill' from Le Monde (14 December 1992)

Caption: On 14 December 1992, two days after the Edinburgh European Council, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the thorny issue of the financing of the Community budget and analyses the precise financing plan proposed by Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. LESOURNE, Jacques ; Réd. Chef COLOMBANI, Jean-Marie. 14.12.1992, n° 14.634; 49e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La facture de Maastricht", p. 1.

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Footing the Maastricht bill

Jacques Delors' presentation of the EEC funding plan has a distinctly familiar ring. Last time round, the Single Act had to be implemented to make Europe's economy more competitive in the face of its Japanese and American rivals. This time, as the gap is still there, a success has to be made of Maastricht … for the same reasons.

Under the heading of 'social and economic cohesion', it had been decided, in February 1988, to double the size of the 'structural funds' in order to help the 'poor countries' of the Community keep up with the progress towards completion of the European single market. Now an 'intervention fund' is needed to make sure Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain do not lag behind in the march to Economic and Monetary Union.

In itself, a further increase in the Community budget is an unwelcome prospect for the 'rich countries'; the fact that they are being asked to foot most of the bill makes it more unwelcome still. To ease Spain's financial contribution — like France, Spain has played the European card for all it is worth — Brussels proposes to rely to a greater extent on contributions based on gross national product and to place less reliance on VAT yield.

The President of the Community's executive body, conscious of the ill-feeling that this proposal is likely to provoke in Bonn, has been considering placing the five new eastern *Länder* on the list of least developed regions within the EEC. In order not to further complicate the situation, the Commission proposal does not raise the vexed question of the 'British rebate', even though the current arrangements expire at the end of the year. And then there is the case of France, the largest 'net contributor' to the Community after Germany, which is now bracing itself for further cuts in farming subsidies.

Little doubt, then, that the Twelve are about to enter a phase of particularly difficult negotiations, in which national interests will come sharply to the fore. It is not without reason that Mr Delors and the Portuguese Presidency are committed to the idea of convening a special meeting of the European Council, perhaps in the run-up to the meeting of Heads of State or Government to be held in June in Lisbon.

There has been little movement as regards the funding of European integration, which continues to rely on the goodwill of governments and their national treasuries. In an increasingly unfavourable economic environment, exacerbated by the impact of German reunification, the difficult situation in Central and Eastern Europe and the never-ending problems of the countries along the southern Mediterranean rim, the natural reaction is to tighten the belt.

And yet it would be an illusion to imagine that Europe will not cost more and more. It is hard to see how the Twelve can avoid for very much longer the issue of introducing a European tax, if they do not wish to replay the same budget scenes every five years.