

‘Will France ratify the Maastricht agreements?’ in L’Europe en formation

Caption: In its winter 1991–1992 edition, the federalist journal L’Europe en formation analyses the political situation in France and wonders whether there might be doubts surrounding France’s ratification of the Treaty on European Union.

Source: L’Europe en formation. Hiver 1991-1992, n° 283. Nice. "Les accords de Maastricht seront-ils ratifiés en France?", p. 3-6.

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Will France ratify the Maastricht agreements?

Editorial

The 'Treaty on European Union', more widely known as the 'Maastricht agreements', had not yet been signed when those who traditionally oppose European integration policy involving any transfer of sovereignty declared war on its ratification in France, whether by referendum or by Parliament. It is not enough for them that there is no longer any mention of a 'federal goal' in the texts signed by the Heads of State or Government of the Twelve on 7 February, that in the sensitive areas of foreign and security policy (no one yet, of course, dares speak of common defence) intergovernmental cooperation remains the promised land, and that the improvements to the majority decision process are in fact fewer than the measures requiring unanimity.

So the motley procession of the great 'no' is already on the move, headed by Le Pen's 'anti-federasts', followed by Gaullist Jacobins who are trying to drag the whole RPR along with them, and a few individual snipers from the UDF itself, like Philippe de Villiers, while the large chauvinistic-conservative battalions of Western Europe's most backward communist party bring up the rear together with Jean-Pierre Chevènement's followers in the Socialist Party, indistinguishable in this respect from the likes of Philippe Seguin.

Europe has had its problems in the past, but this time the situation is serious. France's ruling socialist government, under a President of the same political colour, is running out of steam, as repeatedly shown in the polls and by-elections of recent months, and the government's unpopularity will inevitably contaminate the European policy it is seeking to promote.

Encouraged by the xenophobia of Le Pen's movement, which is clearly on the upswing, the opponents of the Maastricht agreements have chosen their line of attack. They are targeting non-French Europeans resident in France, who, if the Maastricht agreements are ratified, will be entitled to vote and stand as candidates in local elections, in a country where locally elected representatives take part by delegation in the election of senators. It is just about acceptable that a European citizen living in a Member State should have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in European elections on the same terms as nationals of that State, but that the same provisions should apply in local elections seems excessive to part of the French political class, who accuse the socialists of trying an old trick: first let European 'foreigners' vote in local elections, and later the real 'foreign' foreigners will shove through the breach opened by Maastricht. They deliberately ignore the fact that a great deal will depend on the implementing provisions to be adopted unanimously by the Community's Council of Ministers by 31 December 1994. Clearly, the idea of European citizenship has made little headway in the minds of the French. For a Jacobin, the very idea of shared citizenship is heretical — strangely enough, since nobody in this country is bothered any longer by the fact that 18 million French citizens (i.e. more than a third of the population) born between 1880 and 1980 are descended from first, second or third generation immigrants (Quid 1991).

In these circumstances, was it absolutely necessary for the Brussels Commission to present the bill for the Maastricht agreements before they have even been ratified — a bill which, according to estimates the experts are still discussing, would increase the Community budget by 22 million ecus (153 billion French francs) from 1992 to 1997?

It is of course quite proper to do the sums now, as it was in 1988 when the task was to get the Single Act accepted. There is no ignoring the fact that the 'economic and social cohesion' needed in order to achieve monetary union will require the transfer of resources and financial intervention in favour of disadvantaged regions or countries. But in our view it was not advisable to impose a further burden on ratification and constitutional debates that are difficult enough already, by obliging the authorities of the twelve Member States to embark at the same time on financial policies that should preferably have been avoided at this stage. One does not have to be a genius to see that the next European Council meeting will provoke passionate conflicting reactions. Nothing is more revealing than the outcry already caused in several countries of the Community by the Brussels Commission's financial estimates, dubbed the 'Delors II

Package’.

Publication of the bill for the Maastricht agreements was judged inopportune even in Germany. The Federal Republic is already the Community’s largest net contributor. It has to face the considerable costs of ‘reunification’ and by itself contributes more than half the world’s aid for salvage operations in the former Soviet Union. So Bonn let it be known that the rebate which the United Kingdom has been receiving since 1985 would have to be renegotiated. That was met by violent reactions in the British press, as was the cost of the Maastricht agreements.

In France, where the balance of contributions paid to the EEC and the subsidies distributed by Brussels was negative by 10.5 to 12 million francs in 1991, reactions were scarcely more favourable. France also knows that it will be the main loser in the current negotiations on the reduction of aid to European agriculture. Mr Bérégovoy has talked of a European tax to replace national budget contributions. Why not? At this stage in the European integration process it would be a good idea to institute a form of direct participation by each citizen, but only on condition that a European tax of this kind is not paid into the State exchequer and is kept separate from the contributions of national taxpayers. A European tax should no more be combined with national taxes than are local taxes at present.

To put it in a nutshell, the ‘Delors II Package’ comes at a bad time. It will not facilitate ratification of the Maastricht agreements by France, even if the three French political heavyweights who are in favour (Raymond Barre, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and François Mitterrand) intervene in the debate to prevent a rejection that would have long-lasting consequences.

L’Europe en formation