

‘Thank you, Denmark’ from Libération (4 June 1992)

Caption: For Serge July, director of the French daily newspaper Libération, the Danish refusal to ratify the Treaty of Maastricht reopens the debates on European political integration.

Source: Libération. 04.06.1992. Paris. "Merci le Danemark", auteur:July, Serge , p. 3.

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Thank you, Denmark

Serge July

It is not a Danish proverb but a French one that says that every cloud has its silver lining. Sometimes it's a very silver lining. 46 269 Danes, by forcing their country out of the slipstream of the Union, have provoked the first major European political crisis, one which was essential if the Maastricht process was to break free of its snug cocoon.

Thank you, people of Denmark. They have done Europe and the European people an enormous favour, no doubt at great cost to themselves.

For it was the technocratic approach to European integration that was overthrown on Black Tuesday in Copenhagen. If Europeans are to seize ownership of Europe, it was necessary that what was hinted at in Brussels and spelt out in Maastricht should at last take shape.

Given the essentially economic nature of European integration, there was only one way forward: the real-world principle. In the space of a few days, Europe got its fair share of that with the bombing of Sarajevo and the mishap in Copenhagen.

In the first instance, Europe was forced to admit that it still was not the power that it dreamed of being and needs to be. The massacres perpetrated just a few minutes' flying time from Milan, Berlin or Paris could not be prevented. Europe was unable to command respect for its values, particularly the right to self-determination. The fact cannot be denied: as things stand, Europe merely has a neutralising power in the Balkans. In Copenhagen, Europe is facing the other side of the looking glass: it is discovering its own mortality. Too fantastical, somewhere between a bureaucratic nightmare and political abstraction, Europe's strangeness has awakened fears and highlighted the shortcomings, deadlocks and impotence of Europe as an entity. These fears, which vary from one country to the next, have been heightened by the lack of any real control over a rapid and dizzying process.

The Danes, Germans and French are no longer faced with plans or blueprints to be realised at some future date, but with the possibility of solidarity and interdependencies actually disappearing and being dismantled, of a black hole opening up on the continent. The Danes, for whom German reunification was a threat because of the lack of adequate safeguards to ensure the democratic operation of the massive Community marketplace, are now, a few hours after the 'no' vote, faced with an even worse prospect, one of economic marginalisation and political annihilation by powerful neighbours.

For what part of the Danish electorate, along with most opponents of Maastricht, feared was a loss of sovereignty and greater German power; and this is precisely what the Danish 'no' vote has brought about. Fear creates the very thing that is feared.

This 'no' vote has proved that Europe exists, and that fact had to be hammered home. It is the notion of automaticity that has been challenged by the Danes. Reintroducing an element of risk changes everything: Europe remains to be conquered. Its opponents will henceforth be held responsible for unravelling Europe. We are now facing a totally different situation. Moreover, it is the very nature of this crisis that could serve to provoke a genuine Community awareness: it is the first time since the founding fathers and the pre-history of European integration (with the exception of the extremely premature EDC) that the Danish domestic political crisis and the European crisis are one and the same thing. It is one and the same crisis. The significance of being part of Europe could not be better illustrated: all politics is now European. By hastily arranging a referendum that he had been wanting for several weeks, but which he did not want to call prematurely, François Mitterrand has realised that he has to hurry up. Europe is once again something that has to be fought for. It is a fight in which, the Head of State hopes, Europeans will come together. He is hoping for a political shake-up that a mere ratification in Parliament would not have delivered.

The Danes have sparked-off a series of powerful jolts: a certain way of talking about and constructing

Europe died at the ballot box in Denmark. Thank you, people of Denmark: they have clearly rescued the European project from its dreariness. It was not political in nature but it will become so.