

# Editorial

## The Danish "No" to The Maastricht Treaty

On 2 June, 1992 Danish voters by the narrow margin of 50.7 per cent against 49.3 per cent rejected the Maastricht Treaty. Polls, however, indicate that a large majority of 70 per cent of the Danish voters continue to support Danish membership of the EC. Only 19 per cent call for a Danish withdrawal from the Community. The Danish politicians now face the difficult task of combining the opinion of the Danish voters with the aspirations of the 11 other Member States into a viable Danish relationship with its European partners.

The negative result became a reality despite the fact that 147 out of a total of 175 Danish MPs supported the Treaty and despite a massive campaign in favour of a positive outcome highlighting the substantial risks of a "No". In an effort to clarify the issues of the referendum, the Danish Government printed 500,000 copies of the Treaty text for free distribution through post offices and public libraries. The Treaty copies were picked up by the public in less than three days.

The voting card did not require the Danish voter to explain what motivated his vote. Opinion polls indicate that concern over the lack of influence of small countries as well as general distrust of the EC decision-making process played a larger role in the voters' minds than any single aspect of the Maastricht Treaty. In a Gallup poll, 24 per cent of the interviewed Danes expressed concern over loss of independence and sovereignty as the major reason for their "No", followed by 12 per cent who distrust the EC generally, and 10 per cent who are unsure of the consequences of a European Union. Only 1 per cent mention the common currency as their major concern while other actual contents of the Maastricht Treaty are not even on the voters' list of issues. While it is not possible to point out the cause of the "general distrust", various factors have been mentioned in the public debate, *ie* the feeling that decisions are made far away, that the EC decision-making process is not open

enough, and that the EC interferes in too many areas at too detailed a level.

It also appears that the very complexity of the Treaty was an issue. The population was to understand the scope and consequences of an often diffusely worded Maastricht Treaty which nonetheless clearly aims at the establishment of a European Union and a substantial surrender of national sovereignty. Further, the electorate had to react to a number of loose plans on the consequences of a foreseeable substantial enlargement of the EC involving the risk of reduced influence of the smaller Member States in the Community institutions.

In the coming months, attention will focus on possible solutions to the present situation. The Danish Government has taken note of the fact that the 11 other Member States have continued their procedure for ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. The official Danish attitude is that all options should be kept open including a renegotiation of the Maastricht Treaty and a right for Denmark to accede to the Treaty at a later date. Danish officials have been entrusted with the task of producing a white paper with possible solutions.

While it is still too early to predict the outcome of the crisis, it is a widely held belief in the media that a separate and parallel Maastricht Treaty among the 11 other Member States will be ratified and that the Danish problem will have to be solved in a special agreement providing for Danish participation in certain of the new areas covered by the Maastricht Treaty. Considering the complex anatomy of the Danish "No", making the necessary interpretation will not be an easy task for Danish politicians.

With a view to the narrow margin in the referendum (merely 48,000 votes), some observers have downplayed the importance of the referendum and even suggested that the "No" could be considered merely a general protest against Danish politicians. It could, however, be a mistake to dismiss the Danish result as accidental. While the EC debate since Denmark's accession to the EC in 1972 has shown an increasing backing for European cooperation as reflected in the broad parliamentary support for the Maastricht Treaty, it has also demonstrated a decreasing popular support for EC initiatives involving the surrender of self-

determination to centralised decision-making in Brussels. Compared to recent polls in the Euro-barometer on the preference for self-determination in various EC Member States, the Danish "No" is surprisingly small. If the negative result was to be repeated in a new referendum in a few months, the consequences for Denmark's future participation in the EC could be fatal. Thus, it is to be hoped for that there will be sufficient time for the strong support for European integration in the Danish Parliament to gain similar popular support before a new referendum is called for.

In the longer perspective, the Danish "No" may result in a new orientation of the European integration process with greater emphasis on the democratic foundation of the European Union and the principle of subsidiarity, provided that the Danish vote does not instead lead to an uncontrollable development derailing the integration process.

While the Danish Parliament is considering the options for the upcoming negotiations with Denmark's EC partners, Danish business leaders are uncertain about the effects of the "No" on the Danish economy. Most of them agree that the long-term effect can only seriously be estimated when the ultimate fate of the Maastricht Treaty is known and Denmark's relationship with its Community partners has thus been clarified. In the intervening period effects are unlikely to be drastic, though the rise in interest rates and the general fall in business and consumer confidence following the Danish "No" will most likely lead to hesitancy in the financial markets and a fall in investment rates.

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