

---

## **First No, Then Yes: The Danish Referendums on the Maastricht Treaty 1992 and 1993**

---

TORBEN WORRE

*Department of History, University of Copenhagen,  
Njalsgade 102, DK-2300 Copenhagen 5, Denmark*

### **Abstract**

This article considers the behaviour of Danish voters in the two referendums on the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty). The first, in June 1992, rejected the Treaty and threatened the whole union process. The second, in May 1993, approved the Treaty. The development of opinion before and between the referendums is considered, and it is demonstrated that resistance to the Maastricht Treaty was not an effect of opposition to membership of the Community, but the result of a preference for an intergovernmental type of European Co-operation.

### **I. Introduction**

The second constitutional reform of the EC, the Treaty on European Union (TEU), passed at the Maastricht summit in December 1991, was adopted by an overwhelming majority in the Danish Parliament, Folketinget, on 12 May 1992. But three weeks later, on 2 June, it was rejected by Danish voters in a referendum, although with a tiny majority of 50.7 per cent of the votes cast.

The rejection created a serious political crisis, not only because it implied a repudiation of Parliament, but also because it jeopardized the Union process and Denmark's membership of the Community. A solution to the dilemma was reached at the Edinburgh summit of the EC in December 1992, which accepted

a number of Danish reservations to the TEU. A new referendum on both the Maastricht Treaty and the Edinburgh agreements was held on 18 May 1993, and it resulted in approval by a majority of 56.7 per cent.

This article will consider the Danish Union debate and explore the referendum voting on the basis of survey data. As EC referendums have become a fairly regular feature of Danish political life, their study becomes a source of the understanding of referendum behaviour, of the influences making people vote the way they do. The two Maastricht referendums are particularly suitable for comparison, because they were very close to each other in time and theme, but produced different results. This article will consider a number of influences affecting the referendum vote, moving from the general and remote to the particular and recent.

A study of the arguments in the Union debate shows that the campaigns for and against the Union were based on essentially different types of arguments, presenting very different images of future European co-operation.

Party identification is considered as one of the main sources of voter opinion formation, but the rejection of the TEU revealed considerable discord. The impact of party preference on opinion development and referendum vote is studied with special interest in the consequences of a party changing its recommendation from 'no' to 'yes'.

The vote on the Maastricht Treaty was mainly an expression of fundamental attitudes to European co-operation. This analysis shows that the rejection of the TEU was not an effect of increasing hostility to Danish membership of the Community, but rather an expression of a preference for interstate co-operation.

The Maastricht Treaty on European Union constitutes in reality a package of major and minor changes, and some of these are shown to be more acceptable to the voters than others. But the vote was also affected by voters' expectations of the consequences of a rejection of the TEU on the future position of Denmark in Europe. Finally, the probability of a change of vote between the two referendums was influenced by the voters' impression of how profoundly the Edinburgh agreement had changed the options offered in the second poll. While the former influences considered are of an attitudinal nature, the last two concern differences of perception, which proves to be just as important.

## **II. Danish Policy on European Union**

Danish EC policy has always been controversial.<sup>1</sup> Denmark's entry into the European Community was approved in a referendum of October 1972 by a majority of 63 per cent. But this was based mainly on considerations of economic expediency, and within the Community Denmark became a firm advocate of an

<sup>1</sup> For a general presentation of the history of Danish EC policy, see Thomsen (1993).

intergovernmental pattern of co-operation, preservation of the principle of unanimity and national veto. Further expansion of European co-operation should develop by means of a pragmatic step-by-step approach within the existing intergovernmental framework.

Although an overwhelming majority in Folketinget has always been in favour of Danish membership of the EC, there have been differences in party policy regarding integration. One group of parties, the Social Democrats, the Progress Party, the Radicals and eventually the Christian People's Party, had reservations about further integration: they wanted to preserve the intergovernmental status quo, refusing any additional transfer of powers, limitations of the veto or increased influence of the European Parliament. 'The Social Democrats consistently reject any supranational development of the EC towards a political union' stated a 1984 party manifesto, which also turned down any 'institutional changes or redistribution of powers'.<sup>2</sup> Another group of non-socialist parties, the Conservatives, Liberals and Centre-Democrats, were more in favour of integration, but even they were very cautious and pragmatic: 'We would like a so-called union, but we must pursue it by small practical steps in order to make the population follow suit'.<sup>3</sup>

The true opposition to EC membership was represented only by minor left-wing parties, the most important being the Socialist People's Party, usually controlling one sixth of the seats in Parliament. But in public opinion opposition to the EC was much stronger, normally comprising a majority of Danish voters. This difference of opinion between voters and parties effected strongly deviating voting behaviour in the European elections, quite unique within the Community (Worre, 1987). And it certainly contributed to the very reserved Danish policy towards integration.

So projects for European Union, which appeared on the agenda from the beginning of the 1980s, were not favourably received in Denmark. Although the first result, the Single European Act, included only minor adjustments to the institutional framework, this was rejected by a majority in Parliament, including the Social Democrats, Radicals and the Socialist People's Party, as transgressing the limit of acceptability. A major European crisis was avoided only because the SEA was approved in a referendum of February 1986 by a majority of 56 per cent of the votes cast (Worre, 1988).

This overruling contributed to a certain convergence of party policies towards the EC during the following years, and six parties agreed on a joint memorandum in October 1990 to the Intergovernmental Conference on European Union, which was opposed only by two minor parties, the Socialist People's Party and

<sup>2</sup> Social Democratic party manifesto 'Towards New Progress' of September 1984.

<sup>3</sup> MEP and former chairman of the Centre-Democrats Peter Duetoft in 'Situation Report from the Centre-Democrats on Developments in the EC', August 1988.

the Progress Party.<sup>4</sup> During the conference Denmark endeavoured to curb the more comprehensive supranational proposals, and the Treaty resulting from the negotiations in Maastricht in December 1991 corresponded to most of the propositions of the Danish memorandum, although on certain points it went beyond it, e.g. by including defence policy.

The TEU was carried by Folketinget on 12 May 1992, by 130 votes to 25. The confirming referendum required by the constitution was scheduled for 2 June.<sup>5</sup>

### III. The Referendum of 2 June 1992

On the face of it, the Maastricht Treaty was less controversial than the themes of the two former referendums: it was supported by an overwhelming majority of Parliament, by nearly all organizations and groups concerned and by a unanimous press. Opposition to the Union was confined to three minor parties, as the two parties of the extreme left and right were joined by the small centre Christian People's Party, whose national conference (but not its parliamentary party) recommended a 'no'. A number of ad hoc referendum organizations also campaigned for a 'no'.<sup>6</sup>

The campaign revealed large differences in conceptions of the Maastricht Treaty. According to supporters of the Union, only superficial changes had been made to the institutional structure of the EC and, as for the two major limitations of national sovereignty – the currency union and the defence community – the final decision concerning Denmark's accession to these was postponed until new referendums in the late 1990s. On the other hand, 'A "no" would place Denmark in a considerably weaker position in the development of Europe as regard the economy as well as welfare and environment'.<sup>7</sup> Denmark must not be 'side-tracked, while the European train continued', it should stay at the table where decisions were taken, and it should not delay the admission of the Nordic countries applying for EC membership.

EMU and the defence issues were played down, while the social dimension and environmental regulation were emphasized. Although some cession of sovereignty would take place in these areas, this was considered a positive

<sup>4</sup> 'Memorandum from the Danish government concerning the political and economic monetary union', adopted by Parliament on 25 October by 85 votes to 16.

<sup>5</sup> Although the majority was considerable, it did not satisfy the requirements of the Danish constitution of a five-sixths majority for any cession of sovereignty, implying a threshold of 150 votes. The alternative procedure is approval by referendum.

<sup>6</sup> The traditional anti-EC organization, the People's Movement against the EC, was joined by a number of ad hoc organizations in the campaign. After the referendum most of these joined the moderate wing of the People's Movement to form the June Movement (named after the referendum month) which, unlike the rump organization, did not want to leave the EC, but just to combat the Union.

<sup>7</sup> Social Democratic referendum manifesto. This and most of the following quotations are from the information leaflet published by Parliament 'Denmark and the European Union', a collection of party statements (Folketinget 1992).

development, because Denmark had higher standards than other EC countries: 'With a "yes" we have a better chance to protect Danish places of work from being undercut from abroad.'<sup>8</sup>

Union opponents, on the other hand, considered the Maastricht Treaty to be a threat to Denmark's independence, 'the foundation stone of the United States of Europe'.<sup>9</sup> The transition to majority vote in several areas meant that Denmark's influence was reduced from a veto to 3 votes out of 76. 'The EC Union reduces Denmark to a state in a federal Europe and Folketinget to a county council. Thus popular government will gradually be abandoned . . . The Danish constitution is rendered invalid'.<sup>10</sup> The TEU would increase the impenetrability, remoteness and democratic deficit in EC government. Furthermore, it would even constitute a threat to the Danish welfare state. Cuts were inevitable as a consequence of an equalization of the level of taxation. 'In the long run, we cannot maintain old age pensions . . . at a higher level than that of the other countries'. 'We shall have to pay, whenever we get sick, old or unemployed'.<sup>11</sup> While a "yes" to the Union would have disastrous consequences, a "no" would just preserve the status quo: 'If only one country says "no", the Union Treaty lapses'.<sup>12</sup>

Incidentally, Union opponents differed considerably in their reasons for rejecting the Maastricht Treaty. For the Progress Party it was 'saturated with planned economy and centralism', a situation 'the former communist countries are struggling to get rid of'. The Progress Party complained about the number of expensive EC projects, 'quota tyranny', subsidizing schemes, structural funds, the Social Charter and the attempt to turn the EC into a power which 'regulates our daily life inside and out'. For the Socialist People's Party, on the other hand, the military aims and centralization were reprehensible, while the Treaty was considered lacking in environmental and social regulation: 'The green and the social Europe keeps us waiting'. The Christian People's Party wanted to keep the EC as 'co-operation between nations. Several items in the treaty point, however, to a federal state'. While opposition to the EC in the past was mainly a left-wing affair, opposition to the Union now came from right across the political spectrum.

The campaign followed a conservative pattern very similar to the two former referendum campaigns. For the opponents, a 'no' meant a preservation of the current state of affairs, while a 'yes' would start an incalculable undermining of independence. For the supporters, a 'yes' would produce limited, but beneficial changes, while a 'no' would be risky. But unlike the former referendum

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Socialist People's Party manifesto.

<sup>10</sup> Pamphlet from the People's Movement against the EC.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Socialist People's Party manifesto.

Table 1: Danish Referendums on the EC (%)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Result</i>		<i>Turnout</i>
		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
2 October 1972	Denmark's entry into the EC	63	37	90
27 February 1986	Single European Act	56	44	75
2 June 1992	European Union Treaty (Maastricht)	49	51	83
18 May 1993	Maastricht Treaty and Edinburgh agreements	57	43	86

Table 2: Development of Voting Intention before the Referendum of 1992: Last column 'yes %': yes in % of decided, i.e. the first column as a proportion of the first two columns, corresponding to the votes cast in a referendum

<i>Period</i>	<i>Voting Intention</i>			
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know/ Will not Vote</i>	<i>Yes (%)</i>
March 1992	29	33	48	47
April, first three weeks of May	37	36	27	51
Last week of May	42	39	19	52
Referendum of 2 June	41	42	17	49

*Source:* Gallup's voter barometer. Average number of respondents 700 per week (%).

campaigns, the two most tangible consequences of a 'no' were hardly mentioned this time round: the risk of a total rupture with the EC, and the economic costs. This time the voters might even imagine that a 'no' would cost nothing.

The formation of opinion on the Maastricht Treaty is explored through survey polls in Table 2.<sup>13</sup> In March 1992, three months before the referendum, only half of the electorate had any definite voting intention, and the remainder were still in doubt. But during the following months most of those hesitating were gradually mobilized: only 17 per cent abstained from voting on polling day, fewer than at the last general election. But despite this colossal mobilization of opinion, the balance was not affected. From the beginning there was an equilibrium between 'yes' and 'no', and despite considerable short-term changes

<sup>13</sup> The survey data used in this article were assembled by the Gallup Institute: a 'voter barometer' taken daily during the months before the referendums, and post-referendum surveys made by a research group from the universities of Copenhagen and Aarhus.

in favour of one side or the other, no decisive deviation from that balance ever occurred. The contest was in the balance to the very last. One third of the electorate chose sides during the campaign, but they were just as divided as those who had decided at the beginning. At the polls the TEU was rejected with a majority of only 50.7 per cent.

#### **IV. The Referendum of 18 May 1993**

The rejection of the TEU was a serious repudiation of the overwhelming majority in Parliament. This not only constituted a crisis in national politics, but seriously jeopardized the whole relationship of Denmark to the Community. Union opponents claimed that the rejection simply implied the annulment of the Union Treaty. If other member countries wanted to continue with the Union process, they would have to renegotiate the terms of the Treaty to find solutions acceptable to the Danish electorate. But a few days after the referendum the European Council of Ministers declared its intention to carry on with the ratification process and refused to consider any amendments to the Treaty text: this would demand a new round of ratifications.

The use of referendums in representative systems implies the paradox that it is the responsibility of the parliamentary majority to interpret and draw the consequences of a repudiation at the polls. The Danish government might have returned the Maastricht Treaty for a second referendum, now that the consequences had been clarified. Conservative Prime Minister Schlüter declared, however, that you cannot vote twice on the same issue. As a substantial renegotiation of the terms of the Treaty was excluded, the government turned its efforts to the possibility of negotiating certain appendices to the Treaty redefining Denmark's terms of affiliation to the Union.

The second endeavour was to gain broader Danish support for such a special settlement. Here the Socialist People's Party proved most amenable to compromise. After protracted negotiations with the Radicals and the Social Democrats, a 'national compromise' was concluded in November: this later gained the assent of the government and the other non-Socialist parties. It was remarkable that the initiative to change the very fundamentals of foreign policy did not originate from the government, but from the opposition. This underlines the extraordinary need to create a national consensus on the Union issue.

In the end, the 'national compromise' (later officially renamed 'Denmark in Europe') got the support of only seven political parties, the five original supporters of the Maastricht Treaty plus the Socialist People's Party and the Christian People's Party. It was still rejected by the Progress Party and anti-Union campaign organizations.

The EC summit in Edinburgh received the Danish demands favourably. It passed a number of 'decisions' concerning Denmark's status and the working of the EC institutional set-up, and accepted a number of unilateral Danish declarations.<sup>14</sup> The interstate nature of the Community was emphasized. 'The European Union requires independent and sovereign states to exercise some of their competences in common'. Openness and subsidiarity were introduced into the EC government. Four main exceptions were made regarding Denmark's status inside the Union: it will remain outside the defence community (including the WEU) and the third phase of EMU (with a common currency) and any future transfer of police power to the supranational level, and certain reservations were made about the concept of European citizenship. Denmark finally declared that it did not intend to prevent the other Member States from developing closer co-operation without Denmark.

The importance of the Edinburgh agreements was disputed, and their significance depends on the interpretation of the original Union Treaty. The concept of European citizenship will serve as an illustration of this issue. Union supporters claimed that they had curtailed the idea of a common citizenship effectively during the Maastricht negotiations, that the concept was reduced to two clauses, about suffrage at municipal and European elections. But opponents maintained that, if this was the sole intention, there was no reason at all to introduce the concept of European citizenship, and there was no guarantee in the Treaty against an extension of scope, e.g. into the field of social security. The Edinburgh agreement merely states that citizenship of the Union gives nationals of the Member States additional rights as specified in the Treaty, but does not in any way take the place of national citizenship.

The second referendum campaign therefore focused mainly on the significance of the Edinburgh agreements. To opponents of the Union it made little difference. 'Exactly the same treaty as last year. Not a comma is changed. A footnote was added, a non-committal arrangement, which actually does not change anything essential',<sup>15</sup> 'empty, without legal power . . . The same all over again'.<sup>16</sup> An encouraging development was the rise of resistance to the Union project in other EC countries: 'The Danish "no" of 2 June rallied the peoples of other countries. Since then Union opposition has grown rapidly everywhere'.<sup>17</sup> 'Denmark is no longer alone'.<sup>18</sup>

For the Union supporters it was essential to emphasize that the Edinburgh agreements had changed the options fundamentally. They 'preserve our contin-

<sup>14</sup> The term 'Edinburgh agreements' hereafter refers to the whole package of decisions and declarations.

<sup>15</sup> Progress Party manifesto. This and the following quotations of party manifestoes are from the official information leaflet 'Denmark in the EC' published by Parliament (Folketinget, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> People's Movement manifesto.

<sup>17</sup> Progress Party manifesto.

<sup>18</sup> June Movement manifesto.



ued active commitment to the EC, while allowing us to remain outside aspects of Union development.. Denmark won a special status in relation to the Maastricht Treaty ... It is in our interest to gain the kind of affiliation to the European Community which suits us'.<sup>19</sup> It was of particular importance for the two parties who had changed their recommendation from 'no' to 'yes' to emphasize the improved conditions: 'The Edinburgh agreements extract the teeth of the Union for Denmark',<sup>20</sup> 'Denmark participates in those aspects of the Maastricht Treaty which do not indicate a European Union'.<sup>21</sup> The Socialist People's Party considered that Edinburgh had realized its own intentions regarding European co-operation, 'a Europe with many mansions,' which must be open for the other Nordic countries, too.

The old Union parties stressed more generally the advantages of co-operation, the need for a concerted effort against unemployment: 'We cannot cope with the crisis alone'.<sup>22</sup> But two issues that had been played down in the 1992 Union campaign now became conspicuous. One was the risk of a total rupture with the Community: 'The Conservatives expect that a "no" implies farewell to the EC ... We shall be at the mercy of the decisions of others, but will ourselves be excluded from influence'.<sup>23</sup> The other issue was a concern for the economic costs of a 'no'. 'It will become economically very difficult for Denmark to preserve its present standard of living ... To say "no" costs jobs and investments'; it will cause 'irreparable damage to Denmark's economy'.<sup>24</sup> 'We cannot afford to create uncertainty about the future of Europe'.<sup>25</sup>

This referendum campaign did not seem to catch public interest in the public any more than that of the previous year. But, on polling day, 18 May, the turnout proved to be considerably higher: 86 per cent.

During the first referendum campaign on the Union the balance of public opinion had proved fairly stable. But surveys taken after the 'national compromise' in November revealed that this event had provoked a landslide of opinion: while more than half of the voters in the June referendum had rejected the TEU, now no less than 72 per cent of the electorate were in favour of the 'national compromise'. This arrangement was apparently a correct interpretation of the 'no' of 2 June and represented an adjustment to the public mood.

But Table 3 shows that this reaction was not lasting: throughout the second campaign the 'yes' vote declined slowly, but steadily: during the first four months it dropped by 7 per cent and during the last two by another 8 per cent. On

<sup>19</sup> Radical manifesto.

<sup>20</sup> Socialist People's Party manifesto.

<sup>21</sup> Christian People's Party manifesto.

<sup>22</sup> Social Democratic manifesto.

<sup>23</sup> Conservative manifesto.

<sup>24</sup> Liberal manifesto.

<sup>25</sup> Social Democratic manifesto.

Table 3: Development of Voting Intention before the Referendum of 1993

<i>Period</i>	<i>Voting Intention</i>			<i>Yes (%)</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know/ Will not Vote</i>	
November 1992	69	24	15	72
December	54	24	22	69
January 1993	54	25	21	68
February	51	26	23	66
March	48	26	26	65
April	48	29	23	62
First two weeks of May	48	33	19	59
Referendum of 18 May	49	37	14	57

*Source:* Gallup's voter barometer. Average number of respondents 700 per week (%).

referendum day only 57 per cent 'yes' votes were cast: two thirds of the increase by November had been lost again, but the result still constituted a gain of 8 per cent since the former referendum and a comfortable majority approving the TEU with its Edinburgh amendments.

An examination of Table 3 reveals that the crossing from 'yes' to 'no' during the campaign occurred in two separate, essentially distinctive stages. From November to March the 'no' vote was fairly stable, while a rapid decline of the 'yes' vote, from 69 per cent to 48 per cent, corresponded to a similar increase in the number of undecided, from 15 per cent to 26 per cent. During the last months the (now decimated) 'yes' vote remained stable, while the 'no' vote grew rapidly and the doubts dwindled. Apparently the initial increase in support for the 'national compromise' gave way to doubts, and doubts gave way to a new rejection. But during both phases time worked against the Union Treaty.

The 8 per cent increase of the 'yes' vote at the expense of the 'no' vote between the two referendums necessarily implies a net transition of voters from 'no' to 'yes'. This is confirmed in the transition matrix of Table 4: very few who had voted 'yes' in 1992 had changed their minds since then, and only 4 per cent voted 'no' in the 1993 poll. But, on the other hand, 43 per cent of the no voters of 1992 had changed their minds by November, and intended to vote 'yes' under the impact of the 'national compromise'. The size of this defection declined rapidly during the next six months, however, as most of the initial deserters returned to the opposition camp. On polling day the number of defectors was reduced to 16 per cent, a third of their initial number. On the other hand they still largely outnumbered the 4 per cent lost by the 'yes' camp, and this difference

Table 4: Stability of Vote between the Two Referendums: Intention of voting 'yes' in the referendum of May 1993 by vote in the referendum of June 1992

<i>Intention of Voting 'Yes' in 1993 Referendum</i>	<i>Vote in 1992 Referendum</i>			<i>All Voters</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Did not Vote</i>	
November	96	43	72	72
December–January	99	33	80	68
February–March	98	24	75	65
April–May	97	18	68	60
Referendum of 18 May	96	16	71	57

Source: Voter barometer and referendum study, % of decided (yes %).

accounts for most of the 8 per cent net swing in favour of the Union. The increased turnout contributed to the swing, too: 71 per cent of the former non-voters voted 'yes'.

### V. The Impact of Party Preference

The TEU was in many ways a complicated and impenetrable document, and the hundreds of thousands of copies of the Treaty text distributed to the public did not necessarily make their choice easier. For the irresolute voter, an obvious solution might have been to stick to the position of their preferred party and accept it as opinion leader. But evidence from former referendums proves that there was frequently a considerable distance between the parties and their voters, and in fact under the present Danish constitution, Parliament has been overruled in one third of the referendums.

Table 5 presents the development of opinions in the electorates of the individual parties up to the two referendums of 1992 and 1993. It discloses considerable differences in the support given to a party's position from its voters. The greatest accordance occurs among the two large non-socialist parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, although even here 10–20 per cent were opposed to the Union, a proportion which did not change much from month to month.

The Social Democrats were always seriously split over EC policy. Therefore referendums on the EC invariably placed the party in extreme difficulty. In fact, at the beginning of both the referendum campaigns of 1972 and 1986, most Social Democrat voters had disagreed with the party position, but both times the party succeeded in persuading a considerable majority to vote according to its recommendations at the polls.<sup>26</sup> But the table shows that by April 1992 only 38

<sup>26</sup> In 1972 the Social Democrats recommended 'yes', in 1986 'no'.

Table 5: Development of Voting Intentions in Party Electorates: % intending to vote 'yes' in party electorates, 'don't knows' excluded (yes %)

<i>Period</i>	<i>Party in General Election 1990</i>				
	<i>Liberals</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Social Democrats</i>	<i>Socialist People's Party</i>	<i>Progress Party</i>
<b>First referendum</b>					
April	92	80	38	9	44
May	88	81	34	9	36
Referendum 2 June	89	79	33	11	33
<b>Second referendum</b>					
November	88	92	63	32	37
December–January	93	89	59	31	45
February–March	90	89	59	23	33
April–May	88	87	56	18	21
Referendum 18 May	89	86	50	16	45
Party preference in May 1993	87	88	58	22	17

*Source:* Gallup's voter barometer.

per cent of the Social Democrat electorate intended to vote 'yes', and this time the party proved unable to mobilize any further support during the campaign: on the contrary it lost even more votes and only had the backing of 33 per cent of its voters on polling day.

The Social Democrats had apparently lost their former influence on the formation of opinion in their own electorate, and of course repudiation by their own voters on the most important contemporary issue constituted a serious problem to the biggest party in the country. The party congress of September 1992 thus resolved to demand a number of exemption clauses in relation to the TEU, and these later won the consent of the other parties in the 'national compromise' and were carried through by the Edinburgh agreements. At that point the party appeared more convincing to its voters: the 'yes' percentage grew from 33 per cent at the referendum in June to 63 per cent by November. Thus the Social Democrats contributed most to the reversal of opinion. But they also experienced the biggest backlash during the following months, especially just before the polls. At the referendum an equal number of Social Democrats voted 'yes' and 'no'.

In January 1993 the Social Democrats assumed the leadership of government after ten years in opposition. One of the considerations which persuaded the minor centre parties to change sides and opt for a Social Democratic Prime Minister was supposed to be the assumption that he would be better suited to convince reluctant Social Democratic voters. But the table reveals that the Social Democratic 'yes' vote continued to decline regardless of the change of government.

For many years, the Socialist People's Party constituted the only genuine anti-EC party in Parliament. But after the referendum of 1986 the party gradually accepted that Denmark was in the EC to stay, and, instead of fighting membership, the party turned its efforts to fighting EC projects.<sup>27</sup> In this the Socialist People's Party gained the nearly unanimous backing of its voters in the referendum of 1992: like the Liberals on the opposite wing there was discord from only 11 per cent.

During the campaign, the Socialist People's Party had suggested a renegotiation of the Maastricht Treaty and had expressly stipulated the amendments wanted in order to make the Treaty acceptable. After the rejection at the polls of the TEU the Union parties complied with most of Socialist People's Party's objections during the negotiations on the 'national compromise'. It was a completely new situation for the Socialist People's Party to take part in the formulation of foreign policy, and having obtained far-reaching acceptance of its demands, the party decided to recommend a 'yes' to the Edinburgh agreements. But, as is apparent from Table 5, the party, former champion of EC resistance, proved unable to carry its voters with it in this sudden and fundamental change of policy. By the time of the compromise in November, only 32 per cent of the Socialist People's Party voters intended to vote 'yes', and during the following months the 'yes' votes dwindled to half. The 16 per cent 'yes' votes at the polls constituted only 5 per cent more than at the preceding referendum: the Socialist People's Party had been able to convince only that many of its changed European policy. The accordance between party and voters had dropped from an impressive 89 per cent in 1992 to a miserable 16 per cent in 1993.

The Progress Party was the only party which consistently opposed the Union Treaty in both 1992 and 1993. This rejection was in many ways in accordance with its past policy, marked by aversion to supranationality: the EC should be merely a common market. But on the other hand the Progress Party had traditionally been counted as an EC supporter, and it had recommended the SEA in 1986. So its opposition to the Maastricht Treaty may have come as a surprise to some Progress voters, and 33 per cent of these voted 'yes' in 1992 and 45 per cent in 1993.

<sup>27</sup> 'The EC should be used whenever it serves a reasonable purpose' says a party manifesto of October 1988, which wants, for example, 'the strictest possible regulation' in areas of labour and the environment.

Table 5 is based on party choice at the last general election in December 1990. But of course some voters had changed party preference since then under the impact of the predominant political problem of the day, the issue of EC Union. If the vote based on party preference at the time of the referendum of May 1993 is investigated, it will be seen that the accordance between the parties and their voters is somewhat higher. Fifty-eight per cent of the present Social Democratic voters voted 'yes', compared to 50 per cent of those in 1990, and for the Socialist People's Party the accordance grew from 16 per cent to 22 per cent. Such differences do little to repair the serious representativity problems of the parties in question. The development inside the Progress Party is, however, remarkable: 83 per cent of its present voters voted 'no' in accordance with party recommendation, compared to only 55 per cent of its voters at the last general election. This impressive difference is the result of an exchange of party supporters: most supporters of the European Union had left the party in dissatisfaction, while the Progress Party, as the only remaining 'no' party, attracted Union opponents from other parties.

## VI. EC Attitudes and Union Voting

Although Denmark's membership of the European Community has always been contested, it would be wrong to interpret the increase in 'no' votes through the three referendums, from 37 per cent in 1972 to 44 per cent in 1986 and to 51 per cent in 1992, as an expression of increasing opposition to Danish membership of the EC. On the contrary, opinion polls reveal a rapid and constant increase in support of Danish membership of the EC.

While Denmark's entrance in 1972 was supported by a majority of 63 per cent of the votes cast in the referendum, membership soon produced a sense of deception, and support declined drastically: during the early 1980s there was a considerable and steady majority of the electorate against Danish membership of the EC.<sup>28</sup> So the referendum on the SEA in 1986 might appear hazardous, but it produced a steep, although temporary increase in support for the EC.

But since then a new, much more steady growth in EC support has begun. It has increased continuously for six years, from one-half in 1987 to two-thirds in 1990, three-quarters in 1992 and four-fifths in 1993. EC membership has become a matter of national consensus. This landslide is undoubtedly influenced by the development of high politics: the new dynamics displayed by the Community, coinciding with the collapse of the communist world and the membership applications of the Nordic and the other EFTA countries. The Danish people

<sup>28</sup> Table 6 is based on a Gallup question regarding voting intention in a new referendum on EC membership (since 1989 on withdrawal from the EC) posed irregularly, but usually several times a year.

became gradually convinced that there was no alternative to the EC, that Denmark had joined the Community to stay. Membership was no longer on the agenda.

Table 6 displays the long-term trends in EC support, but it also reveals that the two referendum campaigns in 1986 and 1992 produced a particularly rapid short-term growth in EC support.

Thus, it may appear a paradox that the referendum in June produced a 'no' majority. But agreement on Denmark's membership of the EC did not imply agreement on European policy: a new political cleavage was replacing the traditional one, as European Union projects were put on the agenda from the mid-1980s. It was a cleavage between those who wanted to preserve the Community as mainly a form of intergovernmental co-operation, making decisions according to the principle of unanimity and including a national veto, and those who wanted to strengthen the supranational aspect of the Community, through transition to majority vote and limitation of the veto, and through the transfer of more power from individual nations to the Community.

In reality there was never any doubt about the position of the Danish people regarding the integration issue. Table 7 is based on the question of what kind of European Community the voters considered preferable. The respondents were

Table 6: Changing Attitude to EC Membership: Voting intention in referendum on EC membership

<i>Period</i>	<i>Voting Intention</i>			
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Yes (%)</i>
Referendum 1972	57	33	10	63
1973-79	41	42	17	49
1980-85	35	44	21	44
1986	54	31	17	63
1987-88	47	44	10	52
1989-90	53	34	13	61
1991	60	22	18	73
April 1992	62	19	19	77
June 1992	68	18	14	79
June 1993	70	16	14	81

*Source:* Gallup and election studies. Average of polls 1973 to 1991, single polls 1992 and 1993 (%).

Table 7: Changing Attitudes to European integration: Options for the future type of European co-operation

<i>Options for European Integration</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1992 April</i>	<i>1992 June</i>	<i>1993 June</i>
Denmark should leave the EC	34	18	23	17	16	12
EC Member States should retain full sovereignty and the right of veto	52	71	53	62	69	76
Decisions should increasingly be left to the EC	14	11	23	22	15	13
<i>n = 100%</i>	954	897	1309	978	772	921

*Source:* Election surveys. Distribution of all voters (%).

faced with a choice of three options.<sup>29</sup> One option was merely to leave the EC, but this was never chosen by a majority: only 34 per cent wanted to quit when the question was first posed in 1979, and that figure dropped to 16 per cent by 1992 and 12 per cent by 1993. At the opposite end, an equally modest minority preferred a supranational kind of Community, implying transfer of more authority to the EC. In 1979 only 14 per cent wanted any further integration. The increasing support for the EC towards the end of the 1980s apparently also brought about broader support for integration, desired by 23 per cent in 1979 and staying at that level until April 1992. But by the time of the referendum in June, support for integration had declined to 15 per cent and by the next referendum in May 1993 to 13 per cent. The campaign, focusing merely on integration, had produced a reduction of the support for supranationality by one third. The prevailing majority of the electorate continued to prefer an intergovernmental Community, preserving the full independence of the member countries and the right of veto against Community decisions. It is remarkable that all three referendums concerning greater integration produced considerably stronger support for the purely interstate model. While, by April 1992, 62 per cent preferred this level of co-operation, the proportion had grown to 69 per cent after the referendum in June and to 76 per cent at the following referendum in May 1993. The campaigns thus produced an unambiguous rejection of a supranational

<sup>29</sup> The full wording of the options was:

- (1) Denmark should leave the EC.
- (2) In EC co-operation each member country should preserve full sovereignty and right of veto in EC decisions.
- (3) The EC member countries should increasingly transfer powers to the EC and submit to the Community.



union. Among Danish voters, there even existed a consensus concerning the exact nature of European co-operation.

So the subject of the Union debate was not whether a supranational Community was preferable, but whether the Maastricht Treaty implied such a supranational development.

The European Community, which Denmark entered in 1973, functioned in many ways like a traditional interstate organization – a pattern which suited Denmark well – and the country consistently resisted any federalist ambitions inside the EC. During the Union negotiations Denmark endeavoured to preserve the existing pattern of government and limit cession of sovereignty. Furthermore, the Danish government always asserted that the Maastricht Treaty (like the SEA of 1985) did not exceed Danish wishes, that the concession to the European unionist forces were trivial ('cosmetic'), without any essential content. The Union opponents, on the other hand, accepted that the immediate loss of sovereignty was limited, but they asserted that the Union Treaty was the beginning of a self-increasing process, a slide which would lead the EC in a federalist direction and reduce Denmark to a semi-autonomous status with dwindling influence on, for example, welfare and taxes, defence and foreign affairs. The complexity of the Maastricht Treaty and its many distant objectives offered considerable scope for interpretation, to the alarm of opponents and the relief of supporters.

The margins of the referendum campaign, according to Tables 6 and 7, were delimited by, on the one hand, the maintenance of the EC membership by 80 per cent of the electorate and, on the other hand, by the rejection of any further cession of sovereignty by another 80 per cent. Table 8 presents the Union vote of 1992 and 1993 by attitudes to the EC and to integration. The rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 was due to the combination of a unanimous 'no' from EC opponents and a division among EC supporters, as 28 per cent of these voted 'no', like the majority of the 'don't-knows' did. The following year the 'yes' vote had increased in all three groups. But the numerically decisive contribution to the total shift was the predominant group of EC supporters with a 7 per cent rise in the 'yes' vote. Thus the Edinburgh agreements had succeeded in countering some of the widespread scepticism among EC supporters.

As for the attitude to integration, the table reveals, not surprisingly, unity on both wings, a near-unanimous 'no' from EC opponents and a near-unanimous 'yes' from the supporters of integration. The outcome depended, however, on the great majority who preferred a purely intergovernmental Community. Among these a small, but decisive majority of 53 per cent voted 'no' in 1992. The following year a further 12 per cent of this group had been reassured, so that only 41 per cent still voted 'no'. All the switching to the 'yes' side occurred within this attitudinal group.

Table 8: Voting in the Referendums by Attitude to EC Membership (Voting Intention in Referendum on Withdrawal) and by Attitude to Integration (Option for Future Co-operation, cf. Table 7)

	Referendum Vote				n = 100%	
	1992		1993		1992	1993
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
<b>EC attitude</b>						
EC supporter	72	28	79	21	492	1054
EC opponent	2	98	9	91	322	444
Undecided	22	78	37	63	46	88
<b>Integration attitude</b>						
Decisions should increasingly be left to the EC	96	4	92	8	142	92
EC Member States should retain full sovereignty	47	53	59	41	571	576
Denmark should leave the EC	5	95	4	96	122	93

Source: Referendum surveys (%).

## VII. Views of the Union Treaty

The TEU was, like the SEA of 1985, a package solution, comprising a few major and many minor amendments to most parts of the European constitution. Some of these changes were evidently more popular than others, and the vote would depend on a weighting of all aspects of the Treaty. Table 9 presents the attitudes of the Danish voters to six important elements of the Maastricht Treaty at the referendums of 1992 and 1993.

One central pillar of the Treaty was Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which would gradually introduce a common European currency managed by a common central bank. In the Maastricht Treaty, Denmark had postponed its final decision regarding accession to the EMU. The table shows that only a minority of 45 per cent of the electorate in 1992 wanted a common currency and a common central bank. This minority was produced by the addition of a clear majority of 75 per cent of Union supporters and an almost unanimous rejection by Union opponents. By the Edinburgh agreements Denmark had backed out of the EMU for the present.

Table 9: Voters' Opinions on Main Elements of the Union Treaty: % of voters in favour of the individual elements of the Maastricht Treaty, by vote in the referendums of 1992 and 1993

Main Elements of Union Treaty	Vote 1992			Vote 1993		
	Yes	No	All	Yes	No	All
Common currency	75	13	45	41	8	26
Common central bank	79	15	42	51	9	31
Common foreign policy	67	17	42	64	19	44
Common defence and security policy	80	32	58	69	25	50
Social dimension	97	74	87	95	81	89
Legislative power to the European Parliament	65	11	37	47	14	31
<i>n</i> max = 100%	701	671	1372	394	293	739

Source: Gallup's voter barometer and referendum survey.

In 1993 support for both elements of the EMU was halved. This was the largest single change of opinion demonstrable between the two referendums. Even among Union supporters only a minority now wanted a currency community. The explanation of this decline is, however, over and above the Edinburgh agreements, an economic development in Europe, which in the meantime had produced a considerable weakening of the EMS with numerous devaluations, competing interest rates and a general distrust of the feasibility of the EMU in any foreseeable future.

The second main pillar of the Union Treaty was the so-called 'Political Union', comprising stronger co-operation in foreign and defence policy, although on an intergovernmental level. The table shows that in 1992 only a minority of 42 per cent were in favour of a common foreign policy. There was, however, a majority of 59 per cent in favour of the most controversial element in the Maastricht Treaty: defence co-operation. This surprising attitude may have been influenced by the civil wars in Yugoslavia, which had revealed a new kind of security problem, and at the same time revealed the impotence of the EC in that respect<sup>30</sup>. The following year support for a common defence policy declined by 7 per cent, but it still comprised a majority. Unlike the preceding points, support for a common foreign policy remained unaltered.

<sup>30</sup> The result is similar to *Eurobarometer* 37, April 1992, which reports a majority of 57 per cent in favour of a common security policy, an increase of 4 per cent compared with the *Eurobarometer* poll of October 1991. A third comparable survey, Siune (1992), showed a considerably lower figure.

The only major immediate reduction of sovereignty resulting from the Maastricht Treaty was the introduction of majority vote in environmental and labour policies. But these extensions of EC power had been major Danish demands, and they constituted a clear Danish interest. Accordingly, Table 9 confirms an almost unanimous support for the 'social dimension' concerning working conditions and the environment, even among opponents of the Union.

The Maastricht Treaty contained only minor changes to the government of the Community, but the European Parliament attained more power in some legislative areas. The table shows that a large majority of Danish voters were against any gain in legislative power for the European Parliament, and also that this majority increased between the two referendums.

### **VIII. The Expected Consequences of a 'No'**

The debate during the referendum campaigns focused extensively on the expected consequences of a 'yes' and, more particularly, of a 'no'. Two types of expectations were discussed: on the one hand, the negative consequences of a 'no' predicted by the Union supporters, on the other hand, the alternative issues recommended by the Union opponents in case of a 'no'.

The most dramatic consequence of a 'no' would be that Denmark would have to leave the EC. This argument was successfully advanced in favour of the SEA in 1986. But in 1992 it was rarely mentioned, and only 14 per cent expected a genuine expulsion of Denmark. Incidentally, half of the 'no' voters declared that they would have voted 'yes' if they had expected a rupture with the EC as a consequence of a 'no'. The following year the risk of exclusion was mentioned more frequently, and the fear of a rupture did in fact spread, but still to a small minority of 21 per cent.

Most Danes expected that even in case of a 'no', Denmark could stay affiliated to the EC. But they thought that the country would lose influence and be reduced to second-rank status within the Community. This view spread from 65 per cent in 1992 to 72 per cent the following year, when even a majority of Union opponents foresaw diminished influence.

One of the main arguments of the Union opponents was that the complete Maastricht Treaty would lapse in case of a Danish 'no'. The Community would just continue as hitherto. Union supporters expected, however, that the other Member States would carry on with the Union formation without Denmark. The table shows that 65 per cent of the electorate expected the Union process to continue, and this held good for both Union supporters and opponents. A minority of only 40 per cent, mainly opponents, expected the Treaty to lapse.

Table 10: Expected Consequences of a Danish 'No' to the Union Treaty: Proportion of voters believing in the probability of some possible consequences of a 'no', by vote in 1992 and 1993

<i>Expected Consequences of a 'No'</i>	<i>Vote 1992</i>			<i>Vote 1993</i>		
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>All</i>
Denmark leaves the EC	10	18	14	30	10	21
Denmark stays a member of the EC, but loses influence	75	55	65	83	57	72
Denmark stays a member of the EC, while the other members form the Union	68	64	65	82	40	64
The TEU is discontinued	29	51	40	29	60	42
The TEU is renegotiated, new referendum	35	61	48	—	—	—
New referendum on single elements of the TEU	35	54	45	—	—	—
<i>n max = 100%</i>	732	715	1724	394	321	705

Sources: Gallup's voter barometer and referendum survey (%).

The question was not finally settled during the following year. On the one hand, the other EC countries continued the ratification process; on the other hand, the British Presidency emphasized that the Maastricht Treaty required the signatures of all the 12 Member States. Table 10 shows that the total balance of opinion was unchanged by the time of the second referendum, but that opinion had become more polarized, and the distance between 'yes' and 'no' voters had widened.

But the opponents indicated other issues in the case of a Danish 'no'. One was a renegotiation of the Maastricht Treaty amending those elements unacceptable to Denmark. The other was a selective Danish adoption of certain aspects of the Treaty, e.g. those concerning the environment, while Denmark remained unaffected by other elements, e.g. those concerning currency and defence. This solution, 'Europe à la carte', would mean that some countries would become more integrated in the Community than others, it would produce a 'two-speed Europe'. The table shows that fewer than half the electorate in 1992 believed in any of these issues: most of the opponents did, but only one-third of the supporters.

The Edinburgh agreements brought clarification of these questions by the special arrangement allowing Denmark to stay outside parts of the Union. The main theme of the 1993 referendum campaign therefore was the question of whether the TEU had been essentially altered by the Edinburgh agreements, or whether the electorate had to vote on the identical issue once again. Supporters asserted that a real renegotiation had taken place, and that very real changes had been made in the membership terms offered to Denmark, while opponents maintained that no essential changes had been made, that Denmark's exceptions were temporary and not legally binding.

The investigation shows that a majority of 56 per cent of the voters thought that, in the second referendum, they were merely voting on the same issue as last year. This was true of one-third of the 'yes' voters in June 1992 and three-quarters of the 'no' voters. None of these groups, however, saw any reason to change their vote. Only 44 per cent of the voters thought that they were offered a new basis on which to vote. The majority of the 'yes' voters considered that real change had taken place. However, even they had no reason to change their vote. Finally there are those 13 per cent of the voters who had voted 'no' in 1992, but who now considered that they faced an essentially altered issue on which to vote. The table shows that 40 per cent of this group changed its vote from 'no' to 'yes'. This was the marginal vote of the referendum campaign, the group in focus, and the group where the decisive changes occurred.

Table 11: Vote on Same Issue Twice: Replies to the question of whether the voters thought that in 1993 they had voted on a new basis because of the Edinburgh agreements, or whether they thought they had just voted on the same issue as in 1992; Vote in the 1993 referendum by opinion and vote in the 1992 referendum

<i>Opinion and Vote in 1992</i>	<i>Vote in 1993</i>		<i>n = 100%</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
<b>Same basis</b>			
Voted 'yes' in 1992	91	9	105
Voted 'no' in 1992	7	93	253
All voters	34	66	394
<b>New basis</b>			
Voted 'yes' in 1992	99	1	215
Voted 'no' in 1992	40	60	79
All voters	84	16	318

*Source:* Referendum study (%)

### IX. Conclusion

The 1992 and 1993 referendums on the TEU divided the Danish people into two camps of approximately equal size. The cleavage was not the expression of any fundamental disagreement on Danish membership of the EC, which it was necessary to continue, nor on the supranational Union development of the EC, which it was necessary to reject. The referendum debate mainly concerned a question of perception, where the Union supporters presented a minimal interpretation of the scope of the Maastricht Treaty, while the Union opponents expressed a maximal interpretation. In this respect the Union referendum closely resembled the two former EC referendums, on the Treaty of Rome in 1972 and on the Single European Act in 1986.

Through the referendum of 1993 Denmark achieved special status in the European Union, but this did not settle the Union question finally. It has been followed by continuous debate on the four Danish reservations to the TEU. The following year the Liberals suggested a new referendum on joining the Western European Union, in connection with the European elections of June. The acceptance by Sweden, Finland and Austria of full Union membership, without reservations, has renewed the debate on the viability of the Danish exceptions. And the planned intergovernmental conference of 1996 is generally expected to produce such changes in the Maastricht Treaty that it will require recognition by a new referendum. EC referendums usually have higher turnout than general elections and they are becoming almost as frequent.

### References

- Folketinget (1992) *Danmark og den europæiske union* (Information Leaflet from Parliament).
- Folketinget (1993) *Danmark i Europa* (Information Leaflet from Parliament).
- Nielsen, H. J. (1992) 'The Danish Voters and the Referendum in June on the Maastricht Agreement'. In Kelstrup, M. (ed.), *European Integration and Denmark's Participation* (Copenhagen: Political Studies Press), pp. 365–80.
- Nielsen, H. J. (1993) *EF paa valg* (Copenhagen: Columbus).
- Siune, K. and Svensson, P. (1993) 'The Danes and the Maastricht Treaty'. *Electoral Studies*, No. XII, pp. 99–111.
- Siune, K. *et al.* (1992) *Det blev et nej* (Aarhus: Politica).
- Thomsen, B. N. (1993) *The Odd Man Out. Denmark and European Integration 1948–92* (Odense: Odense University Press).
- Worre, T. (1987) 'The Danish Euro-Party System'. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, No. X, pp. 79–95.
- Worre, T. (1988) 'Denmark at the Crossroads: The Danish Referendum of 28 February 1986 on the EC Reform Package'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 361–88.