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# Uncorking the Bottle: Popular Opposition to European Unification in the Wake of Maastricht

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## 1. Introduction

The Treaty on European Union (TEU), generally known as the Maastricht Treaty because of where it was signed, was supposed to capitalize upon the triumph of the Single European Market by opening the way to a political union that would complement the economic union that was by then (December 1991) virtually complete. Indeed, one of the arguments for the TEU was that economic union could not advance any further without some form of political union. In a clear illustration of the logic of 'spillover' (Haas, 1958), true completion of the Single European Market required a single currency. A single currency required a single central bank. A single central bank required a single monetary policy. A single monetary policy in turn required coherent policy-making in many areas (including foreign and defence policy) that had previously been beyond the scope of European Community decision-making. So the TEU was in some ways a natural

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follow-up to the Single European Market project, due to be completed (and indeed virtually completed in fact) by the end of 1992 (for full details of the Maastricht discussions see Laursen and Vanhounacker, 1992; and on EC development generally, see Keohane and Hoffmann, 1991).

It was not only governments of EC Member States who were convinced of the benefits of further treaty making. On the contrary, the TEU was supported by the vast majority of organized political forces throughout the European Community. In particular, most political parties in all Community countries supported it and few difficulties were thus envisioned in obtaining ratification (Siune, 1993; Criddle, 1993). However, in some countries there was a formal requirement to consult the people before the final seal could be put on the document – a sort of splash from the bottle of democratic legitimacy to launch the European Union on its way.

To the surprise of many observers, what emerged from the bottle was an apparent wave of popular opposition the volume of which raised questions about the underpinnings of European Union, not just in those countries where there was a referendum, but also among most of the other signatories to the Treaty. In June 1992 the Danes voted 'no' in a referendum held as a constitutional necessity for ratification, and in October of the same year the French came within a hair's breadth of doing the same. The Danes voted again in May 1993, their government having obtained several concessions in the application of the Treaty to Denmark; but, even though the Treaty was ratified the second time, a feeling remained that politicians and many commentators had seriously underestimated or misperceived the public's attitude to Europe. This article deals with the reasons why the referenda turned out the way they did. In addition to studying public responses to the proposed Treaty in Denmark and France, we will study similar data for Ireland – the third EC country in which a referendum was held in the same period to ratify the Treaty. In Ireland it was approved by a handsome margin.

Three possible explanations must be examined. The first is that popular sentiment on Europe was by no means as positive as had been believed, and that in fact people were never in favour of the Maastricht Treaty and remain sceptical about European Union. In other words, there should have been no surprise at the outcome and, in one sense, there is nothing to explain. The second possibility is also apparently straightforward: that voters changed their minds during the campaigns because they did not like what they heard about the Maastricht Treaty so that the votes against the Treaty reflected this new public awareness. The implications of this explanation, if true, are that integration has gone far enough. Rather different implications follow if a third possible explanation is accepted: that the Maastricht results can best be understood in terms of domestic party competition. The implications of this third possible explanation for the future of the European project will be taken up in our conclusion.

## 2. Popular Sentiments about Europe and the Maastricht Treaty

Let us begin by looking at the development of opinion on Maastricht to see how far it can be seen to have changed between the Maastricht summit held in December 1992 and the referenda held the following summer.

Table 1 provides data drawn from *Eurobarometer* polls and campaign polls in the respective states and reveals the development of public opinion over the months that separated the signing of the TEU in December 1991 from the holding of the referenda six to nine months later. Prior to the Maastricht conference (when people can have had few ideas about a Treaty the contents of which were still under negotiation) there was apparently broad support for 'Europe' and the idea of unification – large majorities in all three countries thought that the European experience had been a good thing. An index<sup>1</sup> constructed from two

Table 1: Development of Opinion Regarding Europe and the Maastricht Treaty During the 12 Months Leading up to the Referenda of Summer 1992, %

	Autumn 1991			Spring 1992			Summer 1992		
	Pro	Con	DK/NA	Pro	Con	DK/NA	Pro	Con	DK/NA
<b>Denmark</b>									
EC support*	52	15	32	50	18	33	56	12	32
Maastricht**				41	27	32	42	39	19
Referendum							49	51	–
<b>France</b>									
EC support *	59	4	37	55	8	37	55	9	37
Maastricht**				48	13	39	42	42	16
Referendum							51	49	–
<b>Ireland</b>									
EC support *	66	2	32	67	2	31	62	4	34
Maastricht**				61	6	32	56	28	16
Referendum							69	31	–

Notes: \* Typology derived from 'EC membership is a good thing' and 'for/against efforts to unify western Europe' in *Eurobarometers* 36, 37 and 38.

\*\* For or against ratifying Maastricht Treaty in *Eurobarometer* 37 and eve of referendum polls: 31 May Gallup poll in Denmark ( $n=1,801$ ); 27 August–1 September IFOP/l'Express in France ( $n=1962$ ); 15 June MRBI/*Irish Times* poll in Ireland ( $n=1000$ ).

<sup>1</sup> The typology was constructed from two items: 'Membership of the EC is good thing/bad thing/neither good nor bad', and 'Being for, or against, or undecided about efforts to unify western Europe'. Pro-EC respondents are those positive on both items, and anti-EC respondents those negative on both, with the remainder classified as DK.

questions measuring these opinions shows significant pockets of ignorance or ambivalence about the European project, but solid majorities supporting the idea. Maastricht featured in the Spring 1992 *Eurobarometer* polls and there are three significant features of the opinion distribution at that time (middle columns). Firstly, there had been little change with respect to views on the EC in general, although support had fallen slightly in Denmark and France. Secondly, support for the Treaty was clearly lower than that for 'Europe' in general, by between 6 and 9 percentage points in the three countries. Lastly, one-third of the voters in all three countries still had no opinion on the Treaty even three months after the Maastricht meeting. On the other hand, those who had been mobilized by this time were showing overwhelming support. The final column of the table gives figures from the end of the process. Again, it is evident that there had been little change in support for Europe in general – in fact support had risen in Denmark. What had changed was opinion on the Treaty. While proportions in favour had oscillated around a point that remained fairly constant in each country (50 per cent in France and Denmark, 65 per cent in Ireland) the anti-Treaty group had been able to grow and, in two countries, reach parity with the pro-Treaty group by the time of the referendum whilst the undecided had become fewer. Even where the 'yes' parties won the vote (and they did not manage even that in Denmark in 1992) the 'no' parties always won the campaign.

It is clear that our first possible explanation is invalid. Support for Europe as a whole remained high throughout 1992. However, it is apparent that there is a difference between support in general and support for particular developments. While at an individual level there may be 'vertical constraint' (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987) between opinions on the general (EC) and the particular (Maastricht), it is clear that support for the particular lagged behind support for the general in this instance, although initially that lag was not serious. More importantly, there was a movement in attitudes during the campaigns, involving a major net shift from 'don't know' to 'no'. Viewed from this perspective, a simple explanation for what happened between December 1991 and the summer of 1992 would be that those who were initially unsure of their position were largely mobilized against the Treaty. Commentators may have erred in discounting these 'don't knows' and in consequence they were surprised by the result.

### 3. Maastricht as a Step Too Far

This interpretation supports our second possible explanation, that the vote against Maastricht represented the expression of a newly informed public opinion. Developing this explanation for the swing against the Treaty, which fits in quite well with the apparent shift of undecided voters, some would suggest that Maastricht pushed the 'permissive consensus' regarding Europe (Lindberg and

Scheingold, 1970) beyond its limits. The view has long been held that public opinion on Europe was favourable towards European integration but did not see the issue as salient. Arguably the consensus consisted largely of acquiescence on the part of those who took no great interest in European affairs and who had no real opinions on the subject of European integration. Lindberg and Scheingold had suggested in 1970 that the consensus might not withstand a major increase in the scope or capacity of the Community (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970, p. 277). It could be argued that the debate on the Maastricht Treaty led people to realize that the European project was developing in ways that they were not prepared to support, particularly those people who had little prior information about developments. For example, in France (according to the *New York Times*, 4 June 1992) many people were appalled to discover that their leaders had acquiesced in signing a treaty that would allow other European citizens to vote in French local elections. This supposedly reinforced a pre-existing view that the government was out of touch with the electorate (*New York Times*, 9 July 1992). This viewpoint suggests that permissive consensus had reached its limits, and that the support for further integration was more apparent than real. Such a scenario is implicit in two articles about the 1992 Danish referendum (Siune, 1993; Siune and Svensson, 1993) which document the evolution of Danish public opinion during the run-up to the vote, and in the observations by Ysmal (1993) and Bille (1993) of a strong relationship between attitudes to Europe and the voting patterns in the French and Danish referenda respectively.

It is easy to see how this situation could have arisen. The European project had apparently enjoyed considerable public acceptance, if not actual popularity, in all EC Member States. Even in Denmark, 68 per cent of respondents to a *Eurobarometer* poll in 1990 acknowledged that their country had benefitted from membership (*Eurobarometer*, 33, p. 5). However, opinions of this kind are solicited without reference to particular objectives involved in European unification, whereas any specific reference is likely to raise objections among one group or another of European citizens. This will have been particularly true in regard to the components of the Maastricht Treaty – each component of the Treaty will have aroused at least some opposition. Some will have been against the idea of a single currency, some against the idea of a central bank, some against a unitary defence policy, and so on. Of course different groups will also have been in favour of different components. In such a situation, politicians seeking agreement will carry out a log-rolling exercise, and develop a package which offsets the components that a group does not like with others that it does like. This is how the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty were constructed, but the log-rolling all occurred at an elite level (Sandholtz and Zysman, 1989) between groups which could understand how to balance costs against benefits. Presenting such a solution for mass consumption is a different matter altogether.

At a popular level it may well be that when you put the elements of a package together you are bound to lose support for the package as a whole. In this way, permissive consensus might give way to squabbling divisiveness.

This supposition becomes particularly plausible when it is realized how little access the public has had to European affairs. As has generally been the case with foreign policy, European unification has always been the fief of national political leaders carving out deals with each other behind closed doors and then asking for the support of their followers in ratifying the resulting steps towards unification. When Community development was largely a matter of removing tariff barriers and simplifying regulations, the notion that the process involved technical adjustments of little interest to the citizens of Europe was probably justified. To sell their products anywhere in Europe, automobile manufacturers, for example, had to be governed by standard regulations regarding safety glass and headlight glare – not subjects likely to generate controversy. As long as these were the sorts of issues decided in Brussels, lack of popular debate and consultation did not deprive European voters of anything they were likely to value.

However, unqualified support on the part of national political leaders for steps towards economic integration continued long after the steps ceased to be purely technical and started to affect the daily lives of individuals. Unification, which initially involved the ‘negative’ activities of removing tangible barriers to trade, has now become more ‘positive’, involving the construction of joint policies in ever more salient areas. Consequently, ‘Europe’ has become more ‘visible’ and as such more liable to arouse public disquiet (see Weiler, 1993, for a similar argument with respect to the European Court). Nevertheless, European political parties were not led by these developments to present their voters with choices on EC matters. Rather, it can be argued that parties continued to act as they always had, as ‘gatekeepers’ to EC policy-making: taking credit for developments that would be popular with voters, like grants or bigger markets, and playing down or even blaming the EC for less popular ones, like the pressures to reduce public sector debt. These habits still persist. The *Economist* (8 January 1993) recently pointed out how the perception that EC bureaucrats were attempting to interfere with or ban a number of national foods arose largely from the ineptitude or dishonesty of national governments in failing to take responsibility for decisions they had themselves taken behind closed doors in the Council of Ministers.

Indeed, pro-European parties may well have contributed to their own difficulty in ‘selling’ the European project by perpetuating the illusion of national sovereignty down the years. Governing parties have tried to present themselves at one and the same time as bringing home the bacon from the European cornucopia, and as defending the national interest against incursions from Brussels. The irony, however, is that in maintaining the illusion of national

sovereignty beyond the point at which the truth could be hidden from voters, politicians in European countries may have come to appear impotent to affect the course of events in Brussels. Observing this, many voters may have drawn the natural conclusion that if Brussels is out of control, then their country had better cut itself loose from Brussels.

By the time of the Maastricht referenda, therefore, politicians had done little to prepare the ground for voters to treat the proposals sympathetically. As the *Economist* pointed out at the time:

Decisions that will profoundly change the way Europe works are being taken in tortuous negotiations behind closed doors. That is why some puzzled Europeans have been slow to appreciate the scale of what is happening. How, they wonder, has Europe come to this? (30 November 1991)

When the implications of the latest proposals became evident, many of these individuals may have decided that enough was enough.

If this were indeed what happened during the run-up to the Maastricht referenda, it would be an interesting example of popular attitudes on a complex topic changing with changes in real world circumstances, and might testify to a greater sophistication in public opinion than many have found there (the classic is Converse, 1964). Some recent studies have certainly suggested that the 'minimalist' view of the quality of public opinion is overdrawn (Sniderman *et al.*, 1991) and that public opinion can change in quite a rational way as circumstances change (e.g. Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992).

For several reasons we remain unconvinced that this is an adequate explanation of events. First, such studies still tend to emphasize the greater sophistication of more educated and informed publics (Stimson, 1975); casting doubt on the notion that those who were initially undecided would be those who would show the more sophisticated reactions. Indeed, established wisdom from the time of the earliest voting studies holds that swings in popular sentiment do not originate with uninformed publics (Berelson *et al.*, 1954; Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Flanagan and Zingale, 1983; Harrop and Miller, 1987).<sup>2</sup>

A second reason for caution about accepting that the vote was simply a reflection of people's (newly formed) anti-Treaty views is to be found in Siune and Svensson's observation that there was no systematic effect of level of information on the relation between people's attitudes to integration and their vote in the Danish 1992 referendum (Siune and Svensson, 1993, pp. 109–10). If

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this is not the same as saying that undecided voters cannot swing an election. Everything depends on how informed the undecided voters are (Polsby and Wildavsky, 1991, p. 267). Moreover, one can imagine circumstances in which the uninformed public might actually be expected not to fall into line with informed opinion. If understanding the compromises necessary for moving forward on the European project requires a degree of sophistication characteristic of attentive publics but not of inattentive publics, then Maastricht might turn out to be an instance where the normal expectation – that uninformed opinion falls into line behind informed opinion – breaks down; but we will see that this is not the case.

attitudes towards Europe were the cause (rather than a subsequent rationalization) of support for the Treaty, then (especially if the general level of ignorance about Maastricht in 1992 was anything like that demonstrated in 1993 – see below) those who were best informed about the Treaty should have been those most likely to bring their votes into conformity with their attitudes. This, however, did not happen.

A final reason is that the effect of an election (or referendum) campaign is usually to inform voters of the positions being taken by the various political parties. The views of party leaders then serve as cues for their followers, with the opinions of voters falling into line with the positions being taken by the parties they generally support (Campbell *et al.*, 1960, p. 133; Harrop and Miller, 1987, p. 230). Evidence from the 1989 European Election Study suggests that the same thing happens in European elections (Franklin, 1992). With most parties in all European countries taking a pro-European position on the TEU, the campaign should actually have reinforced their pro-European leanings had it focused their attention on the European arena; but this appears not to have happened. Before accepting our second explanation, then, we should look into the campaigns themselves, and consider our third explanation: that the shift in opinion reflected a domestic rather than a European agenda.

#### 4. European Referenda and Domestic Politics

Writing about European parliamentary elections, Reif and Schmitt (1980) employed the concept of a 'second-order election' to account for the substance of campaigns and the performance of parties. They argued that so long as the national political arena remained pre-eminent in the minds of parties and voters, European parliamentary elections must be seen primarily as events dependent on a national political agenda. Although Reif and Schmitt do not suggest this, it is possible that referenda on EC matters should be viewed in the same way: not so much in terms of the European content that is the overt subject of the referendum, but in terms of the domestic standing of the government that is asking for support. Opposition parties may be less than wholehearted about mobilizing votes in support of government policy when an adverse vote could produce considerable political embarrassment for their political opponents. Moreover, voters may take advantage of the opportunity provided by a referendum to express a protest against government policy generally – something Reif and Schmitt assert occurs in most European parliamentary elections. If this is a valid picture of the electoral situation presented by a referendum (Franklin *et al.*, 1995) and if it applied to the referenda of 1992, then we should see the consequences when we divide pro-Treaty parties into those that are government parties and those that are not.

Table 2 shows the per cent voting 'yes' (of those voting, or who had decided

how to vote) in each country. Parties are distinguished according to whether they are traditionally pro European or not, with a further distinction between governing (all of them pro-Treaty) and non-governing parties. The table indicates that parties certainly enjoyed very different degrees of success in mobilizing their supporters. Furthermore, it is clear that the anti-Maastricht parties enjoyed most success in this respect. Almost 90 per cent of French National Front and Communist Party supporters, and more than three-quarters of those saying they would vote for 'other' Irish parties (all of whom campaigned for a 'no' vote) in fact voted 'no'. Similarly, most Danish left socialists voted against the Treaty. The pro-Treaty parties as a group were far less successful. Those in government did well enough but those in opposition, whatever their European credentials, saw their supporters significantly divided between 'yes' and 'no' camps. The Irish party Fine Gael, the most traditionally pro-European of all Irish parties, persuaded only 65 per cent of its supporters to vote 'yes'. Supporters of the Labour Party, which was against entry to the EC in 1972 but has been more favourable to developments since, broke down 59 to 41 for the Treaty. In France,

Table 2: Referendum Vote by Party Choice in Denmark, France and Ireland: Pro-Treaty (Governing and Non-governing) and Anti-Treaty Parties

	<i>Ireland (n=737)</i>		<i>France(n=2731)</i>		<i>Denmark (n=1357)</i>	
Pro-Treaty parties (33–89%)						
Governing (70–89%)						
Fianna Fáil	78	Socialists	84	Agrarian Liberals	89	
Prog Dem	70			Conservative	79	
Other pro-Treaty (33–68%)						
Fine Gael	65	UDF	68	Centre	68	
Labour	59	Greens	51	Social Liberals	64	
		RPR	37	Christian People's Party	55	
				Social Democrats	33	
Anti-Treaty parties (0–33%)						
Others <sup>a</sup>	23	Communists	11	Progress	33	
		National Front	10	Socialist People's Party	11	
				Others <sup>a</sup>	0	
All voters	64		51		49	

Sources: MRBI, 15 June; SOFRES Exit poll; Danish post-referendum study (reported in Bille, 1993).

Note: <sup>a</sup> In Ireland includes Greens, Sinn Féin, Democratic Left and The Workers' Party; in Denmark includes minor left-wing parties.

the strongly pro-European Union *pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) received only a 68 per cent 'yes' from its supporters, while the other big party of the right, the neo-Gaullist *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), whose pro-European credentials are a little less shiny but which is nonetheless not an anti-EC party, persuaded only 37 per cent of its voters to say 'yes'. This dismal record was matched by that of the Danish Social Democrats who managed to win only one-third of their voters to support Maastricht.<sup>3</sup> We will be better placed to understand why initially undecided voters were not mobilized in favour of the Treaty if we can determine why these parties did so badly.

There are a number of reasons why the pro-Treaty parties might have done comparatively poorly. One is that parties rally supporters with their own symbols, and by using equally symbolic depictions of opponents. This evidently does not work as well in a referendum precisely because the choice does not determine who runs a country; and it was hard for pro-Treaty forces to find alternative symbols of an equally potent nature. Nevertheless, while traditional partisan enmities could not drive the campaign forward, they could hold it back. In both France and Ireland there were eventually joint statements by pro-Treaty party leaders on the eve of the referendum, calling for a 'yes' vote, but during much of the campaign proponents of a 'yes' vote avoided supporting one another, for reasons that we will explore below. When the Irish government launched its own campaign for a 'yes' vote, non-government politicians were conspicuously absent – even those in favour of the Treaty.

In contrast to those arguing for a 'yes' vote, the 'no' campaign had plentiful symbolic resources. Anti-Maastricht campaigners could emphasize the threat to national institutions and national autonomy and, as Smith (1992) has pointed out, national symbols are generally much more potent (and easy to identify) than 'European' ones. This might be particularly important when dealing with the inattentive public. In general 'no' advocates argued that Maastricht would mean the end of the nation's ability to deal with its own affairs. National identity and national independence were under threat. The leader of the French National Front party claimed that signing the Treaty would make the French President less powerful than the Governor of Texas. The Irish 'no' campaigners argued that it would mean an end to Ireland's ability to present itself as a neutral country, and eventually might lead to conscription into a European army. The 'yes' side could not easily compete with this sort of symbolism.

So perhaps the reason why so many pro-Maastricht parties failed to mobilize

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 6, below. Mobilization might also be measured by looking at how well parties got their supporters out to vote at all, and then to vote 'yes' (or 'no'). We have data about this only for Ireland and that is from a pre-referendum IMS poll rather than a post-referendum poll. These show that 43 per cent of *Fianna Fáil* supporters were 'certain' to vote and would vote 'yes'. The figure is lower, between 37 per cent and 39 per cent, for the other three pro-EC parties. In contrast, 44 per cent of voters for the anti-referendum parties were certain to vote and would vote 'no'. *Fianna Fáil* apart, the 'no' side look as if they might have better mobilized their supporters than the 'yes' side.

their supporters in favour of the Treaty was that they could not take advantage of their normal methods for rallying support. A problem with all these arguments, however, is that the 'yes' side still did very well, winning the vote in two countries in 1992 and in the third country the following year; and that the 'yes' parties that were in government did as well as 'no' parties in rallying their supporters. Ireland's Fianna Fáil mobilized almost 80 per cent of its supporters behind the Treaty, and the French Socialist Party did even better. As can clearly be seen in Table 3, much of the variation between the 'yes' parties coincides with whether or not such parties were in government. Any analysis of the failure of pro-Treaty parties has to take this into account.

Most European parties, while pro-European overall, have significant minorities (even of elected office-holders) who are strongly opposed to European unification, and some of the 'yes' parties were obviously somewhat schizophrenic on the subject of the Treaty. The party systems of today developed in a previous era, when the major differences requiring representation had to do with matters of religion and with the degree to which market forces should be controlled in the interests of working people. The European question cuts across these differences; and during the referendum campaign there were obvious divisions in many parties. In the Danish Socialist Party, the Irish Labour Party and the French RPR, in particular, these were allowed to surface. Indeed it was clear that, in these parties and at least some of the others, there would be freedom to defy the party line. Partly as a consequence, the line in these parties was not defined very clearly. Some leaders chose to handle the matter by using a classic method of conflict avoidance: they stayed quiet. Jacques Chirac, leader of the French RPR, broke his silence only on the eve of the vote when he belatedly called for a 'yes'. In Ireland, Labour Party leader Dick Spring kept everyone waiting until the last minute, when Labour had officially decided its position, before calling for a 'yes' vote – but one in which conscientious objection would be permitted!

Several 'yes' parties allowed lesser known figures to campaign against the 'party line'. Sanctions usually invoked to maintain party discipline were rarely applied in non-governing parties. In a general election politicians have little choice but to follow party discipline in most matters, whether they are running as one of a list or in a single member district; but in a referendum, when personal seats are not at stake, a politician such as Philippe Séguin could stump France with impunity as a member of a cross-party group in opposition to his party's official stand in favour of the Maastricht Treaty. If this had been a Parliamentary election rather than a referendum, such tactics would have reduced the credibility of his party and hurt its electoral prospects. Whatever electoral support he might himself have received, other candidates of his party would have been hurt by the evidence of lack of common purpose, and would not readily have forgiven his

disloyalty. But in a referendum occurring several months before the next Parliamentary elections, the stakes were not so high. His own seat was not at risk, and he could oppose the Treaty and still have time to mend his fences with his colleagues. Hence, many parties did not succeed in mobilizing their supporters because they did not speak clearly to them, and indeed at times parties spoke out of both sides of their mouths at once.

It was the parties in power – governing parties – who had greatest success in suppressing factional dissent. In every case, the parties we have identified as being able to mobilize the largest majority of their supporters in favour of the Treaty were government parties. Evidently these parties either found it easier to discipline their campaigners, or their members were less likely to step out of line.<sup>4</sup> Probably more to the point, leaders of opposition parties may have found it hard to discipline the anti-Treaty members of their parties who could easily argue that the party leadership was being disloyal to the traditions of the party in asking its members to support the policies of a political adversary. This would be a particularly hard argument to counter where the adversary was a governing party that was having political difficulties, supporting the pro-Treaty line could be construed as bolstering the electoral chances of a political foe and hurting one's own chances of replacing that foe at the next national elections. In France and Denmark especially the evidence of the polls was that the vote would be close and in both cases the unpopularity of government was perceived to be a factor. For instance, one French poll indicated that almost half of those thinking the referendum would be lost thought the blame lay with Mitterrand (*Le Monde*, 28 August 1992). Mitterrand's plea that 'I have never said that if you vote for Europe you vote for me' (Criddle, 1993) was a clear attempt to untie this particular knot although, particularly when the shift to the 'no' side appeared unstoppable in late August, it appeared that the attempt would not be successful.

All this supports an idea originally proposed by Ronald Inglehart. Writing in 1971 about the permissive consensus, he suggested that the sorts of questions asked about integration tapped deep-seated political values and orientations. The support was (and is) real. However, any particular question, such as might be put in a referendum, could and quite probably would be influenced also by short-term considerations (Inglehart, 1971). Thus, as suggested above, the way in which parties went about mobilizing their supporters to vote in these referenda might be better understood as a response to short-term national circumstances rather than as disciplined attempts to mobilize their supporters to vote for European Union. The disarray of the non-governing 'yes' parties suggests

<sup>4</sup> For example, Ireland's governing Fianna Fáil party expelled Des Hanafin, a Senator who opposed the party line (Holmes, 1993). In France the ruling Socialist Party gave all its allocated broadcasting time to advocates of a 'yes' vote, whereas the opposition RPR (though not the UDF) gave some of its time to dissidents (Criddle, 1993).

precisely that the search for short-term partisan advantage may have been a major factor throughout the campaign.

It appears that voters too may have been swayed by short-term considerations, independent of any deep-seated attitudes towards the EC. Table 3 demonstrates quite clearly that the referenda in Denmark, France and Ireland turned out to a great extent to reflect the popularity of the government (or perhaps of the leader of that government). The table shows the voting intention or reported vote in the referenda according to whether or not respondents thought their government was doing a good job. There is a striking similarity in the association between the two variables in the different countries. Even in Denmark, the overwhelming majority of those who approved of the government's performance in 1992 voted 'yes'. The percentages are the same to within 5 per cent in the other two countries. Amongst those unhappy with the performance of the government, a majority voted 'no', again with remarkable similarities between the percentages in each country. What was very different in the three countries was the degree of approval of the government in the first place. In Ireland, a new Cabinet under a new Prime Minister was still enjoying a honeymoon of sorts with over half of all voters willing to make approving rather than disapproving noises about it to pollsters. Not so in France where, despite shuffling his pack of Prime Ministers, Mitterrand had been very unpopular for some time. At the time of the

Table 3: Referendum Support by Government Support in Denmark, France and Ireland

		<i>Approved of government</i>	<i>Disapproved of government</i>
Denmark*	Yes %	84	32
	No %	16	68
	<i>n</i>	468	889
France**	Yes %	79	35
	No %	21	65
	<i>n</i>	930	1801
Ireland***	Yes %	82	43
	No %	18	57
	<i>n</i>	391	346

Sources: MRBI, 15 June; SOFRES exit poll; Danish post-referendum study.

Notes: \* Supporter of governing party

\*\* Approved of Mitterrand

\*\*\* Approved of government performance

French referendum two out of three voters with an opinion disapproved of his performance. The Danish government too, with a relatively small parliamentary base, was out of public favour. When governments said ‘trust us, and vote “yes”’ it is not surprising that the referenda ran into difficulties in France and Denmark.

A final piece of evidence in support of our contention is to be found in the circumstances of the 1993 rerun of the Danish referendum. By this time, it is true, the Danes had obtained concessions in the application of the Treaty to Denmark. However, opinion in Denmark had already swung in favour of the Treaty before these concessions were made;<sup>5</sup> and moreover the Danish people appear to have been remarkably ignorant about the details. One post-referendum poll reported that of those Danes who voted in May 1993, only 17 per cent knew about the Edinburgh concessions and only 2 per cent could name the four opt-out clauses (*Irish Times*, 15 May 1993). Someone evidently had to interpret these concessions to the voters and assure them that it was safe to vote ‘yes’ this time. Since we have seen that this role is generally played by government parties, it is surely of the utmost significance that during the period since the first referendum an unpopular government (which had proved ineffective in turning diffuse support for the Treaty into actual votes) had been replaced by a much more popular government that was apparently able to prevent an equivalent erosion of support the second time.<sup>6</sup>

### 5. Party Politics and the Future of the European Project

We began by asking why the EC referenda of 1992 produced ‘surprising’ results, apparently demonstrating greater opposition to the ongoing European project than previous polls had generally indicated. The notion of a ‘permissive consensus’ which had allowed integration in the past and would do so in the future seemed unduly optimistic by the end of 1992. We showed that, while some surprise was understandable given the enduring strength of support for the EC, part of the problem was due to a careless reading of the results of opinion polls,

<sup>5</sup> In fact the eve of referendum poll in Denmark showed a majority in favour of the Treaty (as shown in Table 1) and the Autumn 1992 *Eurobarometer* (fieldwork completed in November 1992) showed a handsome majority in favour. The Edinburgh concessions clearly came too late to have been responsible for this. Only the actual vote and exit poll (see Table 2) were negative, reinforcing our view that national forces overcame the balance of opinion regarding Europe when the time came to cast a vote.

<sup>6</sup> It might be argued that since opinion was favourable towards the Treaty in 1993, no special role need be ascribed to the governing party during the run-up to the referendum; but this is to overlook the fact that opinion was also in favour of the Treaty in 1992 (see footnote 5). Evidently voter mobilization is critical to actual referendum votes. An alternative explanation for the 1992 outcome of the Danish referendum stresses the role of the Social Democrats who, because of a leadership crisis in April 1992, were unable to mobilize their followers as they had managed to do in previous referenda (Worre, 1993). This analysis also focuses on domestic reasons for the referendum outcome, in line with our approach.

confusing general support for unification with support for the Maastricht Treaty and, even more important, to an assumption that the undecided would either behave like everyone else, or else not behave at all (by not voting). We then examined the view that the referendum votes represented a shift of opinion against the Treaty on behalf of those who were previously undecided, a view consistent with the idea that Maastricht overstepped the bounds of the permissive consensus. While a plausible argument can be made for this, the notion that undecided voters merely took the anti-Treaty side as the facts became known, is at odds with much of the research literature on opinion formation, and ignores the politics of the campaign itself.

Examining the partisanship of groups voting 'yes' and 'no' revealed that those calling for a 'no' vote appeared to have been more successful in mobilizing their supporters than pro-Treaty parties. Whilst possible explanations for such a difference could be imagined, most of these foundered on the fact that pro-Treaty *government* parties were successful in mobilizing their supporters: it was the pro-Treaty *opposition* parties whose supporters were most divided. We argued that the divisions over Europe that exist in all parties were most inclined to surface here because of the exigencies of inter-party competition in the national political arena. Moreover, voters were also influenced by national politics, with those not supporting the government and its record strongly inclined to vote 'no', and those who were supportive inclined to vote 'yes' in much the same proportions in all three countries.

It is evident from this that the European project is still bound up with national politics. Parties hesitate to speak clearly on European questions because most of them are split between pro-European and anti-European factions. In all EC countries – even Denmark – disagreements over European unification do not occur between the main political parties but within them. What happened to Britain's Margaret Thatcher in 1990 is instructive in this regard. Instead of being able to take her concerns to British voters, asking them to choose between a Europe that was unified purely in terms of products and one that was unified also in terms of the personnel and capital employed to create those products, she found herself faced with a rebellion in her party that finally resulted in her being ousted from the Tory leadership. The reason why this happened is simple: Thatcher could not go to the voters with her concerns because raising such issues at the time of an election would have split the Tory Party so badly as drastically to hurt its chances of re-election. So Thatcher was replaced, and the splits within the party were more or less papered over in time for it to be able to face the election of 1992 with barely a mention of the issues that had caused such internal dissension only two years previously.

Generalizing from this example, what we see are attempts to consult the voters about European matters being essentially 'hijacked' for partisan and

national ends, thereby shutting out public discussion of European issues. This is evident even in elections to the European Parliament where European issues get little discussion and have little impact on individual voting choice (van der Eijk and Franklin, 1995). In country after country, European elections are fought not on European but on national issues. Only in Denmark is there a party that campaigns only in European elections; however, it does not propose specific policies for the Eurocrats to implement (it is against European unification altogether). In consequence, elections to the European Parliament do not provide the kind of democratic validation for the conduct of European affairs that general elections provide in a national context.

In this article we have established that the same thing happens even in referenda targeted specifically at European questions. Parties find it difficult to mobilize their supporters in such situations, and leave much of the responsibility to governments. Where those governments are unpopular, that unpopularity translates quite naturally into votes against the object of the referendum.

All this supports an argument that the referendum votes held to ratify the TEU are better interpreted as decisions made on short-term, national, rather than on long-term, European, considerations. Although it would be misleading to discount completely the electorates' suspicions about the Treaty, and foolish to play down the long-term importance of creating a 'People's Europe' (Williams, 1991, pp. 169–71), we can account for the outcome of the Maastricht referenda without recourse to such considerations. According to our interpretation of the data at our disposal, a perfectly adequate explanation of the apparent surprises of 1992 can be built up from a combination of the search for partisan advantage, the unpopularity of governments, and the myopic (but quite understandable) preoccupation by national parties with their prospects at forthcoming national elections.

None of this should be taken to imply that there is or will be unlimited 'real' support for the European project. On grounds of interest as well as ideology many people have strong objections to any extension of European integration, and while more democracy would solve some problems, real and significant sources of opposition will remain. Our point is simply that lack of electoral democracy can serve to magnify opposition at critical times, as in the case of the Maastricht Treaty, since the ground is never prepared for persuading European publics to accept more integration.

Anthony King once suggested that electorates are cautious and conservative by inclination. Allowing the democratic genie out of the bottle by calling a referendum does not well serve the purpose of change. 'Democracy may not prevent major changes in Europe but it does seem likely to slow them down' (King, 1981, p. 127). What we have found generally underlines that view, but we have also emphasized that the natural distrust of the EC and the European project

by voters has been exacerbated by the behaviour of political parties. Europe is poorly served by national parties and politicians whose local interests often lead them to resort to obfuscation about European matters. If there is a crisis of legitimacy in Europe today, it seems to us that national parties and their leaders are far more responsible than the people of the European Union or the Eurocrats of Brussels.

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