

Treaty of Maastricht

The Maastricht Treaty served two purposes. It amended the provisions of the Treaty of Rome while hugely advancing the agenda set out under the Single European Act (1986) for deepening European Political Union (EPU). It created a new model for the Community based around three ‘pillars’ which, broadly speaking, covered economic relations, foreign affairs and home affairs. It also officially created the European Union (EU), which became the title to cover all the functions of the much-expanded European governmental structure. It set in train the process of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which would lead to the creation of the Euro. Coming at a time of political upheaval in Britain and across Europe, the Treaty was hugely controversial and has come to be seen as a central moment in the movement towards deeper European integration.

History

Negotiations for the new treaties began through two separate Inter-governmental Conferences (IGCs) – one dealing with Monetary Union, the other with Political Union. In April 1991 a draft set of treaties was presented at the Luxembourg European Council, after which extensive negotiations were carried out between national governments, leading to the signing of the Treaty in the Dutch town of Maastricht on 10 December 1991. This was far from the end of the story however. On 2 June 1992, the Danish people rejected the treaty in a referendum. Subsequently, the British government narrowly won a vote on the treaty in the House of Commons, which forced Prime Minister John Major to postpone final ratification of the Treaty until after a second Danish referendum in 1993. Although the British government then passed the treaty, the controversy that surrounded it produced a huge boost to those sceptical about the European project.

What did the Maastricht Treaty do?

The Treaty pushed forward two broad processes – the widening of EU responsibilities and the deepening of integration. This meant using *supranational* structures in some areas while using *intergovernmental* ones in others. In order to make EMU possible it amended the original Treaty of Rome, reinforcing the economic responsibilities of the European Community in line with the goals of the SEA. At the same time however, it set up a whole new range of intergovernmental responsibilities outside the remit of the Treaty of Rome in the areas of a common foreign policy and home affairs. Institutionally, it transformed the way in which the organisation was structured. While the Commission retained responsibility for the economic ‘pillar’ of EU activity, the new ‘pillars’ were to be controlled not by the Commission but by the European Council. However, the three separate pillars would all be linked under the overarching structure of the European Union.

Arguments

For

- The Maastricht Treaty created a structure capable of coping with closer integration and Monetary Union while giving national governments more say through an expanded European Council.
- The process of closer integration through Monetary Union made it vital to have closer political co-operation.
- The British government succeeded in including the principle of *subsidiarity* in the Treaty, which helped counter-balance the federalist tendencies of other parts of the document. This has since gained great importance.

Against

- The deepening measures of the Treaty pushed forward a federalist model of European integration that set the Community in the direction of a United Europe.
- The focus on big issues like EMU distracted people from the expansion of EU control over other areas such as environment, security and foreign affairs.

Quotes

‘We’re not just here to make a single market, but a political union.’ Jacques Delors, EU Commission President, 1993

‘Those in favour of the creation of a European state want to see all European co-operation channelled through the institutions established by the Treaty of Rome. We do not accept that model.’ Douglas Hurd, British Foreign Secretary, 1989-1995

‘The European Union Treaty... within a few years will lead to the creation of what the founding fathers of modern Europe dreamed of after the war, the United States of Europe.’ Helmut Kohl, German Chancellor, 1992

Technical Terms

Subsidiarity: the idea that the EU should act only when member states cannot act.

Intergovernmental: a form of international organisation where governments work together to achieve shared goals.

Supranational: a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states.

Links

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3595155.stm#s23>
- http://europa.eu/abc/treaties/index_en.htm