

Getting that sinking feeling

WHEN Denmark voted No on Maastricht, its two chief architects - President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl - reacted like Alfred E Neuman, *Mad Magazine's* whacked-out mascot: "What, me worry?"

Jaws set in concrete, both Euro-champions brushed off the Danish refusal with the disdain due a pestering fly. Then, they proclaimed that they would keep on marching towards federal Europe as if nothing had happened.

Both might be lauded for their determination, but not for their perspicacity. Herr Kohl, for instance, might have a look at the most recent German poll on Europe. One item should make him happy. When Germans were asked how they would vote in a referendum, 56 per cent would say Yes to Maastricht.

But that is only scant solace. When the pollsters dig a bit deeper, they unearth two items that ought to strike fear into the likes of Chancellor Kohl. One pertains to the good old Deutschmark. Asked to choose between it and a Euro-currency, 72 per cent of Germans want to hold on to

Germans want European unity in principle. But, says **Josef Joffe**, they do not want to lose their sense of national identity

their mark, and only two out of ten want to give it up in favour of Euro-geld.

The second has to do with a British favourite; sovereignty. Aren't the Germans the most enthusiastic unity mongers? Wrong, shout the German pollsters. Only 18 per cent are willing to yield sovereignty in matters of economic, financial, social and defence policy. Seven out of ten Germans opt for "full sovereignty".

What do these numbers mean? In principle, the Germans, like all Europeans, are for more unity. But when it comes to the nitty-gritty - when they are asked about specifics like money - their enthusiasm wilts like an unwatered lawn in August.

And no wonder. For the last 30-odd years of European integration, the Brussels enterprise had remained abstract and remote. The general populace could not care less. Suddenly Europeans

woke up to the fact that Maastricht was a turning point.

Maastricht was not just a bit more integration here, a bit more "harmonisation" there. It was virtually a constitution for a federal Europe, threatening to render to Brussels what had been considered for centuries national prerogative. If Maastricht becomes law, it will extend the grasp of Brussels into those areas of life which matter to everybody.

A common social policy, for instance, will regulate hiring and firing, unemployment benefits and welfare payments. It will change power relationships between unions and employers. It will overturn age-old certainties on the factory floor and in the board room. Along with the Scandinavians, the Germans enjoy the most generous welfare state in the world, and so they cringe at the thought of

having to live by rules set in Portugal and Britain.

Or take the almighty Deutschmark. Its value has risen relentlessly for decades. Once worth 20 marks, the British pound fetches less than three today. But it is more than just the historic fear of inflation that keeps Germans so lovingly attached to their Deutschmark. Given Germany's flawed history this century, the mark is probably the only national symbol every German can look to with pride.

The mark is hard, whereas everybody else's currency has gone soft. It represents strength and success, almost a Calvinist sense of redemption at the end of a century which, until 1945, was but an endless chain of national disasters. It might be easy for the Italians (where 67 per cent favour it) to give up their sickly lira. But the Germans will undoubtedly fight tooth and nail against a Euro-currency that would rob them of the most important icon of national pride.

So when Herr Kohl proclaims, "Maastricht über alles", he may be whistling in the woods. People all over Europe, and in Germany above all, sense that their national

communities are being threatened from two directions: from above and from below. From above - that is Brussels. From below - that is the influx of immigrants.

A new constitution from above and a new culture from below: these two forces threaten more change than people are willing to handle.

Since it isn't just Nazis or racists who flock to the German Republikaner or to the French National Front, politicians have recently started to listen more closely to the rumblings from below. The message, even from such good citizens as the Danes, reads or pleads, "Please go a bit more slowly".

And the second part seems to read, "Don't railroad us into European unity - don't confront us with rush jobs".

That is a message well worth heeding. Yes, democratic leaders must lead. But if they move too far too fast, the governed, their bosses, all will revolt. For Europe, it is better to grow more slowly than not at all.

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Italy is immune to the virus



ABRAHAMS/NETWORK

the great Italian Maastricht treaty debate will finally get off the ground.

This will not be for long, however. In August it will again grind

was to create Germans, support which Nato is merging the Federal armed forces in presided over general.

The larger ensure that would be stalling the Soviet through guises of economic challenge. They sent, for example of Eurocommu-

American history United States ing them often than the thus not only share the civil American experience also a strategic a commitment World War to Third World W

All that see Despite some about German potential economic dominance ope, most Americans are pleased to has gained nationhood a proving, by large, to be an play public c The Soviet U meanwhile, become ex along with its n menace to the ican homeland bedraggled Yeltsin, was th to Washington partner.

The prospect choice will le awareness that is in fact quit: therefore shockers - while th seems unaware happened.

Within the defence departments the EC viewed as a bit the Nato old g shown itself f best, in its fa about the fe-