

Statement by Jacques Santer on the IGC (Strasbourg, 28 February 1996)

Caption: On 28 February 1996, Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, outlines to the European Parliament in Strasbourg the implications of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) which is due to open on 29 March in Turin for the revision of the Treaty on European Union.

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Santer, *President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to be able to accept your invitation to make a statement on this morning's meeting of the Commission. It was a particularly important meeting because the Commission adopted its opinion on the intergovernmental conference provided for in Article N of the Treaty. This intergovernmental conference, which opens in Turin on 29 March, is the first of the major milestones on which the future face of Europe depends. This is why the intergovernmental conference must succeed. But success means strengthening political union and preparing for enlargement.

By way of introduction, let me say this: legal adroitness would not be sufficient to unite Europe. Without a genuine political commitment by all parties, we run the risk of producing nothing more than a handsome document, and we are well aware that, now that our numbers have grown to fifteen, we can no longer continue as we have in the past. That was why the Treaty provided for a meeting in 1996. With further enlargements in prospect, the revision of the Treaty is becoming even more essential. So let us look beyond arithmetic and narrow self-interest and break new ground. We need to embark upon the future with imagination, ambition and realism.

It was in this spirit that the Commission drafted its opinion. That opinion calls, first, for the creation of a citizen's Europe. To achieve this, we first need to promote the European model of society. As I see it, there are five requirements to be met here: strengthening the defence of human rights, consolidating the rule-of-law union, emphasizing the social aspect – in this context, we are calling for the social protocol to be reintegrated into the Treaty – and inserting an 'employment' chapter into the Treaty. This point seems to me especially crucial: fine speeches are all very well, but the Union must do more to demonstrate that it regards the fight against unemployment as its priority. I am well aware that merely including such a chapter in the Treaty will not in itself solve the problem. But I am convinced that the insertion of specific provisions will make a contribution to solving it. They will be designed to create the right conditions for a common strategy for employment, to strengthen the multilateral supervisory mechanisms of the Member States' multiannual programmes, and to take due account of employment in all Community policy.

The fifth requirement is to place even greater emphasis on sustainable development.

Creating a Europe for the citizen also means creating a region of freedom and security. Freedom of movement for persons within the Union's territories is inscribed in the Treaty. In practice, unfortunately, it is subject to significant restrictions. This is unacceptable. But freedom of movement creates a requirement of internal security. Problems of immigration, crime, drugs or terrorism do not stop short at the borders of the Member States. The Union has a duty to remedy the inadequacies of the Treaty in the fields of justice and internal affairs. With this in mind, the Commission is proposing substantial amendments, in particular the transfer of the majority of these areas from the third pillar to the Community framework.

Thirdly, a Europe for the citizen must be comprehensible and democratic. The citizen does not want a Europe which is only for insiders. He wants transparent procedures and clear responsibilities. This calls, first and foremost, for the strengthening of the role of the European Parliament. The need for simplification begins with the Treaty itself, and we must go as far as we can along that road. It then applies, clearly, to the taking of decisions. In this area, the Commission proposes to limit the number of procedures to three: extending and simplifying codecision, extending the European Parliament's power of assent to so-called constitutional fields such as amending the Treaty and own resources, and, finally, reforming the implementing measures. In this area, the Commission must play its full part as an executive body under the control of the legislative authority.

Mr President, the second important field is that of foreign policy. Europe needs a strong external identity, and much remains to be done here. The conference must have a simple and clear ambition: to give the Union the genuine capacity to act rather than just react. I can see three lines to be followed up here. First, we need to ensure that foreign policy is more consistent – Europe must be capable of speaking with one voice and

bringing together political, economic and development aspects within a global vision. Secondly, external action by the Community needs to be strengthened, which requires adapting the common commercial policy to the radical changes in the world economy. It is unacceptable that bickering over jurisdiction is depriving the Community of ways of effectively defending the interests of the Member States in such crucial areas as services and intellectual property.

This also means that the Treaty must include explicit provisions to ensure that the Union speaks with one voice in areas which are a matter both for Community responsibility and for the competence of the Member States. Thirdly, we need to organize effective convergence between the Community and the Member States in the field of shared competences. Finally, we need to affirm the common foreign and security policy.

In this context, the Commission stresses the need for the presidency of the Council and the Commission jointly to ensure the high profile of this policy. This automatically calls for a series of improvements, from the way in which decisions are prepared to the way in which they are adopted and implemented. And, throughout this process, it is essential that the partnership, and I do mean partnership – presidency and Commission – should act consistently and effectively.

As far as the preparation of decisions is concerned, the Commission shares the opinion of those who recommend the setting-up of a common think-tank made up of experts from the Member States and from the Commission. In the taking of decisions, the Commission also emphasizes the use, as a general rule, of qualified majority voting. Specific rules will, however, have to be provided in the military sector. In some situations, the possibility must exist for a limited number of Member States to take action. Such initiatives must also be able to constitute Union actions when they are not in conflict with the general interests of the Union and when the latter is duly represented. The responsibility for implementing the decisions would have to devolve primarily on the presidency and the Commission. We also think that expenditure in this area will, in general, have to be included in the Community budget.

Those are a few key elements of our proposal. Before leaving this subject, let me add a few words about security and defence, where the need for a genuine European identity is essential. As far as the Commission is concerned, this calls for the following measures, on the understanding that NATO remains the central pivot of our defence. The first, the introduction into the Treaty of missions to maintain and reestablish peace; secondly, the strengthening of the Union's security capability, by virtue of appropriate involvement of the Defence Ministers in the Council; and finally a review of the role of the Western European Union, with a view to its integration into the Union in accordance with a fixed timetable.

Mr President, the third part of our opinion deals with the matter of institutions for an enlarged Europe. In this context, the Commission believes that the intergovernmental conference must resolve the following three questions: how many Members of Parliament, how many Commissioners, and how should the presidency of the Council be organized? These are questions which are bound to arouse heated debate. You may be surprised to hear that I believe that, important as they are, they are possibly not quite as vital as may be suggested. I am sure that solutions will be found, reconciling the quest for optimum efficiency with respect for individual identity.

As far as the Commission is concerned, it adopts the following position: it shares your Parliament's opinion that the number of Members of the European Parliament should be limited to 700. It also believes, incidentally, that it is becoming a matter of urgency to decide upon a common form of election which will ensure that those elected are as representative as possible.

With regard to the Council of Ministers, the Commission believes that the sixmonthly presidential terms should be retained, but at the same time consideration should be given to ways of strengthening the presidency's powers of action. As regards the weighting of votes, the Commission has not set its face against change but does strongly stress the need not to raise the normal qualified majority threshold.

As for the Commission itself, we will fight to retain its legitimacy, its collective responsibility and its effectiveness. Clearly, this poses the question of how many Commissioners there should be, because above a

certain limit the principles which I have just stated may come under threat. To prevent this, the Commission considers that, in a context of enlargement, the number of Commissioners should be reduced to one per Member State. The Commission is aware of the fact that its composition and structure will have to be reviewed above a certain number of Member States. The intergovernmental conference will have to determine the appropriate procedure here.

The Commission also considers that its President will have to be appointed by the European Council and approved by Parliament. The President will have to play an important part in the composition of this body, as the best way of ensuring its collective responsibility. And the members of the Commission will have to be appointed by common agreement between the President of the Commission and the respective governments of the Member States.

Mr President, these changes are necessary, but they are not sufficient. The Commission proposes two fundamental reforms. In the enlarged Union, the principle of unanimity in the Council and in the taking of decisions would result in paralysis. To avoid that, we are proposing majority voting as the general rule. In any case, in a Europe numbering twenty or twenty-five Member States, is it really acceptable that the procession should be as fast as its slowest member? The Commission thinks not. That is why it believes that forms of strengthened cooperation or integration should be provided between some of its members which want to move more quickly towards achieving the objectives of the Treaty. Of course, there must be no backsliding. Flexibility will have to respect the following principles in order to guarantee the unity of the Union: compatibility with the Union's objectives, respect for the Union's institutional framework, permanent acceptance of those States which are willing and able to join the Union, and the preservation of the single market and its flanking policies.

Mr President, those are the Commission's guidelines for the intergovernmental conference. Perhaps my introduction today is rather long, but I believe the importance of the subject justifies it. As you can see, what the Commission is calling for is an ambitious intergovernmental conference. It must be a genuine debate on Europe and its objectives, on the major issues of future years and on the role of each individual within Europe. This debate must be launched as of now, so that the negotiators can benefit from it. We cannot wait for the ratification stage before talking about Europe.

In this debate, the Commission intends to restate some simple truths: first, an obvious but sometimes forgotten truth that the most dazzling success of European integration is that it has produced a Europe of peace with prosperity. The need now is to build upon this unequalled heritage and extend it to the countries of a long-divided Europe. Next, there is the value of the Community method: it is thanks to this innovative approach, based on original institutions and on law and solidarity, that the Union has been able to become what it is today. While we must preserve those values, we must at the same time adapt the methods to new contexts: the transition to a more genuinely political Union and to a Union which will soon be made up of more than fifteen members. This is the thrust of the reforms recommended by the Commission.

Finally, there is the imperative of political intent: outlining clear objectives and creating the necessary tools is an absolute necessity. The Union must equip itself with the resources to match its ambitions. Yet all this will lead to nothing if it is not backed by a genuine political intent. It goes without saying that the problem of unemployment will not be solved merely by inserting a chapter on employment into the Treaty, just as a foreign policy cannot be created with a stroke of a pen. That said, including such a chapter in the Treaty will compel us to act in unison. Lucidity is not synonymous with abdication.

So let this conference be an opportunity to mobilize our energies and our will, to send a message of confidence and determination to our citizens and to the rest of the world, to proclaim that the Union has clear objectives and the tools to achieve them; that Europe, united in its diversity, is prepared to maintain and develop its society model, to put growth and competitiveness at the service of a social or cultural ideal; that Europe, combining the strengths of its institutions and the efforts of its Member States in a single thrust, will accept its responsibilities in the international arena; and that Europe, far from being the sum of this continent's self-interests, is the sum of all its riches.



(Applause)