

Speech by Jacques Santer to the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 15 February 1995)

Source: RAPID. The Press and Communication Service of the European Commission. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [20.01.2005]. SPEECH/95/9. Disponible sur <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/95/9&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech_by_jacques_santer_to_the_european_parliament_strasbourg_15_february_1995-en-8e2e229c-6668-4d5a-862f-434b6f7934bf.html

Publication date: 23/10/2012

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Mr President,
Honourable Members,

In January I pledged the Commission to report to you and account for its actions. I would now like to take the first, albeit decisive, step towards redeeming that pledge. This means recasting the way we present our work, which is why the programme I am putting before you, unlike its predecessors, sets the Commission's work in a wider context. The major policy options and each specific decision need to be seen to fit into an overall structure. This will make it easier both for yourselves and for all our fellow-citizens to grasp the purpose of what we do, much more than if the measures were presented to you as an assemblage of piecemeal decisions.

This is why, to make the action which needs to be taken more obvious, we have decided to submit our indicative programme to you in a new form which very clearly brings out the four complementary aspects of that action: the drafting of new proposals for legislation, the adoption of those which are still outstanding, the launching of wide-ranging discussions before legislation is introduced and, lastly, the management and implementation of our policies.

- You know what the general objectives are already. I identified them when I spoke to you last month: a strong economy which creates more jobs, a stable economic and monetary union, increased economic, social and regional solidarity, greater security inside the Union, a role as a strong and respected player on the international stage, open and efficient management and laying the groundwork for the Intergovernmental Conference in 1996.

- There is more to the Commission's role than merely exercising its right of legislative initiative. Our responsibility is to steer each project through the four essential stages it must pass through as it moves forward: upstream, we have to put forward proposals for new initiatives and instigate the wide-ranging discussions which bring forth new ideas, and, downstream, make sure that whatever is under way goes through smoothly and that our policies are put into practice. This is the full process with which I now propose to associate you.

What are these stages?

* Let me begin with the main one, the one where our primary responsibility lies: making proposals for new legislation. The Union is a community under the rule of law and needs laws and rules. But we must take care not to overdo the legislation. In my confirmation speech I said that "less action, but better action" should be our motto. Acting less is something we can do. In fact the number of new proposals has been falling for some time, in the first instance because the 1992 single market programme has largely been completed, at least as far as the legislation is concerned, but also because we are acting more effectively.

The Commission is determined to focus on the essential. It will become more and more effective in applying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The figures speak for themselves: the number of new priority legislative proposals is 52, a figure similar to the 50 or so put forward last year but a long way below the peak of 180 proposals launched by the Commission in 1990.

* The second stage is very close to my heart, as you know: it will not do just to keep launching new projects - we have to complete them too. I am sometimes amazed to hear that "Brussels" has "decided" this or that on a Wednesday evening, when we are still only at the first stage of the Union's decision-making process! It makes the ordinary citizen very confused. So I will take very special care to make sure that the schemes we embark upon do not get bogged down in indecision, either in the Council or in Parliament. The point is that all the Union institutions need to work together.

* The third stage is the moment when the innovatory momentum which needs to be the driving force behind our future work takes over. I am talking here about the major discussions which will have to be launched in the course of this year.

My watchwords for this lap of the journey will be openness, efficiency and joint consultation. It is, of course, the point at which the Commission exposes its ideas to the keen gaze of interest groups that play an active part in the life of the Union. Green Papers, White Papers or communications of other kinds must reflect our willingness to listen to what the ordinary citizen has to say. I am relying heavily on Parliament urging us forward; as you will notice, I have acted on some of the things you asked for straight away.

* In the fourth stage, when we are putting decisions into practice, we put the very credibility of the Union into the ring. We will be judged on how we do it. And that is why the Commission's programme also indicates the main steps we will be taking to implement the Union's policies.

If such an all-round operation is to remain graspable, of course, we must target the priorities and know how to distinguish between the essential and the superfluous. We must also find a way to strike a fair balance between all the pressing demands made on us by Parliament and the Council and the policy priorities we have identified. This programme aspires to be a realistic and practical one. I have noticed that large numbers of measures promised in 1994 have not been carried out, particularly in certain fields. As I had occasion to say to you in July, I hope the Commission will be judged on what it does and not on what it says. In that spirit, I mean to have a policy debate in the Commission in October to take stock of progress and establish what has and has not been done, and from it we will draw the proper conclusions for our next programme.

I should like now to give a few examples from our work programme to illustrate the way I want to see attention paid to each of the four stages which separate intention from reality. Obviously this presentation is not intended to be exhaustive; that is the function of the written programme which you have all received.

1) One area above all others where legislative initiatives are still required is that of advanced technology and the information society. This is a major challenge. We have the chance to shape our future, and it is essential that Europe carve out a place for itself at the forefront of these markets to ensure competitive jobs today and new jobs tomorrow. I expect the G7 Conference on 24 and 25 February to launch a far-reaching debate on this decisive issue for the future.

The benefits of this third technological revolution must be shared by the population as a whole. This is a point I have made before and I would reiterate here today. We are shaping the society of the future - and this should provide some encouragement to the young - but not at the expense of the society of the present. I am calling for an effort on everyone's part and in particular for all economic operators to live up to their responsibilities so that together we can face the future with enthusiasm not fear.

Advanced technology calls for a horizontal approach. You will find references to proposals for legislation in this field throughout our work programme, in the sections on the audiovisual industry, education and training and social affairs. You will, for example, come across an integrated programme on the gradual liberalization of the telecommunications sector. Examples include the proposals on ONP, the liberalization of infrastructure, mobile communications and the increased budget for the fourth framework programme for research, the cornerstone of our innovative policy.

2) I have already mentioned the importance I attach to completing work in progress. Many proposals are still pending before the Council and Parliament. At the latest count there were over a hundred! This is very damaging to Europe's image.

In this context I would particularly emphasize the completion of the internal market, energy policy and the environment.

We should complete the internal markets in electricity and natural gas this year. If we find that the Council has made no progress, the Commission will have to take matters into its own hands. There are a number of

agreements with the United States, Russia, Ukraine and the other CIS states to be put into effect in the nuclear field - a sensitive, but extremely important area. There is also a significant amount of unfinished business left over from 1994 in the environmental field. Many of the priorities relate to requests made by the European Parliament.

If the internal market is genuinely to improve the daily lot of European businesses and the general public we must not only consolidate our achievements to date but also make good any shortcomings that become apparent when the first assessment is made and ensure effective implementation.

As Europe prepares for the twenty-first century I should like to mention the major networks that bring fresh life to the regions and encourage trade. They must be built. I can only advise those who doubt the value of such projects to note the enthusiasm of those who have already had occasion to use the Channel Tunnel.

Other major projects are already under way which require a concerted effort to ensure that they are completed on schedule. The most important, of course, is the completion of economic and monetary union and the introduction of a single currency. Let me repeat what I have said before: I insist on the strict application of the terms of the Treaty, no more, no less. The timetable has been agreed: I am simply asking that we stick to it. The four criteria have been spelled out: let us now comply with them. There are encouraging signs of growth; this is not the time to relax our efforts to achieve convergence. The Commission will make its contribution through its recommendations on the broad guidelines of economic policy, and will hear what you have to say on this issue.

Of course preparations must be made for economic and monetary union on an economic level, but we must not miss the boat for lack of technical preparation. With this in mind, the Commission will prepare a Green Paper on the conditions for the transition to a single currency. I want industry, but above all the ordinary public, to understand what an invaluable instrument a single currency will be for progress.

3) Let us turn now to the great debates that will take place this year. There are plenty in the offing: the Commission is putting forward 21 programmes and action plans (some of which, like the fourth equal opportunities programme, will be of a legislative nature) and 67 texts in the form of Green and White Papers and communications of one sort or another, all of which will generate debate. I expect a significant response to these stimuli, from Parliament, the general public, businesses and labour and management organizations.

It is hard to single out just one area among the many in which we are preparing for entry into the twenty-first century. I shall mention just two or three.

a. Improving industrial competitiveness is an essential prerequisite for growth in the economy. Let me draw your attention to three elements in the programme presented today:

i) The follow-up to the recent Commission communication on industrial competitiveness. This involves promoting quality, linking research and industrial competitiveness more effectively and, above all, preparing a White Paper on education and training, the crucial levers for progress in the twenty-first century.

ii) The appointment of an advisory committee on competitiveness, as suggested in Essen. This group will be independent of the Commission and consist of prominent personalities. Their names were announced yesterday afternoon.

iii) A genuine employment policy.

In this context, the Essen European Council clearly set out the five main lines of attack which we should follow. You are all familiar with them. We shall be preparing a communication on the Essen process, in which we shall outline the main features of the multilateral surveillance of employment systems. It is extremely important in this respect that the Member States draft their multiannual programmes without delay, as promised in Essen.

In any case I am thoroughly convinced that we will not succeed if we do not involve management and labour in the process and reinforce the dialogue between them at European level.

b) Citizens will not see the benefits of the frontier-free area unless the Union can demonstrate its capacity to guarantee their security and combat the drugs traffic and organised crime. The Commission will exercise its right of initiative to the full in all matters where it can do so under the Treaties. There can be no talk of the quality of life in a society where there is no safety. In matters of immigration and asylum, drug addiction and judicial cooperation in civil matters, where many citizens are likely to be affected in their daily lives, the Commission will seek to meet their expectations and allay their concerns.

c) Of the various topics that deserve extensive debate, there is one that I am duty-bound to mention - the pre-accession strategy for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe discussed at Essen. Personally I attach great importance to the presentation of the two White Papers we are now working on - one on the approximation of legislation and one on the common agricultural policy. But there will be other areas of the general strategy that will also call for very thorough analysis.

Before moving on to the implementation of our policies, let me briefly outline the tasks ahead of us in external relations. The reality, you will agree, is that the world at large wants a strong, open Europe that displays solidarity. The message from all four corners of the globe - from Latin America, from Eastern Europe, from Asia and from Africa - is the same: they want closer relations with the European Union, in trade matters, of course, but politically also. We must take advantage of this reality, but to do so we first need a common foreign and security policy that is worthy of the name and actually works. Our programme consequently offers a dual message:

- * first, we must use the possibilities offered by the Maastricht Treaty to the full;
- * then, we must prepare resolutely and imaginatively for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

Here I cannot overlook one issue to which this House attaches great importance - human rights. We shall be laying a report on this before you and the Council.

But work on devising a veritable common foreign and security policy should not blind us to the more traditional aspects of our external relations - the common commercial policy, development aid, our dense network of bilateral economic relations, and so on.

4) That leaves the last of the four aspects of our activity - the actual implementation of our policies. Two features must, I think, be permanently visible - accessibility and rigour. The programme has more to say on this, but there are a few points I should like to touch upon now:

- Rigour is the one feature we must display if the citizen is to retain confidence in the Community institutions. The Commission must maintain an unflinching policy of enforcing Community law, using Article 171 whenever necessary. And it must never flinch in the fight against fraud. Success will elude us as long as the Community institutions and the Member States do not present a constant united front. The new Commission has clearly stated its priorities in this respect. One of its first decisions was to adopt a vast programme of anti-fraud measures. I am glad to have this opportunity today to inform you that yesterday the Commission decided to entrust the whole range of anti-fraud activities to a reinforced fraud prevention unit.

- As for the accessibility, the groupability, of the Community venture, the whole reality of Community citizenship depends on this. Our citizens are offering opinions - and will do so more and more - on where Europe ought to be going, and I warmly welcome this almost revolutionary change in the relationship between the institutions and the people. But if they are to offer opinions, they first need to understand what is going on, and we must therefore simplify and streamline our legislation.

We must be ever clearer on the need for action. And to that end we must abandon our parochial quarrels and our demarcation disputes. I solemnly appeal to all the institutions to work together on this, taking criticisms and suggestions on board and leaving individual sensitivities aside.

This transparency imperative is particularly acute in the run up to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference. Time is short. We must work with an open, constructive spirit. I want the entire field to pass the finishing post together.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Paul Valéry described politics as the art of teaching people not to concern themselves with what concerns them. Like you I am glad to prove him wrong and to use our transparent, constructive style as a means of attracting Europe's citizens to show greater interest with every day that passes in what affects them directly.