

Press conference held by Jacques Santer (Brussels, 14 July 1999)

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Médiathèque centrale de la Commission européenne, Berlaymont 4/363, 200 rue de la Loi B-1049 Bruxelles.

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[Jacques Santer] The Union has made fundamental progress since I took office in 1995: the euro became a reality at the beginning of this year; Agenda 2000 was adopted at the Berlin European Council; the Treaty of Amsterdam entered into force on 1 May; we have had an employment strategy for two years, and accession negotiations are under way. Furthermore, following several weeks of war, we are now on the verge of implementing a stability pact for the Balkans and a reconstruction strategy for Kosovo. I hope that this unprecedented commitment by the Union will at last allow us to close a dark chapter in our recent history. I remain convinced that the important steps that we have taken will stand out in the History with a capital H of the period 1995–99. I also believe that the crisis that we have experienced is evidence of the genuine evolution of the institutional and political balances that have existed for 50 years. We have experienced a growth crisis of which I have, in a way, been the first victim. It must be seized as an opportunity for Europe. And this opportunity is first of all the fact that the general public is increasingly interested in what the European leaders are doing on its behalf. This means that we must be more democratic and carry out more reviews. I am not only talking about the Commission. This opportunity is also the peaceful enlargement of the Union. Ultimately, this opportunity is, at the request of the general public, to focus upon new fields of activity such as the environment, sustainable development, consumer health, the area of freedom and justice and the definition of a genuine European security and defence policy. These are all areas where, sometimes as a matter of urgency, we have begun to move. However, the times in which we are living also entail real risks. Firstly, interinstitutional balance must be a priority for everyone. The European Parliament has become aware of its true democratic power over the Commission. This should not lead it to let itself be tempted by the song of the Sirens. The Union cannot afford a lengthy period of instability.