

## 'Santer will not change his Commission despite complaints from the European Parliament' from El País (16 January 1995)

**Caption:** Published in the Spanish daily newspaper El País on 16 January 1995, just as the Santer Commission is being nominated, this article takes account of the difficulties encountered by the designated commissioners during their individual hearings in the European Parliament and forecasts a complicated vote of appointment.

**Source:** El País. 16.01.1995. Madrid. "Santer no modificará su Comisión pese a las quejas de la Eurocámara", auteur:Vidal-Folch, Xavier.

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## Santer will not change his Commission despite complaints from the European Parliament

### Complicated investiture for the new team

Xavier Vidal-Folch — Brussels

An institutional crisis is hanging like the sword of Damocles over the European Union. Tomorrow, at the European Parliament (EP), the incoming President of the Commission, Jacques Santer, will make the investiture speech for his team, which will be put to the vote on Wednesday. His intention is not to make mass concessions to the demands of the European Parliament, which rejected five of the twenty Commissioners at the individual hearings.

This is the third gamble made by the new President of the European Commission since his own investiture last July, which he got through by the skin of his teeth, and the allocation of portfolios in October which forced him into a confrontation with the powerful Leon Brittan. The part-session promises to be controversial. 'If Jacques Santer doesn't make concessions, the vote will be very tight and too close to call,' say sources at the European Parliament, 'but even if he does make concessions he won't get overwhelming support.' 'The President has ruled out any change in the general structure of the Commission and in the allocation of portfolios,' is what this paper was told by a senior official who is very close to Santer.

A simple majority is the order of the day: half the votes cast plus one. The current number of MEPs, following the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden, is 626.

The problem is that the parliamentary committees which have interviewed the members of the new European Commission not only expressed reservations on five of them but proposed far-reaching changes to the general structure of the Commission and the allocation of its responsibilities.

The most important thing is to create a Development Cooperation portfolio. The parliamentary committee chaired by the founder of Médecins sans Frontières, Bernard Kouchner, 'categorically rejects' the disappearance of that portfolio in Jacques Santer's team. On that issue the President of the European Parliament, Klaus Hänsch, concluded that the fear was that there would be no development policy to implement which was worthy of the name.

### External Relations

The different approach taken by the Executive is appropriate; it has divided external relations into four large regional areas under four Commissioners (Manuel Marín, Leon Brittan, Hans van den Broek and João de Deus Pinheiro) who will be responsible for all the policy and economic instruments in each area, including development aid, with a view to preventing the chaos which had prevailed previously when the *Political Affairs* Commissioner clashed with the *Economic Affairs* Commissioner. That was the main bone of contention in October when the portfolios were being allocated. It concluded with Leon Brittan of the United Kingdom being left in the minority. Reopening the issue is tantamount to risking a rerun of that crisis.

The other major proposal is to allocate responsibility for Equal Opportunities to a Commissioner other than the nominee, Padraig Flynn (Social Affairs), to whom an MEP pointed out that someone who told the lady President of his Republic [Ireland] that her place was to look after her children cannot be given responsibility for monitoring equality between men and women.

Flynn was not exactly enraptured by the portfolio and would have been satisfied with Employment, but the harsh nature of the criticism made it a matter of honour for him to hold on to it. 'The European Parliament is not abiding by the spirit in which the hearings were conceived, i.e. as a dialogue, and has all but made them into individual investitures,' say some in the new Commission, 'but Jacques Santer will try to establish good relations.'

Such relations may be the result of ‘gestures rather than concessions’ which draw attention to the collegiate nature of the Commission so as to prevent the most criticised Commissioners from being sniped at from all sides, and of a policy of dialogue over the Code of Conduct which the European Parliament is proposing to the Commission.

The Code is an attempt by the European Parliament to increase its legislative clout at the cost of that of the Commission by making its second-reading amendments (in ‘codecision’ and ‘cooperation’ procedures) binding.

The Executive would be able to make that the norm in practice, subject to reservation of its powers for exceptional circumstances. The concession is likely to be formal in nature because the Commission itself will decide whether the circumstances are exceptional or not.

Whatever happens, the parliamentary sittings to be held tomorrow and the day after, for which Santer’s Commission will be preparing this evening, promise to be lively. The Green Group has already said that it will vote against.

The Chairman of the EPP, Wilfried Martens, took advantage of the weekend to put Jacques Santer under pressure. The scent of the chaos which accompanies a major public holiday is in the air, as it so often is in the European Parliament: while the British Labour MEPs have promised to vote for Santer, the Chairman of the Socialist MEPs, also a Labour MEP, Pauline Green, has intimated that it ‘will be difficult’ to approve the investiture of the new Commission. The worst aspect of this little spectacle is that it could erupt into an institutional crisis.

The second-worst aspect is that the Danes are spearheading a corporate Nordic crusade in the light of the rejection by Parliament of its new Commissioners. The former Danish Prime Minister and MEP Poul Schlüter has accused some of his colleagues of having an ‘inferiority complex’. And Ritt Bjerregaard has covered up the mistake she made in the House — she conceded that she hadn’t studied her papers — with the defence that ‘there is a Nordic tradition of giving a straight ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer; if we are unable to promise Parliament more powers, we say so.’

Published in the International section of the daily newspaper *El País* on 16 January 1995. Byline: Xavier Vidal-Folch.