

Letter from Jacques Santer to the Heads of State or Government of the Member States (10 June 1997)

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Letter from Mr. Jacques Santer, European Commission President, to the Heads of State or Government on the eve of the Amsterdam, 16-17 June 1997

The Amsterdam European Council will be dominated by the final negotiations on a new treaty. I believe that, thanks to the excellent work of the Dutch Presidency, all the conditions are there to achieve a positive result which fulfils the requirements we set ourselves. But I am still a little concerned about last-minute attempts to dilute the text, which has been patiently drawn up over months and is a balanced and reasonable whole. The success of Amsterdam depends on our will and our capacity to resist these attempts, whether they concern justice and home affairs or employment. We must also, I believe, resist the temptation to seek last-minute improvisations to solve all sorts of problems which do not really lend themselves to constitutional solutions. As for the institutional aspect, a last effort remains to be made on our part to achieve an acceptable package which does not create too heavy a burden for the future. I would point out that, with the next few enlargements so imminent, we cannot afford to make a mistake. I would like to add a last word on Article 113, where we must take care not to score an own goal. The text put forward by the Presidency is acceptable, but any further weakening would cause it to lose all meaning and would even be counterproductive.

The reason why I am writing to you now, however, is to raise, once again, the issue of employment. The last few months have proved that the endemic nature of unemployment has shifted some of the concerns and hopes of the Union's citizens to the heart of the European project. We must respond with determination, and the deadlines ahead of us give us the opportunity to do so.

Giving employment its proper place in the treaty is essential, but not sufficient. In practical terms, we must focus ever more clearly on the overall strategy for employment that was determined over the course of the last few European Councils. An assessment of the measures taken in the four main areas of the Confidence Pact for Employment shows that Europe is gradually drawing up a genuine strategy for employment.

A lot of progress has been made recently in putting a stable macroeconomic framework in place. Inflation and interest rates are at historic low levels, and public deficits are diminishing everywhere in Europe. I think that, at the same time, we must consider how best to exploit the potential of Article 103 of the Treaty, which calls for coordination of economic policies.

I would also like to see the European Council give a strong signal for the completion of the single market. Competitiveness and employment must be reconciled in the interest of all citizens. The Action Plan that the Commission is submitting to you defines four strategic objectives: to increase the efficiency of the rules, to eliminate the main distortions which remain, to remove sectoral barriers, and to put the single market at the service of all citizens, in particular by strengthening its social dimension.

As for the modernisation of employment systems, I am particularly delighted by the agreement between social partners on part-time work, signed at the Social Dialogue summit on 6 June. This agreement shows that for future issues, employers and unions can work together to find practical, up-to-date solutions.

Territorial pacts represent another considerable advance on the ground. There has been a positive response in all the Member States. In the autumn, therefore, we will be able to finally launch nearly 90 territorial pacts, which will be testing grounds for job creation.

I would like our meeting in Amsterdam to strengthen the message that the people of Europe expect of us: namely a Europe that gives added value on employment.

Jacques Santer