

Jacques Santer and the European Commission's proposals for the 1996 IGC (February 1996)

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[Jacques Santer] The Intergovernmental Conference, which is to start in Turin at the end of March, on 29 March, is the first of the important dates on which the future face of Europe depends. It is for this reason that the Intergovernmental Conference must be a success; but success implies enhancing political union and preparing for enlargement. Mr President, the third part of our Opinion tackles the question of institutions for the enlarged Europe. It agrees with the Opinion delivered by your Parliament, that the number of Members of the European Parliament be limited to 700. It maintains that common arrangements for the election that will best ensure that those elected are truly representative must be laid down as a matter of urgency.

With regard to the Council of Ministers, the Commission thinks that the rota system of six-monthly presidential terms should be maintained, but at the same time procedures to enhance the Presidency's power to act should be considered. As for the system of weighted votes, the Commission does not exclude adjustments but it firmly insists on the need for not raising the normal threshold of the qualified majority. The Commission considers that, upon enlargement, the number of Members of the Commission should be reduced to one per Member State. In the enlarged Union, the principle of unanimity within the Council and in the decision-making process would lead to paralysis. In order to avoid this, we propose majority voting as the general rule.