

Address given by Michel Rocard on the appointment of Jacques Santer as President of the Commission (Strasbourg, 21 July 1994)

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Address given by Michel Rocard during the debate on the appointment of the Santer Commission (Strasbourg, 21 July 1994)

[Michel Rocard] Prime Minister, our 12 countries are quietly ageing, witnessing a fall in their birth rates, in their importance in international business and in their clout on the world stage in matters relating to peace or development. What is more, we know that none of our nations can act alone. European integration is, for us, the response to this challenge, a requirement for our future and the key to the destiny of our children. You said that we must banish the demons of the past, Prime Minister, but it is more important for us to tackle the formidable problems of the present: massive unemployment, social cohesion that is under threat, the marginalisation of millions of men and women, civic apathy and, above all, growing doubt over Europe's capacity to deal with these issues more effectively than our individual nations. To use an advertising slogan, but one that is effective nonetheless, Europe needs to 'put a tiger in its tank'. This is dependent, in part, on the President of the Commission. For that part, Prime Minister, the strength of your European convictions and your strong reputation for integrity, competence and courtesy were what afforded you a headstart before this House. However, the energy required to strengthen the process of European integration is not solely dependent on the President of the Commission and on the Commission itself. This energy is also dependent on institutional balance and on the situation. Many of us, Prime Minister, including some in the French Delegation in the Party of European Socialists, did not want to come to a decision before listening to you speak. Mr Major's veto, which is clearly not rooted in any of Great Britain's essential interests, serves to undermine the workings of unanimity at a time when what we really need to do is move on, it seriously weakens the Commission in the eyes of the Council, and it demonstrates a deep disdain for the role which was allotted to Parliament by the Maastricht Treaty. This problem is considerable, it is serious, and it creates a situation whereby your talents alone are not enough to allow our institutions to move forward. Knowing this, Prime Minister, you were wrong to advise us not to miss the point. Mr Major has started what you have just called an interinstitutional sparring match of the utmost seriousness. Many of us, not just Socialists, consider it impossible, purely and simply, to accept the consequences and, having pretended to ignore it, Prime Minister, you worry us greatly. We can understand, of course, that you must respect your duty of confidentiality when it comes to the European Council and its practices, we can understand that. However, you should, at least, have referred to the future. There are, Prime Minister, three words — I hope that I heard you properly, I have been paying great attention — three words that I did not hear in your comments just now: veto, unanimity and majority. Prime Minister, when Europe is not making any headway, impeded by its procedures, your silence on these subjects is deafening, and we see in it a threat of the utmost seriousness for the future. Under these circumstances, our vote will be much less of a vote of censure on you, of course, than a demand made by Parliament to the European Council that it make Mr Major reconsider his vote. Thank you, Mr President.