

## Statement by Jacques Santer (Brussels, 16 March 1999)

**Caption:** Statement by President Jacques Santer the day after the resignation of the Members of the Commission.

**Source:** RAPID. The Press and Communication Service of the European Commission. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [21.11.2001]. IP/99/179. Disponible sur <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/welcome.htm>.

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**Publication date:** 23/10/2012

## Statement by President Jacques Santer the day after the resignation of the members of the Commission

Brussels, 16 March 1999

I promised that we would act on the report by the Committee of Independent Experts. Yesterday the Commission assumed its responsibilities. I would like to say a few things on its behalf.

1. The report considers a small number of specific cases which have recently attracted criticism from the European Parliament. The cases are analysed in great detail and, while the findings reveal certain malfunctions and one instance of favouritism, I would point out that there is no suggestion that any Member of the Commission was involved in fraud or corruption or stood to gain personally.

2. I note that on the basis of a tiny number of cases of fraud and malfunctioning, which did indeed merit criticism, the Committee's report paints a picture of total absence of responsibility on the part of the institution and its officials. This picture is distorted. I consider the tone of the report's conclusions to be wholly unjustified.

3. I do not accept that four years of work, during which this Commission has achieved its full policy programme, can be reduced to six cases of irregularities, four of which date back to before 1995. I would also have hoped that the Committee of Independent Experts might have attached appropriate significance to the very substantial reforms carried out by this Commission since 1995 and the ambitious programme announced to Parliament last January.

4. The Commission's decision yesterday was a political act. We have taken our responsibilities, even if we judge the report to be unbalanced. Sometimes criticism can be salutary; we must use this crisis as a catalyst for deep and lasting reform in all the European institutions. I am hopeful that this crisis will help to re-establish the smooth functioning of the institutions.

5. I have informed the President of the European Council of the decision taken yesterday. I pointed out to him that, in line with the Treaties, we will continue to perform our functions until our replacement is provided for under the relevant procedures.