

Jacques Santer, The role of the European Commission in tomorrow's Europe


Caption: Extract from a contribution by Jacques Santer, former President of the European Commission, to a joint publication produced by the European Commission in 2002 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The extract, entitled ‘The High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community and the “institutional question”’, focuses on the role of the Commission as representative of both the Community interest and the Community method.

Source: Commission européenne. CECA EKSF EGKS EKAX ECSC EHTY EKSG 1952-2002, Cinquante ans de Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier, trente-quatre témoignages. Luxembourg: Office des publications officielles des Communautés européennes, 2002. 287 p. ISBN 92-894-2072-3. "Le rôle de la Commission européenne dans l'Europe de demain", auteur:Santer, Jacques, p. 223-226.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/jacques_santer_the_role_of_the_european_commission_in_tomorrow_s_europe-en-f97b308d-eb65-4745-a177-92f12173a515.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



The role of the European Commission in tomorrow's Europe

Jacques Santer

*Member of the European Parliament,
former President of the European Commission*

[...]

The High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community and the 'institutional question'

One of the aims of the establishment of a common High Authority for the European Coal and Steel Community, the institutional forerunner of the European Commission as we know it today, was to give substance to what Robert Schuman called the 'coming together of the nations of Europe'. Within the European Coal and Steel Community, a supranational body that was the first step towards a 'European federation', it was the High Authority which formally took decisions and managed common policies. The creation of the High Authority introduced a new form of political governance in Europe, a new level of management of international relations between European states.

The Community method, which is intended to go beyond the old system of the balance of power between nation-states and to institutionalise relations between sovereign states with equal rights and duties in order to strengthen common interests, is largely defined by the institution which represents it. The Commission is a collegiate body characterised, above all, by its outstanding team spirit, its political focus on the common interest and its determination to achieve progress in the field of European integration.

Of course, the European Commission is not the High Authority. Following the failure of the plans for a European Defence Community and, consequently, for a European Political Community, the Commission is less powerful, and the intergovernmental elements are now stronger. However, it has to be said that today's European Union is much wider and deeper in nature than the former European Coal and Steel Community.

With enlargement about to bring the number of EU Member States to 27 and discussions on the future of Europe producing almost as many different views as there are capital cities, it is worth stressing that the European Commission is the only common institution representing the EU's general interest rather than the individual interests of the Member States.

The European Commission, which, as the guardian of the Treaties, is above all intergovernmental divisions, is indisputably the driving force behind the European Community, both in terms of legislation and as an executive and monitoring body. The exclusive right to propose legislation which it enjoys under the founding treaties gives it a central role which is vital for the balance of European integration.

Economic and monetary union, the common foreign and security policy (with its recently added 'security and defence' dimension), justice and home affairs are all areas offering potential for integration where the Commission needs to be involved and to take action in order to ensure that they are utilised in the interests of the Community.

Monetary policy, for instance, comes under the first pillar, in other words the Community method. Representing the euro abroad is very definitely a new sphere of activity and responsibility for the Commission. The decisions of the Vienna European Council of 11 and 12 December 1998 give it special responsibility in this field, in line with its role in coordinating macroeconomic policies.

Eleven years on from Maastricht, the European Commission has special responsibility in launching the debate about Europe's future, including the division of powers between regional, national and European levels. If there is one institutional question which affects both the composition and operation of the common institutions and the substance of the policies pursued, it is the question of the future role of the Commission in the institutional triangle. History has shown that the European model comes under threat when the political will to

make progress is not clearly defined as an asset belonging jointly to all the states and nations of Europe but lies in the hands of a 'Directorate' determined to impose the law of the strongest.

The smaller Member States have always been keen to consolidate the role and responsibilities of the Commission. The reactions of the Benelux countries to the proposals resulting from the Fouchet Plans, for instance, did a great deal to help maintain the innovative role of the institution. Ultimately, for the smaller countries, the continuation and deepening of European integration are vitally important. Between dilution and consolidation, between the extension of an intergovernmental method focusing on the juxtaposition of individual interests and greater concentration on a Community method based on defining the common interest, the smaller Member States have always managed to steer clear of good ideas that were simply wrong. In this connection, the question of the Commission's role in the Europe of tomorrow is worth considering today.

[...]