

Statement made by Jacques Santer on the 10th anniversary of the signing of Spain and Portugal's Treaties of Accession (9 June 1995)

Caption: On 9 June 1995, in a statement made to mark the 10th anniversary of the signing of Spain and Portugal's Treaties of Accession to the European Communities, Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, emphasises the importance of the efforts made by the European Union to support the development of the most disadvantaged regions of the Iberian Peninsula.

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Statement by Mr Santer on the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Spanish and Portuguese Treaty of Accession (9 June 1995)

On 12 June we mark the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty that brought Spain and Portugal into the great venture of European Union.

In so joining the Union, our Portuguese and Spanish friends realized their legitimate aspirations to share once again a common destiny with the rest of the continent they helped to shape. And Europe, for its part, gained two young democracies, brimming with vitality and enthusiasm for the European ideal.

Ten years on, Spain and Portugal have fully consolidated their political systems, democratic institutions and prestige in Europe and the world, within the European framework, while the Union has benefited from their special links with the southern shore of the Mediterranean, with Africa and with Latin America.

In economic terms, Portugal and Spain have experienced upsets on an unprecedented scale over the last decade. They have opened up and radically modernized their economies in an environment of increased competition. As in other European countries, this process has not been entirely painless.

However, the vital task of adapting the Spanish and Portuguese economies has been helped by a substantial effort on the part of the Union in the form of assistance under the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, two instruments of the internal solidarity that is enshrined in the Treaties. Between 1994 and 1999 Portugal and Spain will receive more than ECU 48 billion. Beyond this figure, this means concrete infrastructure projects, support for the development of disadvantaged regions and above all, the improvement in the quality of life for the people concerned.

Of course, it would be simplistic to conclude that membership of the Union has cured all ills. Major problems remain to be resolved, as they do elsewhere. We must set about solving the problem of unemployment, which is particularly severe among the young, eliminating outstanding imbalances to pave the way for the transition to a single currency, and increasing competitiveness while preserving the European social model. These are the tasks we have to buckle down to.

In today's difficult climate, where there is widespread uncertainty about the future, I can understand that the public may have doubts about the Community's institutions and activities. My answer to these doubts is that the challenges we face today are too big for any one state to tackle on its own and that solidarity between the Member States of the Union is an absolute priority, a fundamental element of European integration which must be preserved. Europe is strong when it speaks with one voice.

This is all the more important in view of the challenges ahead. The Intergovernmental Conference due to open next year will be crucial for the future of Europe. It must answer two important questions:

- How can we build a Europe of the people and for the people, with institutions that are more democratic and transparent?
- How can we make our institutions more effective and coherent, so that the Union can be enlarged to admit the countries of central and Eastern Europe?

If we are to answer these questions and prepare Europe for the twenty-first century, we need first and foremost a common resolve. I am convinced that the peoples of Spain and Portugal will play a major part in forging this resolve.

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