

Address

by

Professor Dr. Walter Hallstein,  
President of the Commission  
of the European Economic Community

on the occasion of the signature of the  
Convention of Association with the  
African States and Madagascar

Yaoundé

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It is both an honour and a pleasure for the Commission of the European Economic Community to take part here in Yaoundé in the ceremony for the signature of the new Convention of Association.

As I stand before this illustrious gathering, my first duty as President of that Commission is to thank once again the man who within the Commission carries the main responsibility for questions concerned with this Association, my colleague Henri Rochereau.

What contribution the Commission has been able to make to the success of this venture is largely due to him. To spare him embarrassment I will only speak of his devotion to duty and his tenacity in serving the cause of solidarity between Europe and Africa; I know that he would wish me to associate with this well merited homage all those who are working under his inspiration.

The ceremony to which we have come today has great significance.

The very fact that our friends of the associated States should have chosen Yaoundé is symbolic. In this city with its fraternal welcome we understand and sense the difficult but peaceful and confident effort of a whole people to merge so many races, religions and diverse historical heritages in the melting-pot of unity: in truth, a fine symbol, a fine example for Africa as a whole.

Today marks an historic stage in the long evolution of relations between the industrialized and the developing nations.

From the very inception of the Treaty of Rome the founders of the European Economic Community resolutely undertook to support the development of the overseas countries with which some of them at that time had special relations.

It is a most remarkable fact, of great political and human value, that after most of these countries attained independence they should have wished to conclude with the Community - on a footing of equal partnership - an agreement which has no precedent in history and which establishes new, more numerous and stronger links through a great joint venture, and that such an agreement should have been successfully concluded.

It is a peaceful venture, intended to provide a decent standard of living for men and women and to lead to mutual understanding amongst States. Everybody is talking about this, but today the Community and the associated African States and Madagascar are acting.

The signing of the new Convention sets the seal on our present relations and opens up new prospects of progress.

In perfecting and renewing our association, in adapting it to the political and economic necessities of our age, we have had to meet several requirements.

The Community, that at the end of the five years for which the new Convention of Association has been concluded will be approaching the end of the common market's transition period, must simultaneously continue its internal build-up and face its world responsibilities. at the same time, this Community feels itself bound to contribute to the economic and social progress of the associated countries and, so far as possible, to take

into account the interests of other developing countries.

The foremost task for the developing countries is to lead their peoples towards living conditions conducive to the unfolding of human dignity so that they may reach that stage of economic security without which true sovereignty cannot assert itself.

We may say that the Association reflects a fair balance between all these objectives, which are not contradictory but difficult to harmonize and to attain reasonably quickly.

It is equally noteworthy that the experience gained during the initial years of association has not been wasted. Both sides have analysed and used it so that, with the modesty called for in the appreciation of such an undertaking, we may say that the Convention of Association between the European Economic Community and the African States and Madagascar marks a substantial improvement on the system in force until 31 December 1962.

This is the result of the active goodwill which inspired all the Governments concerned and the institutions of the Community. In this context we must pay tribute to the work of the European Parliament and to its perseverance in close co-operation with the Parliaments of the African countries and Madagascar.

It would seem to me that over and above the very comprehensive character of the Association with its well balanced and carefully worked out solutions to often highly complicated technical problems, the essential point is that

there is to be a permanent and almost exhaustive confrontation between the economic interests of the two groups of countries, and that problems are to be solved on the basis of the common interest of all concerned. That common interest has already led us to co-operate for five years; we have negotiated the new Convention in that spirit, we have together presented it to the world and, when necessary, we have defended it together. By so doing we think we have merited the praise received from well-qualified observers who have described our association as the sort of agreement which they would like to see applied at continental or even at world level.

I am no less aware than anyone here of the criticisms which the advocates of this association have met, and which they may still meet. Nor do I claim that this association is the answer to all our problems.

It is with all this in mind that the Commission, when putting forward an Action Programme for the Community, suggested that an effort be made to conclude world-wide agreements on the main agricultural commodities - a field in which the European Economic Community will be intervening with greater authority. Such action would help:

- a) To stabilize the prices of tropical products at a profitable level, and so
- b) To guarantee a more regular and higher income to producers and
- c) To improve the structure of production.

Europe must in addition take the necessary steps to increase consumption of these products.

By applying such a policy the Community would evidently improve conditions not only for its associates but also for many other developing countries.

But I cannot follow the critics when they charge the African partners of this association with having committed themselves, in their relations with the European Economic Community, to a closed system incompatible with their sovereignty or their membership of other bodies.

All members of the association, whatever their economic strength, are on an equal footing:

- a) At the highest level of decision the associated States together and the Community each have one vote, and no decision can be imposed on either party unless both votes are in favour;
- b) Far from maintaining old or erecting new artificial barriers between developing countries, the association favours any regrouping which the associates might wish to undertake and at the same time it allows close economic relations with non-associated countries to be maintained or established;
- c) The Convention is not closed to non-member countries whose economic structure is comparable to that of the present associates, but on the contrary it is expressly open to any such countries prepared to accept the rights and obligations involved. I would add that association in no way excludes the conclusion of other types of agreement with any developing country which wishes to make such an agreement;
- d) Finally, owing to a body of solutions, some of which are already found in other systems of international relations but some of which are quite new, the Association really does provide its economically least developed members with certain means of speeding their progress and of catching up with more highly developed countries. I refer here in particular to the tariff, quota and financial provisions which allow the

the associated States to promote diversification and rationalization in their economic structure, in other words their industrialization.

May I therefore wish every success to this venture which is today getting off to a new start. The millions of men and women who must back it and who are also to benefit from it, the men and women who have placed their hopes in it, must not be disappointed. I can assure you that within the European Economic Community the Commission will for its part do all in its power to ensure the success of this agreement which, under the name of the Yaoundé Convention, has so felicitously brought us together here today.