

‘An “open-ended” convention with Africa’ from Le Monde (21 July 1963)

Caption: On 21 July 1963, the day after the signing in Yaoundé, Cameroon, of the first Association Agreement between the European Economic Community (EEC) and 18 states known collectively as the Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM), the French daily newspaper Le Monde describes the main provisions of the agreement.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 21.07.1963, n° 5 757; 20e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Une convention « ouverte » avec l'Afrique", p. 1.

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An 'open-ended' convention with Africa

After many trials and tribulations, the new Association Agreement (the Yaoundé Convention between the EEC and the African countries and Madagascar) was signed in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on Saturday. The document had been initialled in Brussels on 20 December 1962, slightly later than originally planned. The breakdown of talks with the United Kingdom delayed the signing by several months, and the Netherlands and Italy invoked a number of reasons for postponing the event. Since it now has to undergo the standard ratification procedures, the agreement will enter into force on 1 January 1964 at the earliest.

The one-year hiatus between the old and the new conventions will not have any serious implications for the Associated States. Transitional measures were determined by the Six in early April. The Common Market Commission has been authorised to draw upon the European Development Fund's reserves to finance the investments requested by the Associated African States in 1963.

The Yaoundé Convention is in line with the main principles of the earlier convention, but with some significant new details.

(1) The financial mechanisms are more varied. The European Development Fund can intervene to supplement the European Investment Bank's activities and, in particular, in addition to the conventional grants, loans, interest-rate concessions and advance payments will be available to stabilise the market prices for tropical products. What is more, the total aid package has been increased by some 38 %.

(2) There is clearly more emphasis on technical cooperation. Since 1958, economic and social infrastructure projects have been by far the Community's most significant area of activity. But experience has shown that the ground has to be much better prepared for investments if they are to stimulate the economy. So, from now on, the Community will be able to use the Fund to finance planning and regional development studies, to prepare project documents and to guarantee the technical supervision of projects, etc. Furthermore, experts and technical staff will be able to undertake specific missions, and grants may be awarded to universities and institutes in the Associated States or, where such establishments do not exist, in Common Market Member States, etc.

(3) Open-door policies will be much more widespread. The new states have accepted significant cuts in the common external tariff and, hence, in the 'preference' for the principal tropical products. Accordingly, new import facilities will be granted to competitor countries such as those in Latin America. Reference should also be made to the phasing-out of the system of 'price top-ups' that France gave to overseas products. In order to offset these breaches in the 'regionalist' system, special assistance will allow the new states to gradually adapt their output to the global market and to diversify their crops.

The Associated States will, therefore, gear themselves more closely to world trade, but Mr Rochereau, a Member of the Common Market Commission, insisted during his press conference on Friday that the convention was 'open-ended'. Several months ago, Mr Luns, the Netherlands Foreign Minister, expressly confirmed this for the benefit of the Commonwealth countries, and the Six ultimately pointed out that there were three ways forward: membership of the Euro-African Convention, an Association Agreement with the Common Market without any institutional dimension (such as for Greece and Turkey) or simple trade agreements. What path will the Maghreb countries take? It is too early to say for certain, but unfortunately it is likely that the talks will not be able to deal with matters in their proper order.