

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DRAFT SPEECH BY MR EMILIO COLOMBO, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

INAUGURAL SITTING OF THE ACP-EEC CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY - LUXEMBOURG

27.9.78

Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted and honoured to welcome you once again to the Chamber of the European Parliament in Luxembourg which is hosting the Consultative Assembly of the Convention of Lomé for the third time.

Our proceedings are taking place at a time of particular significance to the development of relations between the industrialized and developing countries.

The United Nations have just opened the XXXIII. Session of their General Assembly at which the relations to which I have made reference will be a central topic of discussion, particularly in the context of the North-South Dialogue.

The European Community is aware of the importance of the issues at stake and of the need for its active participation in the negotiations on a scale reflecting its leading role in the industrialized world and its responsibilities as the foremost partner in international trade.

This need was expressly recognized by our Heads of State or Government during the recent meetings of the European Council in Bremen and Bonn at which emphasis was placed on the importance of the Community's cooperation policy, the principal embodiment of which is the common commitment which unites us under the Convention of Lomé.

The negotiations on the renewal of that Convention were ceremonially opened last July and more recently the discussions of substance have begun.

The European Parliament which has always encouraged and called for the intensification of regional cooperation, hopes that the negotiations will be conducted in a constructive spirit following the principles which it has repeatedly affirmed, and that they will be brought to a successful conclusion within the time limits laid down.

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It gives us great satisfaction to note that, at the opening of the negotiations, the Community expressed its clear intention of maintaining the positive content of the existing agreement while at the same time trying to bring about improvements to better respect the wishes of the associated partners.

The content and, above all, the spirit of the Convention of Lomé have aptly been defined in the past as a model for relations between countries with different levels of economic development; it is our intention to maintain and perfect the exemplary nature of our cooperation which is a magnet for an ever-increasing number of countries. I am happy to welcome here the recent accession of the Solomon Islands, bringing the number of member countries to 54.

If the new Convention is to serve, like its predecessor, as a model and a guide, we must use our best endeavours to promote its positive evolution in the light of our experience of recent years.

The Commission of the European Communities has already put forward proposals and suggestions of undoubted value for the future development of our relations. For its part the European Parliament will make the fullest possible contribution to the success of this undertaking.

Without going into details of the negotiations which have now begun I should simply like to stress the vital contribution made by the institutional framework established for our cooperation. This structure has provided an opportunity for a dialogue - admittedly sometimes difficult but always fruitful - aimed at finding satisfactory solutions for both sides.

It would still be premature to speak of the conclusion of these negotiations. However, let me say now that the European Parliament will, as it has in the past, show great vigilance in ensuring that the necessary national ratifications are completed with the utmost despatch.

Since our session last year, the Joint Committee has met on two occasions, once in Lesotho and once in Grenada, with results of great interest to the implementation of the Convention and to its future development. May I put on record here my great pleasure at the success of this dialogue; I feel sure that the conclusions set out in the reports by President Guillabert and Ambassadors Mathé will provide the basis for effective work by our Assembly.

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Mr President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now express our gratitude and appreciation to two eminent Africans who for several years played a leading role in our activities and are now relinquishing the Presidency of the Consultative Assembly and the Chairmanship of the Joint Committee.

In January 1969 at Tananarive, President Philippe Yacé took over from our late colleague, Mr Lamine Gueye, the Presidency of the Parliamentary Conference of the Association provided for in the Yaoundé Convention. Mr Yacé, we all know the importance of the role played by you in the past ten years as Co-President of the Parliamentary institution; we all hold you in very high esteem. This is confirmed by your appointment to successive terms as President of our Assembly, an office to which you were first elected in November 1975. May we once again pay tribute to your political sensitivity and skill, to your wisdom and eminent capability.

I can assure you that our cooperation has for me been a precious experience from which I have derived great personal enrichment. I am convinced that in future your action will be crowned with fresh successes and that in the service of your country, the Ivory Coast, you will continue to place your great gifts at the disposal of our joint commitment to the rapprochement of our peoples in peace and prosperity.

After holding the Chairmanship of the Joint Committee for several years, President Kasongo is also now taking leave of us. I am sure that I shall be speaking for all of you in paying tribute to his great political sensitivity and to his work as a wise mediator.

The difficult compromises at which the Joint Committee was always able to arrive after meetings which were often laborious and protracted into the late hours, were largely attributable to the effective and discreet activities of our colleague, Mr Kasongo.

President Kasongo, on behalf of all of us, I wish to express to you our sincere and heartfelt thanks for all your work over the years.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the example set for us by these two illustrious colleagues confirms our conviction that personal commitment and dedication to the cause of the rapprochement of our peoples are essential factors in the development of our cooperation policy. I am quite sure that we can count on the new Co-President of our Assembly, Mr Muna, to whom I wish to convey our warmest congratulations on behalf of the whole Assembly.

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He has already played an active part in our work for several years with real dedication and commitment.

President Muna represents a country which, for historical and geographical reasons, acts as a bridgehead between peoples and nations with different traditions and cultures. Under his authoritative guidance, the work which we have begun will be able to progress and develop further.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is only if our political judgement at all times reflects the trust placed in us by our respective peoples that we shall be able to continue to build a successful future.

Our common commitment will be crowned with success if we keep our trust in our ideals of free coexistence in peace and progress.