

European BACKGROUND INFORMATION Community

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICE

2100 M Street NW, Washington DC 20037 Telephone (202) 872-8350

New York Office: 277 Park Avenue, New York NY 10017 Telephone (212) 371-3804

BACKGROUND NOTE

No. 8/1975

March 3, 1975

ORTOLI CALLS ACP TREATY MAJOR TURNING POINT

Washington, D.C. -- Following is the text of the speech as prepared for delivery by Commission President Francois-Xavier Ortoli, on the occasion of the signing of the Lome Convention, in Lome, Togo, February 28.

"The moment has come for us to sign, and thereby seal, the Lome Convention, the culmination of more than 20 months of long and difficult negotiations between the governments of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Countries on one side and the European Community on the other.

First of all, as is, I think, only right and proper, I should like to acclaim the work and talent of the negotiators from our various countries. The tribute the Commission pays them is of the same order as the exceptional results which have been obtained.

Over and above the optimism and congratulations that are usual in such circumstances, all of us, I believe, feel that the event we are participating in today is a major turning point in the history of international economic relations in the second half of the twentieth century, indeed in history as a whole.

1. The very fact that it has been possible to conclude an international agreement between nearly 50 developing countries and the nine European countries making up the Community is a unique phenomenon.

It is all the more remarkable in that the new convention has not been negotiated between countries in isolation but between organized groups of states.

Developing countries from a whole region -- several regions in fact -- acting together, and with a single spokesman, were able to bring long and difficult bargaining to a successful conclusion. In spite of the diversity of situations in the various states, you were perfectly united to the end. This present day reality which will continue in the future must be welcomed as a factor of major importance.

Thus, we have proof--and this is one of the most important lessons to be learned from the Lome Convention -- that regional groups of countries make for more effective, better balanced, and fairer international collaboration than any which could be established by states acting singly, whose right to equality is often difficult to translate into fact.

What is more, and this should be emphasized too, the progress made under these conditions has not led to the formation of inward-looking blocs, for the negotiations which we are concluding today have in no way caused the ACP countries to cut themselves off from other developing countries.

These negotiations have also made it possible to win acceptance, in a particularly effective manner, for fresh ideas whose beneficial effect will, we hope, gradually permeate all relations between industrialized and developing countries.

For Europe too, the negotiations were marked by cohesion and by forging links of partnership with the peoples of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The Community, as a whole, has itself been able to undertake an overall policy which should make an effective contribution to the development of non-industrialized countries.

For it is clear that the European Community does not regard the Lome Convention simply as an instrument of development for ACP states alone, it is also a fundamental component of cooperation with all developing countries.

At the very moment when Europe is being cruelly hit by the crisis, and the basis for its economic expansion and prosperity is being called into question, such an attitude -- and in particular, the financial effort which it requires -- shows convincingly how far the Lome Convention is based on an act of deliberate political will and a profound and lasting commitment by the Community.

2. Quite apart from the special circumstances in which the convention was negotiated, its originality and its importance lie also, and perhaps above all, in its content.

Never -- and I am not exaggerating here, but merely describing facts -- have relations between industrialized countries and developing countries been defined by an agreement which is complete and which aims to provide a comprehensive response to so many problems of such complexity. Witness the provisions on financial aid, on access to markets, or on the stabilization export earnings. Witness, with regard to sugar, the reciprocal undertakings on such matters as delivery guarantees and minimum price guarantees linked to the prices offered to community producers. Witness also the organization of systematic cooperation for industrialization of the developing countries. Witness, lastly, a vehicle for regular meetings and contacts -- not only at the level of the governments and the representatives of the people, but also between trade unions and industrialists. The Lome Convention, which brings together this whole arsenal of resources and provisions, represents in the field of international cooperation the most comprehensive and thoroughgoing attack yet made on poverty and underdevelopment.

Of course, any thought of bringing the dialogue on relations between developed and developing countries to an end with today's treaty is impossible, but we can pride ourselves on having managed to secure a very wide range of instruments of cooperation. Some have proved their worth, for the convention we are about to sign should be based partly on the experience of previous agreements concluded between the Community and a number of African states. But others are entirely new and take into account the needs born of the international economic developments of the past few years and the choices clearly expressed by the developing countries.

Though financial aid is still a necessary event fundamental for a number of particularly needy countries -- it cannot remain the only method of development cooperation.

This is why we wished to open the European market to products from the ACP states and give them access to our technology and knowhow as part of intensive industrial cooperation.

This is also why we have established a mechanism for stabilizing export earnings which involves the principle of compensating states that are victims of the hazards and confusion reigning on the raw materials markets.

This is an immensely important innovation because it demonstrates a concern to provide an immediate practical response to a real and important problem.

Such innovations at any rate highlight, in deeds as well as in words, Europe's sincere desire to contribute towards establishing a new type of relations on a basis of equality and having regard for the independence and individual identities of the partners. In so doing, these innovations undeniably demonstrate -- and this perhaps is the most important thing -- Europe's wish to establish with the developing countries long-term links of economic interdependence which would be a better guarantee of progress and complementary action than any treaty.

This choice, this basic, deliberate, conscious opting for solidarity will, I am sure, have a considerable impact on the world. The redefining of relations between rich and poor countries, between producers and consumers of raw materials, between industrialized economies and primary producer economies, is the vital issue of our time. The conclusion of the Lome Convention proves that it is possible -- Because we have had, on both sides, the will, the imagination, and I would say the courage to make it possible -- to bring about the difficult birth of a new world order through cooperation, not confrontation. From this point of view, today's agreement serves as an example, at a time when in many international forums the strategy of confrontation seems to be prevailing too often, the Lome Convention combines the long-term preoccupations and objectives common to all the peoples of our planet into a single vision of their future: that of a community of civilization as much as of interests.

But the Lome Convention countries have not only opted for a strategy based on cooperation and refusing confrontation, they have settled another fundamental question concerning the future of relations between the developing and the industrialized countries, a problem which sets the theorists and dogmatists against those who believe in real progress demonstrated by facts. And I think they have settled this great question very sensibly by choosing the path of practical, tangible achievements within an overall approach: financial aid which some may still find too limited but which is in fact very important, and machinery for stabilizing the export earnings, which though probably not perfect is certainly an appreciable step forward.

Mr. President, may the spirit of friendship and the ideal of Justice which have brought us together here in Lome today inspire relations between industrialized and developing countries more and more profoundly and thus make the new convention as decisive landmark in the history of the Community of mankind."