

Overseas countries and territories

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When the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) was being drawn up, the negotiators debated the extent to which the colonies should be associated with the future Community. The geopolitical concept of Eurafrica, a term used since the inter-war period, once again became the subject of considerable interest. It was necessary to bind Africa to Western Europe in order to curb separatist tendencies and the spread of Communism. The Six therefore wondered how they might best reconcile a customs union, which had its own Common External Tariff (CET), with historical preferential links between European countries and their overseas territories. At all events, France refused to open up its African markets to its partners and continued to bear single-handedly the financial cost of the development of those markets. Fighting a full-scale war in Algeria, France sought to compensate for the weakening of political ties by strengthening economic relations between Europe and Africa. The French National Assembly made the EEC-OCT association and the Eurafrican common market into an essential precondition for ratification of the Treaty. Apart from Belgium, which had extensive colonies in Central Africa, France's partners feared becoming embroiled in a neo-colonial type policy, something which was severely condemned by the United Nations. The French demand was at the root of many lively diplomatic discussions.

Eventually, the Treaty of Rome, signed on 25 March 1957, provided for both the commercial and financial association of French, Belgian, Italian and Netherlands overseas territories with the EEC for a trial period of five years. A free-trade area was established between the Six and the associated countries. As a result, African tropical products found new outlets in Europe, and the Six were able to sell their industrial products in Africa more easily. On the financial level, the Treaty established a European Development Fund (EDF) funded by European national contributions in order to meet the cost of economic and social infrastructure investment.

Once the five-year trial period had elapsed, the Convention on the Association of OCTs was renewed between the Six and the eighteen associated African States and Madagascar (AASM). The new Convention on the Association of OCTs, similarly valid for five years, was signed in Yaounde on 20 July 1963. It entered into force on 1 June 1964. The Soviet Union soon accused Europeans of wanting to enslave Africa. As a means of securing decolonisation, the Communist model established itself in a few new African countries as an alternative to liberal democracies.