

'Is Africa running away from the EEC?' from Die Welt (2 June 1960)

Caption: On 2 June 1960, the German daily newspaper Die Welt considers how to adapt cooperation between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the African countries, given that growing numbers of them are gaining independence.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung für Deutschland. Herausgeber Zehrer, Hans. 02.06.1960, Nr. 128. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Läuft Afrika der EWG davon?", auteur:Himpele, Ferdinand , p. 10.

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Is Africa running away from the EEC?

By Ferdinand Himpele, Brussels

‘The Committee held a lengthy exchange of views with the EEC representatives on the development of relations between the European Economic Community and the overseas territories that have become independent or are soon to receive their independence. The Committee will examine this matter again at a meeting to be held in the very near future.’ This is the wording of an official communiqué on discussions between the Strasbourg-based Parliamentary Committee on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories and representatives of the EEC Commission. This formulation does not reveal the serious nature of the situation, in which relations between the African States and the EEC have become increasingly problematical from one month to the next. Is Africa running away from the EEC?

When the Treaty of Rome was drafted, the fact that Europe would be faced by independent States in Africa within only a few years could scarcely have been anticipated. ‘The Member States agree’, as the Treaty says, ‘to associate with the Community the non-European countries and territories which have special relations with Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands.’ When the Treaty entered into force, this applied to 24 countries with about 53 million inhabitants.

But the political scene in Africa is changing fast. For this reason, the EEC Treaty could not have taken account of the fact that, on gaining independence, these countries would be able to take an entirely free and sovereign decision on their association with the Common Market. At the present time, only Cameroon is known to favour the maintenance of its associated status. Negotiations with Tunis have been taking place for more than a year, with no results to show. What the Belgian Congo, Madagascar, Togo and Somaliland will do is still an open question.

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The Commission of the EEC has issued three declarations of intent with regard to association; these were made to the Kingdom of Libya, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles, with which association talks are to be initiated. These talks, however, are sure to be very lengthy. That is easily foreseeable, because the politics of oil will have a major role to play. Antilles oil would be in competition with French Saharan oil in the Common Market. And so the Commission’s declarations of intent have yet to produce a single association agreement. On the other hand, Guinea is the only State that has actually terminated an existing association with the EEC.

The EEC Treaty provides certain benefits for the associated territories. One of these is the European Development Fund with an endowment of 581 million dollars, to be invested in the associated territories by 1962; another is increasingly open access to the Common Market by means of the gradual reduction of customs tariffs and the introduction of higher import quotas. Newly independent countries which are no longer represented in the EEC by their former mother country are now enjoying these benefits illegally, so to speak, because grants from the Fund were originally made dependent on associated status.

The authors of the EEC Treaty could scarcely have envisaged any alternative back in 1957. The Implementing Convention of 25 March 1957 on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the Community was not signed by a single African statesman, since African statesmen as we know them today simply did not exist at that time. Consequently, say the legal experts, grants from the Fund can be awarded only if the African country continues to be represented in the EEC by the mother country.

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This creates a farcical and politically dangerous situation. It is farcical because the letter of the Treaty says that the resources in the Fund can no longer be granted to those for whom they are primarily intended; it is politically dangerous because such a solution could all too easily give rise to accusations of neo-colonialist behaviour. In a word, the provisions of the EEC Treaty are already outdated in this respect.

The situation described above between Brussels and Africa can hardly be considered normal. Our relations have gone adrift in a rudderless boat. The warm and friendly words that are occasionally exchanged between the two sides should not blind us to this harsh reality. And then there is the problem of aid from the Fund. When I said that 581 million dollars was to be invested in the associated territories by 1962, these words were chosen because the distribution of the funds cannot easily stand up to critical examination.

Dr Allardt, the German Director-General for the Overseas Countries and Territories at the Commission of the EEC, delivered a lecture in which he expressed the problem in the following fairly cautious terms: 'Our somewhat surprising appearance in Africa had adverse repercussions on the quality of the projects, and so it cast a degree of doubt on the whole purpose of the Fund. The Fund is surely not an aid mechanism for European exporters; on the other hand, it should be allocated in a way that will beat the drum for Afro-European cooperation. If, however, dozens of small projects are financed without a master plan having been carefully devised beforehand and without any linkage between the projects, there is a risk that the money will trickle away and that no one will ultimately benefit from it'.

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The level of planning by the African countries undoubtedly leaves a lot to be desired, too. However, the absence of a coordinated approach, which Dr Allardt himself criticised, is compounded by the bureaucratic inertia of the Fund apparatus. For a medium-scale project, for example, the administrative processing of the application alone takes up to six months. Only then does the EEC turn it into a real project; thereafter, it is appraised by the EEC Commission, and it then has to go to the EEC Council of Ministers for approval; after this, a financing agreement is drawn up, following which the six Member States must agree on a technical controller, a process which, apparently, does not always run smoothly; the next step is the conclusion of a contract with the controller; there follows the signing with the mother country, and only then can the controller begin his work. The call for tenders is issued, and the bids are examined; in short, months have elapsed by now. It normally takes more than a year before the actual implementation of the project gets under way.

The last financial statement from the EEC on the disbursement of the Fund up to 30 April 1960 draws the following picture: of the amount of 581 million dollars which was available for use by the end of 1962, the princely sum of 61.3 million dollars had been earmarked for specific projects. Of this amount, 43.5 million dollars had been allocated to former or existing French overseas territories, their Netherlands counterparts had received about 7.4 million, the Belgian territories about 8.4 million, and the Italian approximately two million.

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So there are, unfortunately, very good reasons for asking whether Africa will run away from Europe. We have still had no news of successful negotiations between the EEC Commission and the newly independent African States. But is it not high time we did? Or, one is compelled to ask, is it part of the policy of the Debré Government in France to curb the advance of the supranational EEC into these territories and to make the Fund its sole means of involvement in Africa? Is it at all tenable to go on making association status dependent on compulsory intervention of the so-called mother country?

It is time for the EEC to develop a European rearguard position. The overseas countries and territories were initially drawn into the sphere of the Common Market at the express wish of France. The new French Constitution has created a *Communauté Française*, which has been described as a halfway house on the way to a Commonwealth. In the view of Walter Scheel, a Member of the German Bundestag who also serves in the Strasbourg Parliament as Chairman of the Committee on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories, it is the wish of the French Government to consolidate this constitutional structure first of all before any excessively close contact develops between the overseas countries and the European Economic Community. Not until the *Communauté Française* is firmly established, he believes, can direct contact between the overseas countries and France's EEC partners be further encouraged.

It seems to us, however, that this delay could be dangerous for Europe and hence for the West in its entirety. The Six are confronted with the need to take a political decision here, a decision which they, as a European *Communauté*, should not put off any longer.