'The Economic Community grants broad duty-free status to 46 developing countries' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (3 February 1975)

Caption: On 3 February 1975, German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung comments on how the new trade relations will work between the nine Member States of the European Economic Community (EEC) and 46 African, Carribean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 03.02.1975, Nr. 28. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Die Europäische Gemeinschaft gewährt 46 Entwicklungsländern weitgehende Zollfreiheit", p. 1; 2.

The European Community grants broad duty-free status to 46 developing countries

New Convention wrapped up / Great satisfaction in Brussels / Signing in Lomé

Gz. Brussels, 2 February. After what was unanimously termed a 'very difficult' marathon session, which lasted 24 hours without a break and was not concluded until about 10 o'clock on Saturday morning, the nine EEC States and the nine Ministers representing 46 developing countries reached agreement on all the details of the planned cooperation agreement. In a subsequent session, agreement was also reached, to everyone's surprise, by Great Britain, the European Commission and the sugar-producing developing countries on the politically decisive questions of the Sugar Protocol, which will be part of this Convention, and on the price of sugar. The Convention grants the developing countries duty-free access to the EEC market for most export goods and provides for a new fund to stabilise export revenue.

Agreement will be reached among the participants on some issues that are no longer politically sensitive, above all on the amounts of sugar to be supplied, by 11 February, because, on that day, the developing countries intend to give their formal approval to the outcome of the Brussels Conference at a meeting in Accra, the capital of Ghana; on 28 February, the Convention is to be signed in Lomé, the capital of Togo. Following ratification, which will probably drag on for a year, the Convention will come into force retrospectively from 28 February 1975 — a final, and financially significant, concession by the Europeans. The Convention will come into effect as soon as the nine EEC States and two thirds of the developing countries have concluded the ratification procedures.

The new, comprehensive Convention will be named the 'Lomé Convention between the EEC and the ACP' (ACP = African, Caribbean and Pacific States). It replaces the Treaties of Association between the EEC and a total of 22 predominantly French-speaking countries of the British Commonwealth, especially in Africa, which expired on 31 January 1975; now the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique are also partners in the Convention; in addition, independent countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia and even Guinea are among the signatories. The Convention is to run for a term of five years.

Although the final hours of the conference were somewhat disagreeable and some participants were left feeling demoralised, the spokesmen for the two groups, the Irish Foreign Minister, Garret FitzGerald and the Economic Affairs Minister of Senegal, Babacar Ba, praised the new Convention. Babacar Ba pointed out that the new Convention included elements of continuity but, at the same time, added new elements. The European Community had largely taken account of the requirements of the developing countries. The new type of agreement could therefore be termed revolutionary, because it brought about new types of relationship. The delegation from the developing countries that had negotiated this Convention would recommend its approval at the Conference of Accra, and it was not anticipated that any new negotiations would take place. The Minister of State in the Foreign Ministry, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, designated the Convention as the most important agreement to be concluded by the European Community since it had been founded. The solidarity of the 46 developing countries had survived, even if it had been 'a little creaky at times'.

Mr Wischnewski said that the Convention had demonstrated the Community's ability to take action in a difficult period, and the developing countries had demonstrated their confidence in the Community. The compromise could be very well justified; the final, difficult hours of the negotiations had definitely resulted in greater benefit for the developing countries, although no greater volume of financial advantage.

In the negotiations on the proposed stabilisation fund, the Community had maintained its fundamental position, even though there had been an eleventh-hour concession, which was the inclusion of iron in the relevant list of products, described by Mr Wischnewski as a blunder and a negotiating error; the developing countries had demanded a counter-concession, particularly in view of French insistence that not only Jamaica, but also the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe should be granted some relief in respect of their rum exports. The negotiations on rum, which lasted for hours, caused very bitter feelings among some delegates, and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Gaston Thorn, who took part in the meetings, declared that he would never drink another glass of rum for as long as he lived.

The new Development Fund for the benefit of around 270 million people (80 % of whom live in Africa), set up by the European Investment Bank, will make available sums amounting to about 12 000 million marks, part of this as non-refundable subsidies, part as repayable transfers, and part as loans. This fund, which is three and a half times the size of the previous Fund, includes a good 1 300 million marks (375 million expressed as special drawing rights) for the new fund to stabilise export revenue. The developing countries receive duty-free access for the majority of their export products to the European market; this also applies to 84 % of their agricultural products. In addition to this, agricultural exports also includes sugar supplies, which make up another 12 % of the agricultural exports of all these countries. The Community is introducing a generous system of what are known as certified-origin products, which is supposed to benefit the development of regional economies but, at the same time, prevent the developing countries from becoming a springboard for export offensives by other industrialised nations. In addition to the institutions that already existed (Association Council, Association Committee), a new committee will be set up to deal with industrial cooperation issues.