

Note from the French Delegation on the issue of the association of the overseas countries and territories (15 February 1957)

Caption: During the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and on Euratom, the French Delegation reviews the issue of the economic association of the overseas countries and territories with the future European Economic Community (EEC).

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Opening the door to the Overseas Countries

1. A few general remarks would be helpful so that we may understand the positions, in particular those of our partners, in the negotiations now under way. It should be noted that they are not seeking Common Market membership for the Overseas Countries. They are willing to allow France to continue occupying its privileged position. At no time did they press us to provide access for their markets, capital and men to the African countries with which we have ties. The United Kingdom has said that its Overseas Countries would remain outside the free-trade area.

2. Our partners would be willing to include the Overseas Countries in the Common Market, but under the same conditions as metropolitan France. They would also be willing to accept the type of association that we are proposing, even though it may enable the Overseas Countries to protect themselves from them.

3. However, our partners hesitate or reject participation in public investment. The Germans are the most cooperative, but they are not willing to go very far to meet our demands. In order to devise the best possible settlement, we must first realise that our position is weak and that we have to adjust our arguments accordingly. There are three possible justifications for our requests:

- (a) a beneficial market would be available to everybody, including our partners;
- (b) their entry would be a condition for our membership of the Common Market;
- (c) it would be a political act affirming Western Europe's solidarity with under-developed Africa.

4. Our partners do not consider the Common Market to be so beneficial. As things now stand, they have as many markets as they could want and can sell their goods in the under-developed countries without ever making non-recoverable payments. We, on the other hand, ask them for large sums of money so that they may increase their sales, although such sales are unlikely to be substantial.

5. They have never thought that Common Market membership entailed a sharing of the financial burdens. The Member States remain distinct and maintain their individual responsibilities. The Italians pay the cost of southern Italy's unemployment and development, while the Germans pay the cost of their refugees and Berlin. They believe that they have already met a number of substantial demands put forward by France in a wide range of areas, such as the introduction of a specific regime, harmonisation, a safeguard clause, agriculture, etc., and this could turn out to be the negotiations' snapping point.

6. A political gesture is the only possible basis for an agreement. That would involve a limited contribution at the start but might increase as and when the following happens:

- when our partners learn more about the African problem, of which they are virtually entirely unaware;
- when the pacification of North Africa has been consolidated and when Black Africa is genuinely on its way to greater autonomy, now that it has been accorded;
- when indications about the existence of considerable mineral resources have been confirmed;
- when the need to keep Africa in Europe's sphere of influence becomes more evident.