

Introduction

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URL: <http://www.cvce.eu/obj/introduction-en-bb986316-4902-4949-af0a-cce2958c18e1.html>

Last updated: 01/03/2017



Introduction

The Second World War dealt a serious blow to the colonial powers, depriving them of their former prestige. The Netherlands, Belgium and France had been defeated and occupied, while the United Kingdom was seriously depleted. The peoples under colonial rule, often employed to fill the ranks of Allied armies in wartime, were determined to break the ties that still bound them to Europe, now ruined and stripped of its resources.

Furthermore, the emergence of two anti-colonialist superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and the new international climate after 1945 encouraged the colonies to make a bid for independence. The Charter of the United Nations affirmed its 'respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'. The US President, Franklin Roosevelt, and the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had already subscribed to this principle in the Atlantic Charter, which they signed on 14 August 1941 on the American cruiser *Augusta*, off Newfoundland. In item 3 of this declaration the two Heads of State set out the following principle: 'They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.'

Aware of the new favourable international context in which they found themselves, colonised peoples began their fight for independence. For some, this colonial liberation would take place through negotiation; for others, it would occur by force.

Decolonisation unfolded in two phases. The first lasted from 1945 to 1955, mainly affecting countries in the Near and Middle East, and South-East Asia. The second phase started in 1955 and mainly concerned North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. In 1955, the Bandung Conference, which assembled 29 delegates from African and Asian countries for the first time, heralded the process of decolonisation in Africa and the emergence of Third-World countries on the international stage.

It was in this context that the fledgling European Community was forced to reflect on its future relations with the European colonies. The colonial powers wanted to find a way of linking their colonies with the nascent Community while also safeguarding their historic links with their empires. In May 1956 in Venice, in the latter stages of the negotiations that would lead to the Rome Treaties, France surprised its partners by demanding the association of its overseas territories with the future European Economic Community (EEC). But France's partners, with the exception of Belgium, feared that they would be committing themselves to a neo-colonialist-style policy harshly condemned by the United Nations. Only after lengthy diplomatic discussions did the Six manage to reach an agreement based on France's geopolitical vision of Eurafrika. The Rome Treaties of 25 March 1957 therefore provided, for a trial period of five years, for the EEC's association with the overseas countries and territories (OCTs) linked with France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. These four states opened their overseas markets to all the EEC Member States, and in return all the Member States helped to fund infrastructure improvements in these overseas territories. More specifically, a free-trade area was established between the Six and each of the associated countries, and a European Overseas Development Fund (FEDOM), the predecessor to the European Development Fund (EDF), was set up, financed by national contributions from European countries to fund economic and social infrastructure investments.

From 1960 onwards, as the OCTs gained independence, this association policy took on a more contractual nature. The first Yaoundé Convention, signed in 1963, enshrined the initial cooperation between the EEC and 18 Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM).

At the Paris Summit in October 1972, the EEC Member States affirmed their willingness to step up their assistance and cooperation with the most deprived people in developing countries. But their views differed: while France, Belgium and Italy were in favour of a regionalist approach with a strong focus on the African continent, the Dutch and the Germans, soon followed by the British, adopted a more globalist stance and advocated granting material or trade-related assistance to all developing countries.

The United Kingdom's accession to the Common Market in 1973 brought 20 Commonwealth countries into the association with the EEC. In 1975, the first Lomé Convention established a partnership between the EEC and 46 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States.