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The European Community and the Third World

by Dr Erhard Eppler, Bonn *

For quite some time, and with increasing commitment, people in the member states of the European Community have been discussing the question which role the Community should play in future as regards the developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. From numerous quarters, the view is being voiced with mounting urgency that Europe should contribute more intensively towards solving the manifold problems of the Third World.

In its Memorandum of July 27, 1971, and the supplementary document of February 2, 1972, the Commission of the European Community has gone some way forward in response to this call by submitting the Community's concept for a joint policy of cooperation with the developing countries. The issues raised in the documents were taken up in turn by the Council of Ministers in Brussels on September 26, 1972, and at the summit meeting of European Heads of Government in Paris in October 1972 they played a more important role than was realised by public opinion at the time.

There is no doubt, therefore: a joint European development policy is definitely on the agenda of political discussion in Europe. With the extension of the Common Market by the entry of Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland, the issue has become even more urgent. One reason is that on January 1, 1973, the European Community has come to be the most important trade bloc; another, that, as a result of Great Britain's entry in particular, developing countries belonging to the Commonwealth will necessarily claim the attention of European policy more than in the past.

Sicco Mansholt, the former President of the European Commission, declared on April 17, 1972, before the Plenary Session of the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, with regard to the future role of the European Community in the Third World: "Can we rely upon the simple assumption that such a strong market will be automatically beneficial to developing countries? There are reasons for doubt." It will be the task of the European Community and

its member states in the years ahead to remove these doubts in a joint and patient effort. What are the main obstacles for an effective European development policy?

Outward-looking Europe

The charge has often been made that the European Community tends to be "inwardlooking" and that it devotes its efforts solely to its own expansion and inner consolidation and that, in doing so, it fails to consider whether and how this expansion and consolidation will benefit or hurt third countries, and here, in particular, the countries of the Third World. This charge which was rather popular in many developing countries and can still be heard today has been put in even stronger terms: the European Community has sometimes been described as an "exclusive club of rich people intent only on securing and increasing their affluence".

Indeed, it cannot be denied that in its initial years, the Community was far too much preoccupied with itself and its own progress to bother about what it could do to help overcome underdevelopment in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It must be admitted that this attitude had detrimental effects for more than one developing country. But now care must be taken to keep "inwardlooking" attitude, understandable enough in the initial period, from becoming a permanent principle of the European Community. More than in the past, Europe will have to look beyond its borders.

At the Paris Summit Meeting in October 1972, the European Heads of Government have unequivocally affirmed the responsibilities which the Community will in future have to bear in international affairs owing to its sheer weight. These responsibilities include the further expansion of the

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partnership with the United States and the other industrialised countries outside the Community. They include, furthermore, the cooperation with the countries in Eastern Europe, and, last but not least, the assistance to be given to the countries of the Third World in building up viable structures. This field will in future be among the most important ones. But just talking about this is not enough. Sicco Mansholt has emphasised this point in his speech quoted above before the Plenary Assembly of UNCTAD III: "We have to make sure that our contribution does not merely remain an abstract confrontation of ideas but that these ideas will be eventually translated into political decisions."

Worldwide European Development Policy

On our way towards a more effective European development policy it must be one of the first decisions to get away from its being confined to certain regions. We have to work out a broader and more universal concept which takes into account the responsibilities of the Community towards the Third World as a whole and not only towards individual countries.

Up to now, European development policy has been concerned with certain regions, that is, with the association relationships, existing or envisaged, between the EEC and French-speaking countries in Africa and Madagascar and with some Mediterranean countries. In future, the Community will no longer be able to restrict its activities to just these areas. This new orientation has become even more urgent by the entry of Great Britain into the Community. Due to its historical background, Great Britain maintains special relations to a large number of developing countries in Africa and especially in Asia. If we now grant them, too, certain advantages, do we then have the right to penalise those countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which have not known the "privilege" of having once been colonial lands of France and Great Britain? The reorientation of European development policy towards a worldwide outlook cannot be held up. In France, fresh thought is being given, on the basis of the Gorse Report, to the practical aspects and the criteria of the development policy pursued up to now.

Therefore, in its Memorandum already mentioned, the European Commission starts from the assumption that in future the Community will have a worldwide concept for all developing countries. What this concept will look like in detail depends upon the talks, negotiations and decisions ahead of us. One thing, however, is certain, namely that the Community will direct its developmental

activities in the long run not only towards Africa, but also towards the developing countries in Asia and Latin America, irrespective of whether these countries have been colonies or not. Therefore, the Community's development policy, which in the past was predominantly regionally oriented, will gradually change into a worldwide system of development policy measures. This should be taken into account forthwith, for instance, whenever the Community concludes agreements involving development assistance.

It cannot be the meaning of the global reorientation that those countries in Africa and the Mediterranean area which for years had good and mutually fruitful relations with the Community should suffer from the new course development policy is going to take in the Community. What has to be done rather is to fit the cooperation of the Community with these countries harmoniously and permanently into the new worldwide concept of European development policy.

Possible fears of the United Nations and its Specialised Agencies that some sort of "Sub-UNO" might come into being in Brussels, considering itself competing with UN multilateral development aid, would seem unreasonable to me. However efficiently and universally conceived, any new development policy of the Community is bound to fail, unless it is planned and implemented as a supplementary and supporting measure to the activities of the United Nations.

Elimination of Sectoral Restrictions

Emancipating European development policy from its regional restrictions implies that also sectoral restrictions must be abandoned. These consisted in its being concentrated primarily on trade matters, especially the general preference system, and on food aid. This again is a kind of restriction which should no longer be maintained. Critics, among them even officials of the department "Development Assistance" in the European Commission, took the existence of such restrictions as a cause to say that really there was no Community policy in development matters up to date. If this term was to have any meaning, it would be necessary to extend and improve, in accordance with the UN Strategy for the Second Development Decade, those few instruments of development policy which existed until now. I share this criticism in principle although I am quite aware of the political and legal obstacles which up to now stood in the way of such an extension and will continue to do so for a considerable period of time.

In any case, the object of all efforts towards an effective development policy of the Community

must be to avoid restricting this policy to close cooperation in the fields of financial aid and technical assistance. Trade policy including the preferences should form part of that development policy just as well as industrial and agricultural policy. All these various types of assistance should be combined in a strategy of European development policy in such a way as to cover all aspects of basic importance for the countries of the Third World. In the light of this need, it will be of great importance for the Community to take a cooperative and open-minded attitude at the GATT negotiations planned for this year.

If for no other reason, the sectoral restrictions of European development policy can no longer be maintained, because they are no more in step with the changed idea the Community has of its role in the world. In his article for the European special edition of the London TIMES, which appeared on January 1, 1973, Chancellor Willy Brandt wrote: "This was the first time that the European Community so clearly stepped on the way to social union. Economic growth, important as it is, can no longer be the sole decisive criterion for the Community's development. What matters is that the quality of life should be improved for all citizens. . . . Those who have criticised the Community in the past because it seemed to be developing too much into a 'Europe of business' can now, on the basis of this new common orientation, help to ensure that the Community develops into a 'Europe of equal and better opportunities in life'." In other words, Europe is to give up its one-sided orientation to economic cooperation in favour of a broader orientation directed not only towards pursuing common economic interests, but also towards creating equal social conditions in the various regions of the Community, or jointly protecting the European population from environmental damages.

If these principles are adopted inside the Community, the evident consequence is that they must be applied also in its relations with third countries and especially with the developing countries. And this means, among other things, that the sectoral restrictions of development policy must be eliminated. If we failed to act accordingly, the charge of the Community being "the rich men's club" would receive new substance.

Need for Change in Concept and Organisation

If regional and sectoral restrictions are given up in favour of a worldwide and sectorally-extended concept of European development policy, the Community will be confronted with tasks beyond its capacity, given the present different national concepts of member states and the Community's

present organisational arrangements. Change and harmonisation are urgently called for. In the financial cooperation with the developing countries, for example, it will be necessary to avoid a proliferation of Community funds for regional financial assistance. On the contrary, the Community resources for financial assistance to developing countries should gradually be pooled. This pooling of funds should be supplemented by coordinating other development policy activities of the Community and its member countries. For example, there is nothing to keep us from starting right now with arranging routine talks for all in Brussels on assistance to the AASM, instead of member states having separate consultations with the Commission.

Also in the matter of development policy, the Community will in future have to agree in advance on a joint stand to be taken at major international conferences. Last year's UNCTAD Conference in Santiago de Chile has shown very clearly that seeing the several member countries of the Community take diverging and nationally independent attitudes does not at all fit into the picture the developing countries are forming of the Community. The same is true for what the developing countries expect from the Community. Better and more coordination in dealing with the international organisations would bring advantage for the Community as well as serve the interests of the developing countries. It is true, however, that this unified attitude cannot be achieved without previously harmonising the principles and criteria of the several national development policies.

In view of the fact that the Community is planning to achieve, step by step, closer cooperation in foreign policy and even to set up an economic and currency union by the end of the present decade, a European development policy, harmonised in its principles and improved in its organisation, should not remain mere wishful thinking but become a real aim of the Community.

There are many developing countries where hope has gone dwindling. Much of what is left of it is turned towards Europe. I believe that the European Community as a whole can be a better partner for the Third World than its individual members.

Therefore, it is our goal, even if it cannot be achieved in the present decade, to organise a joint policy of the Community which eventually will take the place of the national concepts. The road to this goal will certainly be no less arduous than those we are pursuing in other fields. I am sure that the Federal Republic of Germany will not be among the footsore marchers on this road.