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Integration — Expectations and Reality

Whenever and wherever international economic co-operation is being mentioned, such talk will always focus on "integration". Vague notions about improved relations employ this term as a magic formula which can be invoked at random in order to draw the world's attention to the conditions under which joint beneficial developments can arise. It is conceivable that some realists use this term only as a phrase making an agreeable noise sounding like a credo: proclaiming the belief in integration is then no more than an appeal to the good will of the partner in a dialogue, designed to convince him that both speaker and listener are committed to striving for the common good.

In Nairobi, too, "integration" was talked about, either in the papers presented by those who had formed a new front of solidarity with the "new order", or in the addresses of delegates who, for some reason, did not fully agree with certain trends and methods of this new order. Whilst some representatives of EC countries circumscribed the task to "integrate" LDCs in world trade, others — who were, likewise, ministers of EC governments — mused about ways and means for setting in motion again the trend towards integration within the Community. And then a shifting of the scene to Puerto Rico, where the biggest among the "Big" had their own conclave about world trade and dropped into the debate many wise saws about "integration". But the "little" ones, who had been left outside, grew wroth that the big ones had operated under the pretence as if there was not even an integrated western Europe, or, worse, as

though the "Nine" of today and the "Twelve" of tomorrow did not even intend to integrate. Expectations and reality!

Integration as an aim worth striving for and to be expected is *one* thing, but the balance sheet of practising integration is of quite *different* nature. Outside Europe, too, there have been innumerable attempts at integration, of which hardly anybody talks any longer. It might be worthwhile to make a list of the many "Common Arab Markets" set up in the recent past but soon aborted. Also in Central and South America, integrating energies seemed to congeal into a firm profile and to promise a steady evolution. But there as well, actual progress had sobering, if not disappointing features.

Admittedly, some progress was made up to about 1970, but then almost everything got stuck in the old runs. This is true of MCCA — the Central American Common Market — and of ALALC — the Latin American Free Trade Zone. Silence has also spread about the "Alliance for Progress". There are several causes mentioned: the too distinctive nationalism combined with the steep economic differentials between big and smaller countries, whilst each country's own structure militates against integration — all this is said to deaden the striving towards integration. To be sure, nobody gives up, one postpones. Thus, under the Andean Pact, the timing for introducing the common third-party tariff has been delayed until 1982 or even 1987, and the timetable for reducing internal tariffs has been correspondingly slowed down.

To be sure, new integrating attempts are being launched — it seems as though the notion of integration never fails to make new expectations germinate. For example, there has been presented a new plan for a "Comunidad Económica y Social de Centroamérica CIESCA". Its programme looks reasonable.

More than just reasonable but eminently intelligent appeared also the form of the East African Community. But in this case, it seems only possible to keep the "community" in being by measures of desintegration, e.g. through re-nationalizing the railway network after, in other fields, having "disentangled" joint or common activities.

Maybe that integration attempts will be more successful in Western Africa than in Latin America but there also seems to be a lack of understanding what the true nature of integration could be. A short while ago, the Finance Minister of the Ivory Coast stated in Abidjan that it is necessary to complete the institutions of ECOWAS as quickly as possible and to staff them fully, in order to guarantee progress for the West African economy towards the world market orientation. From the point of view of the Ivory Coast, which is outward-looking, such a statement is understandable, but the Ivory Coast is a typical front runner compared with its neighbours in the African hinterland. And their expectations, in the long run, are probably aiming far more at regional and sub-regional developments which will yield them a profit. Integration begins at home and next door!

Günther Jantzen