EQUATORIAL CUSTOMS UNION - CAMEROON

Extract from Statement made on 24 February
by H.E. Mr. Georges Damas, Ambassador representing the
Republic of Gabon

At the time when Gabon and the other States formerly comprising French Equatorial Africa acceded to independence, after having since 1940 shared in common the same customs régime and customs tariff, their external trade was governed by the provisions of the Convention of St. Germain-en-Laye, signed on 10 September 1919 by the United States of America, Belgium, the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and Portugal, and which specified in particular that no differential treatment was to be applied to imported goods.

Since August 1960 Gabon and its neighbours - namely the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) and the Republic of Chad - have been masters of their commercial policy and, considering as lapsed the provisions of the Convention of St. Germain-en-Laye, they have adopted, in common with the Federal Republic of Cameroon:

- a Convention regulating the system of commercial exchanges between the five States, signed on 23 June 1961;

- a common external customs tariff, applicable since 1 July 1962;

- lastly, a Protocol of Agreement providing for the achievement of a common market and a customs union, in the GATT sense, between the five States, according to a time-table which calls for the examination by the Conference of the five Heads of State of a draft treaty before 15 December 1964.

The first two of these documents were distributed to the contracting parties in document L/2061 of 13 September 1963, together with a letter from the President of the Joint ECU-Cameroon Commission, stating that the notification was made pursuant to the provisions of Article XXIV:7(a) of the General Agreement. The text of the third document was communicated to the Executive Secretary following its adoption and signature by the five Heads of State at Fort-Lamy on 11 February last.
I wish to point out, so far as Gabon in particular is concerned, the entirely new situation resulting from the creation of the Equatorial Customs Union - Cameroon and from its membership of this customs union, which makes invalid, from the practical point of view, any reference to the situation existing prior to independence, and, to be perfectly clear, any reference to the concessions included in section B of Schedule XI. It should also be pointed out that this position can only be strengthened by the provisions of the agreement recently signed by the five Governments, for those provisions contain elements which in the very near future might speed up the process of economic integration in the area comprising, from north to south, Chad, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Gabon and the Congo (Brazzaville).

We are convinced that all the contracting parties will easily acknowledge that this position is not only a matter of common sense, but is determined by an irreversible process of evolution which obliges our governments to take account of our real development needs, over and above rules and mechanisms whose equity with respect to the under-developed countries is very much open to dispute.