

*Pour une coopération régionale,
inclusive et innovante
autour des défis communs
des îles de la Caraïbe*

14
MARS
2019

ADHÉSION DE LA GUADELOUPE À L'OECS

ORGANISATION DES ÉTATS DE LA CARAÏBE ORIENTALE
ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES*

DISCOURS DU PRÉSIDENT DE RÉGION ARY CHALUS

JEUDI 14 MARS 2019



Honourable Heads of Government,

Director General of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States,

Representative of the Prefect,

Deputies and Senators,

President of the collectivité of Saint-Martin,

President of the collectivité of Saint-Barthélemy,

Representative of the collectivité of French Guiana,

President of the Departmental Council of Guadeloupe,

Ambassadors,

Ambassador for cooperation in the West Indies-French Guiana region,

Mayors,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

Our Caribbean region is an outstanding area, with a cultural and natural richness that is often praised, even envied, yet still underestimated, given our tremendous potential!

We must make this potential and this promise a reality, for our youth, and for the fulfilment of our people.

It is a long-term project as there are many challenges.

Today, Guadeloupe joins the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

This is a major step forward!

One might ask, "Only now?" in terms of how long it has taken to consider institutional cooperation with our closest neighbours.

However, this should be self-evident, given how this idea is gaining ground and seems obvious, due to history – our history.

Because of our geography, both physical and human.

It has taken some time, but Guadeloupe has never tired in its advancement towards regional integration!

Cooperation, as we understand it today, between the islands of the Caribbean goes back to the post-war period, even before the independence of the English-speaking territories.

The OECS came into being on 18 June 1981, through the signature of the Treaty of Basseterre, the capital of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

For the French territories of the Americas, most of the integration has taken place through civil society, in the cultural and sports arenas, as well as economically.

This point is significant, since for many years our people have yearned to contribute to our common destiny!

Accordingly, in 1981, the various chambers of commerce organised the first “European-Caribbean Contacts” in Guadeloupe under the auspices of the Commission of the European Communities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State of the French overseas departments and territories.

The regional cooperation conference held in Cayenne in 1990, which brought together representatives of France and local authorities, led to the establishment of the FIC, an inter-ministerial fund for regional cooperation in the Caribbean and French Guiana, as well as the creation of a position as ministerial delegate for Caribbean cooperation.

Furthermore, this conference set the stage for a climax in the face-off between regional authorities and the government on the issue of authority over regional cooperation.

We were already in the era of decentralisation, but France still tended to “reserve” this authority for itself.

During this conference, Félix Proto, then president of the Région Guadeloupe notably made the distinction between the “decentralised cooperation” proposed by France and “identity cooperation” financed only with regional funds.

This distinction is interesting and once again highlights Guadeloupe’s desire to play an active part in the Caribbean region.

The mid-1990s marked a turning point in France’s regional cooperation policy in the Caribbean.

A further indication of the increasing desire to form an alliance amongst the French territories in the Americas was France’s accession to the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) on behalf of Guadeloupe, Guiana and Martinique.

In 2000, under the impetus of Ms. Lucette Michaux-Chevry, President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe, Mr. Alfred Marie-Jeanne, President of the Regional Council of Martinique, and Mr. Antoine Karam of the Regional Council of Guiana, Europe began to focus on its outermost regions,

particularly during negotiations with the ACP countries, and this led to the Cotonou Agreement of 23 June 2000.

These outermost regions would then benefit from the INTERREG III programme, since they represented the active frontier of the European Union in the Caribbean.

INTERREG Caribbean, in existence since 2000, is THE cooperation programme seeking to deepen ties between the European territories of the Americas (Guadeloupe, Guiana, Martinique and Saint-Martin) and over 40 Caribbean territories and nations.

From the outset, INTERREG Caribbean has been a partnership program, managed by the Région Guadeloupe **together** with its European partners:

Regional Authority of Guiana, Regional Authority of Martinique, Regional Authority of Saint-Martin, representatives of France and the European Commission,

and Caribbean represented by the following regional international organisations: Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, CARIFORUM, Association of Caribbean States, OCT Association of the Caribbean.

There is room for improvement, but it is nevertheless a powerful tool and a forum for regular exchanges between all the partners.

The programme contributes to the integration of the Caribbean region and, as such, responds to the wishes of our people.

We should note that in 2009, during the social crisis that struck Guadeloupe, Guiana and Martinique, among the demands of the LKP union (Alliance Against Profiteering) was a call for greater integration of Guadeloupe into the Caribbean!

Thus, following the overseas parliamentary assembly, a section was added to the Law of 7 July 2011 dealing with regional authorities of Martinique and Guiana, which authorised the French territories of the Americas not only to join the regional organisations of the basin in their own names but also to assign agents to diplomatic posts in the region.

Thus on 31 August 2012, the Région Guadeloupe, under the leadership of Ms. Josette Borel-Lincertin, became an associate member of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), a regional body of the United Nations, then an associate member of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) on 14 April 2014.

We have observed that the people of Guadeloupe have a strong desire to join together to face the challenges of development of our territories.

We must recall that Rémy Nainsouta, who represented Guadeloupe at the West Indies Conference in St. Thomas in 1946, called for the establishment of cooperation between the islands of the Americas.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Rémy Nainsouta, the former Mayor of Saint-Claude, where we find ourselves today.

We attribute to him our unshakeable faith in our local strength which will allow us to extricate ourselves from flawed development.

He understood that the development of Guadeloupe could only be built sustainably based on human and natural resources and within the geographic environment: the Caribbean.

In a word, he emphasised the fundamental paradox which all too often characterises our situations of economic dependence: great poverty in the midst of unlimited natural resources.

We must therefore definitively alleviate this deadly paradox!

Support development based on our strengths!

As we were also taught by Dany Bébél-Gisler, who worked throughout his life to gain recognition for Creole.

Our Creole language, a veritable rhizome, is lively and fertile, and connects many of our islands, heedless of physical or administrative boundaries of any sort.

Among others, Dany Bébél-Gisler taught us that the primary instrument of our emancipation is ourselves!

With you, Territories and Governments of the Caribbean, we share a united destiny; island economies, territories vulnerable to climate disruption and the need to face the same challenges in terms of energy supply.

Guadeloupe is resolved to contribute to the vision, shared by all of you here, whereby the green and blue economy is promoted in such a way as to make the Lesser Antilles region the world's reference for sustainable territories.

Its triple allegiance to the Caribbean, France and Europe must be approached pragmatically since, like Martinique and Saint-Martin, this offers Guadeloupe substantive development opportunities and enhances the contribution it seeks to make to the OECS.

Education, training, promotion of excellence of the health system, energy self-sufficiency, wise development of our rich natural heritage and biodiversity, capacity building of our territories to respond to environmental challenges...

The effective implementation of those structural projects must be based on decentralised, flexible and pragmatic cooperation.

Regional cooperation is not ancillary but is inextricably linked to public policy.

And it is even more natural that we share much more than a geographic proximity!

I agree with Patrick Chamoiseau when he rightly says that "Despite multilingualism, there is a clear cultural unity of the entire Caribbean. Between Derek Walcott and Édouard Glissant, one in English and the other in French, there is a unity of vision, a unity of perception, a complicity in the vision of the world and the examination of the human condition today."

That is what it is all about!

In this assertion, we find the primal essence of what we are!

Our authors demonstrate that once the surface layer of varnish has been scraped off, giving the illusion to the careless observer that we could be different, that we could be divided, our similarities bring us together...

Culture, Our culture, is not ancillary.

It our focal point, linking the genius peculiar to each of our territories and without which we would only be dust from worlds tossed by the winds.

Our populations are united by nature; mutual aid has always been at the heart of our societies and it is in this sense that we must think and act.

Guadeloupe shares a strong community of interests with the OECS Member States.

This ambition was legally backed by French domestic law through the General Local Authorities Code, which stipulates that "French regions of the Caribbean that so wish have the possibility of joining the regional organisations of their geographical area after having referred the case to the authorities of the Republic".

I thank the members of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe who, in the plenary assembly of 7 September 2018, voted unanimously the decision to authorise me to refer to the authorities of the French Republic for the negotiations related to the accession of Guadeloupe to the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as an associate member.

I also would like to thank Ambassador Philippe Ardanaz, French Ambassador to the OECS Member States, and Mr. Jean-Bernard Nilam, Ambassador to the regional cooperation in the West Indies-French Guiana region, for their determined and decisive action in bringing this accession process to a successful conclusion.

On 20 November 2018, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) gave its consent to the final draft agreement, authorising the accession of Guadeloupe to the OECS.

Our accession to the OECS aims primarily to strengthen our already strong link with the Member States of this organisation.

For example, since the first INTERREG programme, we were able to cause many structural projects to emerge.

OECS countries are our main partners in regional cooperation; 65% of INTERREG programme credits are devoted to cooperation with its Member States.

Twenty years later, we can agree that the results are satisfactory: for the 2000-06 period, the programme had a total budget of €24 million and financed 89 projects; for 2007-13, it had €63 million



for 60 projects; the current programme (2014-20) has been allocated €85 million. To date, 22 projects were funded for a programming level of 67%.

This accession will therefore aim to provide a political and strategic framework for cooperation that in many respects already exists and is operational on the ground.

But above all, our accession shows the unwavering commitment of Guadeloupeans to our Caribbean.

Divided we crumble, United we stand!

Thank for your consideration,

Thank you for having us with you.