



MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES
MINISTÈRE DE L'OUTRE-MER

FRENCH OVERSEAS MINISTRY
DELEGATION FOR REGIONAL CO-OPERATION
IN THE FRENCH WEST INDIES
AND FRENCH GUIANA AREA
FRENCH REPRESENTATION TO THE
ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES

Paris, 25 October 2005

THE AMBASSADOR

(Translated from the French)

**- SPEECH BY THE AMBASSADOR ON THE PRESENTATION OF HIS CREDENTIALS
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF CARICOM -**

Your Excellency ^{Mr} Secretary General
Deputy Secretary General
Members of the CARICOM Staff
Distinguished Guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

As you know, France's interest in the Caribbean goes back a long way. France is Caribbean in its history, its geography and at heart. A part of the Caribbean is French soil X so it is natural that France should have an interest in a region in which it is physically present. Our relations with the countries in the Caribbean Basin have been constant in recent years, with the number of French diplomatic representations holding steady (the French Embassy in Jamaica has reopened following its closure due to an accidental fire). However, France would now like to build closer co-operation links between the French Departments in the Americas (the FDAs of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana) and their neighbouring States. It is this policy that we call regional co-operation.

France, like the European Union, believes that although the FDAs (the Ultraperipheral Regions of the EU in the Caribbean) are involved in the process of European regional integration, they cannot remain in artificial and wholly disadvantageous isolation from their neighbouring countries. The aim to improve

their integration into their Caribbean geographic environment is behind the French Framework Law on Overseas Policy, which has created the Regional Co-operation Funds to this end. The European Commission's Interreg III B Caribbean Space Programme has the same goal.

In what is certainly a shortcoming, the French government and Caricom had not hitherto decided bilaterally to establish formal relations, as is the case with other EU countries such as Italy.

France, by virtue of the FDAs, has been an Associate Member of the Association of Caribbean States since its creation ten years ago.

Moreover, the European Commission is empowered to take up economic and trade matters (negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements) and aid management (funding from the EDF, to which France is the leading contributor) with Cariforum, which is its interface and of which all the Caricom States are members.

Caricom and France have now agreed to establish a direct formal relationship, which will give them a framework for dialogue, especially political, which is currently lacking. Both parties have a great deal to gain from this.

Given France's place and role on the international scene, it is easy to see how it is in Caricom's interest to create a specific framework for relations with France. This move to establish a closer relationship could be advantageous for Caricom, especially as regards co-operation, over and above the bilateral and regional aid that the Caricom member states already receive. Indeed, a framework agreement for co-operation is soon to be signed between the two parties.

France is currently involved in bilateral co-operation with the Caribbean countries even though, with four exceptions, they are not part of its Priority Solidarity Zone (PSZ). It would also like to further develop regional co-operation between the FDAs and their neighbouring countries. A Regional Co-operation Conference is held in a different FDA every year in order to define the guidelines for this co-operation. Moreover, the existence in the FDAs of such bodies as the modern university medical centres, the University of the French West Indies and French Guiana, the leading French research institutes and, in particular, of resources for natural disaster prevention and action and combating drugs all facilitate the building of interesting projects. Vocational training and maritime co-operation are slated to be added to the traditional areas of action (health, including combating AIDS, tropical agronomy, etc.). There are also plans to step up artistic and cultural exchanges. Caricom could be involved [as an active partner] in this regional co-operation in the future.

For France is convinced of the value of maintaining, in addition, closer relations with Caricom, within the Greater Caribbean. The direct approach (establishing official relations) and the Overseas Regions approach (participation in the activities of the Organisation's specialist groups and admission to Cariforum as an observer or associate member) are complementary and both hold the promise of helping to build this bridge.

Caricom is clearly the major regional organisation of the Caribbean Zone, the organisation with the responsibility to organise the Zone's integration. It boasts many years of first-rate managers assisted by skilled teams. The Organisation's continuity and sustainability are great assets and go a long way to explaining its successes and the remarkable results it has achieved for its members. Although France maintains diplomatic relations with each of the Caribbean States, their sheer number combined with the small number of our diplomatic representations does not make it easy in practice to sustain a dialogue between the French government and the governments of each State. And yet there is no shortage of issues, including difficult ones, to be discussed. France therefore has high hopes for this new window of opportunity that has opened up today and which should in no way replace or undermine the existing bilateral relations. Between a country such as France and the States comprising Caricom, we hope that this new communication channel we are inaugurating today will generate better mutual understanding, the possibility to improve information sharing and the means to communicate vital messages in good time. In other words, to be more attentive to one another for a better future relationship. Such is the wish I would like to make on behalf of my government, which has asked me to share this wish with you in a most solemn and resolutely optimistic manner. Our approach is intended to be fraternal and proactive. By the same token, we are counting on you to help France and Caricom become preferential partners capable of furthering exemplary interregional co-operation in the interests of our populations. We have a lot of work ahead of us on this road. I am pleased and proud to be the first Ambassador of the French Republic to embark on this road with you.

Patrick BOURSIN