

EU backs boers' trek to Mozambique

WMK 1-7/12/95

Despite resistance from many influential Mozambicans, the project to settle Afrikaner farmers in Mozambique appears to be gathering favour. **Marion Edmunds** reports

THE European Union (EU) has agreed to finance research into the viability of settling South African farmers in Mozambique and other African countries.

Funding for the research would come from EU funds earmarked for the Reconstruction and Development Programme and, depending on the outcome, could lead to further EU money being made available to settle Afrikaner farmers in South Africa's neighbouring states, according to EU ambassador Erwan Fouéré.

A letter has been written to Shaheed Rajie, the Director for International Funding in the RDP office, with this proposal.

The organisation wanting to dispatch farmers to African countries, the South African Chamber for Agricultural Development in Africa (Sacada), has interpreted the EU's gesture as a sign that the project — which is being championed by President Nelson Mandela — is receiving international recognition. Sacada secretary Willie Jordaan said this week that the EU had said the farming project was the best noise out of Africa in the past 30 years.

He said that Sacada had endeavoured to bring its policies into line with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and claimed that it was set to become an international development agency.

Jordaan said his organisation had

been approached by about 12 African countries interested in white South African farmers but, at the moment, was concentrating on Mozambique, Zambia, Zaïre and Angola, with Mozambique being the test case. Mandela's spokesperson Parks Mankahlana said this week Mandela has asked the Tanzanian government to accept Afrikaner farmers to help develop the agricultural sector.

Both Mankahlana and the Mozambican Embassy denied Mozambicans had opposed the settlement of Afrikaner farmers, as was reported on SABC radio this week. The Mozambican government could not be reached for comment yesterday. But a negotiator from Mozambique's agriculture ministry has been quoted on several occasions as saying Afrikaner farmers were neither needed nor wanted in large numbers. He said they would not want to be settled on land in communities and that, in certain provinces, like Maputo, they would not be welcome at all, and would never get freehold possession of the land.

According to Jordaan, about 1 000 people, disillusioned with the new South Africa, are poised to trek to Mozambique. One, Egbert Hiemstra, cites affirmative action, trade unions, new land legislation and drought in South Africa as reasons to invest and farm in neighbouring states.

Not that it's going to cost much hard cash to farm across the border. He



General Constand Viljoen: Convinced President Mandela of the benefits of the project

PHOTOGRAPH: HENNER FRANKENFELD

says Mozambique will lease land to the farmers at 60 cents per hectare per year, if not give it away for free. He said negotiations with President Mandela are under way to allow the farmers to have dual citizenship and continue to vote in South African elections.

Hiemstra already owns two farms in Lydenburg, and wants a third in Mozambique.

Although he has been to Mozambique to have a look around on behalf of Sacada, he has not yet chosen the spot he hopes will be his.

"It's like being a small child in a sweet shop," he said. "There are just so many beautiful, fertile places to choose from."

Hiemstra denies the project is a

throw-back to the past, a desperate attempt to create an Afrikaner *volksstaat* in a country too poor to resist.

"It's not an *apartheidspolitiesk* *oefie*," he said indignantly. For every two farmers who settle, Sacada has promised to train and establish one local black Mozambican as a commercial farmer. Anybody will be able to attend their schools, if they are prepared to respect Hiemstra's "community's standards" and anybody can come on the great trek, as long as they are strong, fit and enterprising. Two black South Africans have asked to be part of the project, said Hiemstra. When approached this week, Fouéré was cautiously optimistic about the project.

"The project could be successful in so far as it seeks to promote complementary progress in agriculture in the region and in so far as it makes the transfer of expertise possible and allows development where it is badly needed."

Fouéré has had discussions with General Constand Viljoen, who initiated the project, and has convinced Mandela of its benefits. Viljoen had argued to Mandela that settling Afrikaner farmers would stimulate the economies of neighbouring states and provide food and employment for locals, and that this would stem the flow of illegal immigrants into South Africa. But not all Mozambicans believe white South African farmers are the solution to their problems.

One analyst, who asked not to be named, said: "Mozambique needs capital, not white South African farmers."