

The fourth Lomé Convention was rushed to signature on 15 December, mainly through French pressure (AC Vol 30 No 23). This followed, and indeed formed part of, the usual last-minute haggling over the amount of money for the five-year aid package from the European Community (EC) to the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) states. For the first time, the Convention itself is to last ten years and will thus not need renewing until the year 2000.

The final amount agreed was 10,800 million European Currency Units (Ecu) for the European Development Fund and 1,200 mn. Ecu for the European Investment Bank. A figure of 12,000 mn. Ecu (US\$14,140 mn.) had been deemed just about enough to keep faith. The ACP group had in fact asked for 15,500 mn. Ecu. The European Commission itself had proposed 12,800 mn. Ecu but some member-states, including Britain, had pushed for a lower figure.

France, for which the Lomé relationship is part of maintaining its African sphere of influence, had a vested interest in seeing the agreement through during its six-month presidency of the EC Council of Ministers, which ended on 31 December. Paris also needs to appear as the Third World's best friend in the councils of the rich. So it devoted considerable efforts to bringing the EDF figure up to 10,700 mn. Ecu and then, when the ACP turned it down, topping up with a further 100 mn. Ecu in order to make the 12,000 mn. Ecu total.

This proved to be the goodwill gesture that persuaded the ACP to accept the package, just as a comparable Italian gesture had done the trick in 1984. West Germany - surprisingly, in that early on it had resisted raising the amount - produced 26 mn. Ecu. Italy found 13 mn. Ecu and France coughed up the remaining 61 mn. Ecu. French diplomats and their Francophone ACP allies exploited ACP fears that EC money might be directed to Eastern Europe unless an early signature could be won.

A certain sourness surrounded the end of the negotiations, in part because of French strong-arm tactics, even though there were several useful concessions in the final package, such as ending the soft-loan element in the EDF, which is now entirely grant; removing the obligation for richer ACP countries to repay advances on the export earnings stabilisation scheme (Stabex); and including gold and uranium in the convention's minerals system (Sysmin).

The signing date was also the subject of a complex diplomatic ballet. A confident Paris had scheduled 8 or 11 December, with airline seats booked and charter planes on standby. When the ACP finally agreed the package, they proposed 28 December. But not one French minister could be found who was willing to interrupt his holidays. Thus, after more heavy arm-twisting, 15 December was proposed, only four days in advance. Prime Minister Michel Rocard, no less, went to Togo as a guest-star sign of French commitment - even though he left later the same day on a pre-arranged trip to Israel.

For the record, the British national newspapers ignored the event, despite the fact that 2,400 mn. Ecu a year of Euro-taxpayers money is being poured into Lomé.