

**MATURE REGIONALISM: BROADENING AND DEEPENING OF
INTEGRATION IN THE ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN
STATES (OECS)**

BY

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PRIME MINISTER OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

**- Address delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the
Special Meeting of the Authority of the OECS for the Accession
of Guadeloupe to Associate Membership of the OECS**

**Office of the Prime Minister
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
March 14, 2019**

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[FORMAL GREETINGS!]

INTRODUCTION

The Revised Treaty of Basseterre establishing the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Economic Union was signed in 2010, replacing the original Treaty of 1981 upon which the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was founded. The accession of Guadeloupe, an overseas department of the Republic of France, to the status of an Associate Member of the OECS is in accord with the Revised Treaty, a status to which Martinique, part of the French overseas region, had earlier acceded. The other associate members of the OECS are the British overseas territories of Anguilla and the

British Virgin Islands. The full members of the OECS are six independent countries, namely, Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Christopher and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines plus the British overseas territory of Montserrat which was a full OECS member from the days of the original Treaty but Montserrat does not subscribe to the Protocol on the Economic Union which forms part of the Revised Treaty; Montserrat, too, is not a member of the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, an institution of the OECS. None of the Associate members of the OECS subscribes to the Protocol on the Economic Union and none holds membership of any, or all, of the institutions of the OECS, namely, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, and the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority. Similarly, the Associate members do not embrace juridically or functionally every aspect of the core Revised Treaty itself.

In short, the Revised Treaty provides enough flexibility or what may be called “the variable geometry of integration”, as the practical and/or constitutional circumstances admit, in the furtherance of

deepening and broadening regional integration of these small Eastern Caribbean island through, and in, the OECS.

The raw territorial, population, and economic data which emphasise the “Small Island Exceptionalism” of the full and Associate Members of the OECS tell the tale of the inducements which necessarily prompt regional cooperation or integration. Our geographical propinquity, shared history of European colonialism, and the reality of our Caribbeanness — the essence of our Caribbean civilization — all pre-dispose us to a closer union in the interest of our people’s humanisation.

It is useful to remind ourselves that the composite size of the OECS members — Full and Associate — on the bases of territory, population, and economy is as follows: Total land area 2,282 square mile; total population 1,446,225; and an aggregate Gross Domestic Product (nominal) of US \$25 billion. Each of the member states of the OECS rank at the high or very high category of the Human Development Index of the United Nations. Each is a functioning democracy with very high scores globally for political, civic, and

economic freedoms. Our region is located in a Zone of Peace for which the Caribbean is acknowledged internationally.

In the Eastern Caribbean, the OECS member-states, Full and Associate, compare very favourably with two leading island-states in the Eastern Caribbean, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. The land area of Barbados (169 square miles), its population of 277,821, and its nominal GDP of US \$4.4 billion are much below the similar constellations, in the aggregate, for the OECS. The comparable numbers for the largest island-nation in the Eastern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, are as follows: land area, 1,981 square miles; population, 1.359 million; and GDP (nominal) US \$21.75 billion, all numbers less than those comparable for the OECS. Six members of the OECS grouping have, individually, a higher GDP per capita than Barbados or Trinidad and Tobago. These OECS members in descending order, are: the British Virgin Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Anguilla, St Kitts-Nevis, and Antigua-Barbuda.

Combine all this with the airspace and seascape, too, of the OECS island chain stretching from Grenada in the south to St Kitts and

Nevis in the north east, and further north to Anguilla and the BVI, the potential for cooperation, integration, and further development in the OECS is huge. Our marine resources, singly and in combination, are highly significant, out of proportion to our land area. For example, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has a landscape of 150 square miles but a seascape of approximately 11,000 square nautical miles.

The accession to associate membership of the OECS by the French overseas departments, first Martinique and then Guadeloupe, adds immensely to the OECS: Martinique comprises 436 square miles in land area; Guadeloupe, 629 square miles. Martinique has a population of an estimated 380,000; Guadeloupe, a population of 395,000.

Each has a Gross Domestic Product in excess of US \$8 million. Each has a high level of development of infrastructure and services.

Before our very eyes the regional integration movement is being transformed with the entry of both Martinique and Guadeloupe as

associate members of the OECS. Is Barbados next? What about French St. Martin and the territories which are called “the Dutch Antilles”? Is there emerging an enlarged south-eastern and north-eastern pole of regional integration? How would Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Barbados react to all this in any reordering of regional integration? Would there be a reconfiguring of CARICOM itself with the emergence of a north-western integrated pole of Jamaica, the Bahamas, Haiti, and perhaps the Dominican Republic and in time, Cuba and Puerto Rico? Would the altered, and altering, global political economy, its knock-on regional reverberations, and regional home-grown alterations demand a reordering of the regional integration movement to accommodate a flexible variable geometry of integration as the circumstances admit?

Our Caribbean experience teaches that concentric circles of integration are permissible and practical, each complementing or supplementing one another with their relevant points of contact, joiner, or association. Is the evolving OECS a path-breaker or harbinger for the future in this regard? Our landscape, our

seascape, our people – our focus about which the poetic son of Guadeloupe, St. Jean Perse, writes so tellingly. He reminds always that it is no error to insist that our fame is on the sands, in the valleys, in our seas filled with conch; and he urges that we find our voice now and for the future. In “Song For an Equinox”, Perse aptly instructs:

“The voice of men is in the men, the voice of bronze in the bronze, and somewhere in the world where the sky was voiceless and the age took no heed, a child is born into the world whose race nor rank is known, and genius knocks infallibly at the lobes of a pure forehead”.

This future voice of a young and maturing OECS has been amplified and further clarified with the accession to associate membership within it. To be young is very heaven; to be maturing is blissful! Forty years ago, a young revolution in Grenada burst forth; immaturity killed it four years later. I am sure that the growing maturity and our refreshing imagination in our OECS will assure its continued access, especially with Guadeloupe in its bosom.

In the context of expanding OECS, it is worthwhile to restate the Preamble to the Revised Treaty penned in 2010 in the midst of the global economic meltdown:

“The Governments of the Contracting States —

“Recalling the links of their common history and the need to build on that history for the benefit of their peoples;

“Recognising the progress that has been made towards their integration under the Treaty of Basseterre 1981 and the Agreement Establishing the East Caribbean Common Market;

“Convinced that at this time it is necessary to deepen the level of integration and the pursuit of a common economic purpose which has obtained under the Treaty of Basseterre 1981 and the Agreement Establishing the East Caribbean Common Market;

“Mindful of their obligations toward the wider grouping of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy;

“Determined to enhance the level of regional co-operation between States that are parties to the Treaty of Basseterre 1981;

“Have Agreed as follows [in the Revised Treaty]”

This quest is in symmetry with the vision of our people which is affirmed and magisterially expressed by the Martinican intellectual, Edward Glissant, in his book, Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays. Glissant begins an essay entitled “Toward Caribbeanness” with an insightful observation:

“The notion of ‘antillanite’ or Caribbeanness emerges from a reality that we will have to question, but also corresponds to a dream that we must clarify and whose legitimacy must be demonstrated.

“A fragile reality (the experience of Caribbeanness, woven together from one side of the Caribbean to the other) negatively twisted together in its urgency (Caribbeanness as a dream, forever, denied, often deferred, yet a strange, stubborn presence in our responses.

“The reality is there in essence: dense (inscribed in fact) but threatened (not inscribed in consciousness).

“This dream is vital, but not obvious.”

The leaders, and the people, of our region know that reality of our Caribbean; we know, too, the possibilities to be harnessed in and from, this reality, and the limitations to be overcome. Pointedly and sensibly Glissant advises us:

“There is potential in this reality. What is missing from the notion of Caribbeanness is the transition from the shared experience to conscious expression; the need to transcend

the intellectual pretensions dominated by the learned elite and to be grounded in the collective affirmation, supported by the activism of the people.

“Our Caribbean reality is an option open to us. It springs from our natural experience, but in our histories has only been ‘an ability to survive’.”

The enlargement of the OECS, with the accession of Guadeloupe to associate membership, opens up tremendous possibilities not merely to survive but to thrive more markedly. We are, in the process, moving from a shared experience to a conscious expression of our Caribbean reality; and we seek in a structured way to channel the people’s activism to desired ends in programmes material and non-material, visible and invisible, reflecting the genius of our people, of our Caribbean civilization. Without an enhanced people-to-people contact, an embrace in the spheres of the economy, society, culture, and polity, our progress would be stunted. The Revised Treaty provides the framework for

deeper cooperation and integration but the governments and our people must make it all work for their benefit and development.

Centuries of European colonial rivalries in the Caribbean have contributed to the fracturing of our countries in differing linguistic groups and a contrived island separateness. Yet, within and arising from the rivalries, contradictions, and separations are the very seeds which pre-dispose our territories to a greater and more perfect union, as the circumstances admit. The development challenges of our contemporary realities induce us to a necessary and desirable cooperation and integration, functionally, and in a quest for deeper integration beyond functionalism, which is itself useful though limited, yet ever more promising. A strategic, many-sided roadmap is thus required for the ongoing remaking of our OECS.

Our region possess the material, institutional and intellectual resources, and inter-connectedness, to refresh and enhance the strategic path as laid down in the language of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre. This meeting of the OECS Authority offers

opportunities to do so in a wide range of areas of policy and programmes, reminding ourselves nevertheless that leaders make history but only to the extent that the circumstances of history and contemporary reality permit them so to make.

Fundamentally, our OECS bolsters the assurance of good government for our peoples. This is the enduring cross-cutting issue of significance which underpins the strategic, policy, and programmatic thrust of the Revised Treaty. It makes “good governance” sense to do things regionally together which are not themselves possible to be wisely or optimally done separately.

This good sense in governance reflects, and extends, the sensibility of our Caribbean civilization and its evolution. Derek Walcott, the Caribbean’s Nobel Laureate from St. Lucia, in his Nobel Lecture The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory, draws our attention to this vital consideration:

“Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than the love which took its

symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than the original sculpture, the icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places.”

Political leadership is insufficient, even inadequate, in the strategic quest of reassembling the fragments made manifest through the fever of our history. But the political leaders, reflecting the people’s will, have put in place the institutional machinery of our OECS to effect the re-assemblage and sustainable development, and to do so with great love, friendship, and solidarity. With Guadeloupe, as with Martinique, love is in the air in our OECS!

The maturation of the OECS embraces practically the variable geometry of integration as made manifest in its welcoming of

Martinique and Guadeloupe to associate membership. A maturing regional integration movement in a ripening civilisation cannot fear alterations and change; if it does, it would atrophy, and through a slow or accelerated process become a metaphoric dinosaur. As St. Jean Perse reminds us in his Nobel Lecture in December 1960:

“Inertia is the only menace ---- Do not fear nor doubt, for doubt is sterile and fear is servile. Listen instead to the rhythmic beat that my high innovating head imposes on the great human theme in the constant process of creation. It is not true that life can renounce itself. There is nothing living which proceeds from nothingness or yearns for it ---- The tragedy lies not in metamorphosis as such.”

Guadeloupe’s accession to associate membership of the OECS highlights our quest for a further metamorphosis, alteration, and change. In so doing we rage against the menace of inertia. On this day we marry a well-grounded scientific exploration of our contemporary reality, the memory of the pains and joys of our historic journeys, and the imagination to capture a spirit devoid of

learned helplessness, confident that our better years are ahead,
together.

Thank you!