



Democratic Republic of Congo and its Neighbours

The Regional Integration Challenge in Central Africa

Conference – Egmont Palace, Brussels – 12 December 2007

The Central Africa Programme of EGMONT – Royal Institute for International Relations and CRE-AC (Belgian Reference Center for the Expertise on Central Africa) organise a one-day conference to discuss different aspects of the relationship between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its neighbours. The conference will focus in particular on trends and dynamics of regional integration in Central Africa and the current and future role of the DRC in this process.

Rationale

The past conflicts in the DRC are, at least partly, regional in nature, scope, causes and consequences. During the two consecutive wars of 1996-1997 and of 1999-2002, almost all of its nine neighbours¹ were directly or indirectly involved in the conflict or hit by side-effects.

Today, the stabilisation and pacification of the DRC as well as its economic development partly rely on regional issues. Regional cooperation in economic, security, social and political areas is therefore considered by many to be of vital interest to the DRC as well as its neighbours.

Common interests and interdependencies are two incentives to promote regional cooperation and integration. With its central position on the continent, the DRC is simultaneously part of four regional economic bodies: ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), SADC (South African Development Community), COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) and CEPGL (Economic Community of Central African States). Furthermore, other regional groupings such as EAC (East African Community) and CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community) are active in the region. The DRC is also part of security-oriented regional fora such as the 'Tripartite + 1' and the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region, not to mention its multiple memberships in other more focused initiatives like the 'Nile Basin Initiative' for instance.

¹ Namely, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia and Angola. Other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa could be notably mentioned since they were involved in a way or another in the conflicts.



This complex architecture often compared to a ‘spaghetti bowl’ is a great opportunity and a real constraint at the same time to come to peaceful relations in the region. This conference will give the participants the possibility to analyze the ‘spaghetti bowl’ as well as to examine the prospects and challenges the DRC is currently facing in terms of regional integration.

Objectives

This policy-oriented conference is built up around four broad issues:

a) Politics of integration in Central Africa: Beyond the ‘Spaghetti Bowl’

What are the dynamics of regional integration in Central Africa? How are RECs (Regional Economic Communities) competing to attract members and gain regional leadership? What role is the DRC playing in this process and what are the challenges it is facing?

b) CEPGL – Communauté économique des Pays des Grands Lacs – What for?

After more than 10 years of lethargy, the revival of the CEPGL is broadly supported by the three member countries as well as the international community. Where do we stand now? What are the objectives of CEPGL and what will become their core business? What are the conditions to succeed?

c) How to promote security through regional cooperation?

Regional cooperation mechanisms are key to deal with security issues. What is the state of play regarding the different existing initiatives? How to deal with non-state armed groups and militias? Which hurdles are hampering regional cooperation?

d) Management of resources: a room for regional initiatives?

The resources of the Congolese soil have been one of the major causes for the continuation of conflicts in DRC. The Kahemba issue as well as the recent tensions concerning the oil under Lake Albert show that there is still a potential for revived clashes. Some interesting initiatives have been instigated such as the ‘Commission mixte’ of the Lake Kivu and the different agreements between DRC and some of its neighbours on the so-called “Zones d’intérêts communs”. How could shared resources (water systems, hydraulic energy, fisheries, forests, oil and minerals) be managed in the future?

The colloquium will be concluded by a set of interventions to provide some further food for thought but also drawing operational recommendations for the region and policy makers.

This event is open to a varied but nonetheless restrained audience of experts and practitioners (academics, think-tanks, politics, diplomats, officials from international organizations, Defence, Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministries of Member States and African countries).