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Democratic Republic of Congo and Its Neighbours

The Regional Integration Challenge in Central Africa

Panel 1: Politics of Integration in Central Africa

What Role for the RECs in the Security Debate?

By

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I. Introduction

Regional Economic Communities provide African states with a unique opportunity to simultaneously reinforce their economies and address, in an efficient and comprehensive manner, security challenges which often transcend national boundaries. The current impetus to strengthen and deepen Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and establish multilateral standby brigades is, therefore, welcome news to African and international actors, alike.

In Central Africa, unfortunately, progress towards regional cooperation and integration in the area of security has been particularly slow. Lack of political will, economic divergence among member states, split allegiances between regional groupings, disparate bilateral relations with external actors and, most importantly, interstate wars have caused serious setbacks to regional integration. While other regional communities on the continent, particularly ECOWAS and SADC, have been able to nurture, with the support of international partners, greater regional capacity to react to security challenges, Central African states have been lagging. There is, thus, an urgent need to reverse this trend by supporting recent efforts to rebuild ties between states which have been at war for too long and, thereby, consolidate peace and security in Central Africa.

II. Progress to Date

The situation in Central Africa has improved significantly over the last five years. Conflicts, long perceived as intractable, have been resolved. Uganda, Burundi and Angola are now, to a large extent, at peace. Stability has improved in the DRC, although fighting continues in North and, to a lesser extent, South Kivu. In December 2006, in Nairobi, eleven countries signed a Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region and established a series of mechanisms to foster regional stability and provide for the resolution of ~~possible~~ conflict by peaceful means. To this effect, a regional secretariat was inaugurated in Bujumbura in May 2007.

On the margins of the most recent meeting of member states in Nairobi on 8-9 November 2007, the DRC and Rwanda, under the auspices of the UN, signed a joint communiqué aimed at tackling the threats to regional

stability posed by the FDLR and Laurent Nkunda's insurgency. Also in 2007, Rwanda and Burundi joined the East African Community (EAC). The EAC is also trying to establish its own stand-by brigade and offers a useful framework, particularly for Uganda and Rwanda, to restore their good relations after some years of tension.

Progress on regional cooperation in Central Africa has not been confined to the Great Lakes countries. After lying dormant for many years, other regional groupings, such as, the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC),¹ the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC)² and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL)³ have also tried to retake the initiative to improve the security situation in the region.

This is notably the case with CEEAC which, in February 1999, established a command structure to deal with security issues at the regional level. This consists of the Central African Council on Peace and Security (COPAX), a Defence and Security Commission and an early warning mechanism called MARAC. In June 2002, it also decided to create the Central African Multilateral Force (FOMAC). With EU financial support, FOMAC has been deployed in CAR to help CAAF become a real national army present all over the national territory. It is also hoped that FOMAC could complement the work of UN mandated forces by acting as a rapid response force to prevent the escalation of looming conflicts, before too late.

Much remains to be done, however, before RECs in Central Africa can achieve these objectives or even reach the level of political and economic integration experienced in ~~Western~~ and Southern Africa. At the moment, the Central African Multilateral Force (FOMAC), which carried out in November its first training manoeuvres in Chad, consists of a small force from ten of the eleven CEEAC member states.⁴ There is no political consensus, as yet, among CEEAC states as to FOMAC's precise role or future composition. Nor is its funding assured beyond the

¹ Member states: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe.

² Member states: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

³ Member states: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi.

⁴ Rwanda did not contribute any troops but Togo, which is not a member of CEEAC, did. *Ecomog, SADC? et maintenant la FOMAC*, Le Potentiel, 19 November 2007.

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end of the year. As the CEEAC Secretary General Louis ~~Sylvain~~ Goma acknowledged in October 2007: "in matters of economic integration, what's been achieved still remains little".⁵ ~~Goma~~ ^{the SG} ~~said~~ the lack of progress ~~was~~ partly ~~due~~ to the landlocked location and commercial isolation of some member states. ~~This is only part of the problem.~~ Lack of progress on the economic front is also caused by longstanding political tensions and insecurity in many parts of the region.

Seven years of war in the DRC have created bitter antagonism between the DRC and Angola, on one side, and Uganda and Rwanda, on the other. These wounds will take time to heal. Besides, the architecture of the regional cooperation organisations seems to lack a clear definition. There are uncertainties as to the future role of the DRC, which has the potential to become the most influential actor in the region. But it has yet to recover from the ravages of war and its army is too weak to enable it to play a role comparable to that of South Africa in SADC or Nigeria in ECOWAS.

III. Economic Divergence among Member States

The future of regional cooperation in Central Africa crucially depends on developments in the DRC. Its weakness is clearly a threat to regional stability but its recovery could also become a source of tension and a possible obstacle to further integration, pending the working out of the required compromise, as in other regions. In West Africa, within ECOWAS, the dominance of Nigeria, by far the region's strongest economic, political and military actor, breeds suspicion among smaller states that Nigeria is trying to use the regional forum (and the legitimacy it brings) to further its interests at the expense of theirs. With regards to the regional standby brigade, ECOMOG, such lack of trust seems a major obstacle to effective military cooperation, as member states may be reluctant to contribute personnel and money to a force perceived as not completely impartial.

Nevertheless, cooperation and integration in the field of security have continued to develop, partly because Nigeria's influence has been kept in check by Ghana and Senegal's readiness to contribute to the regional

⁵ From the Secretary General's speech at the 13th Heads of State and Government meeting in Brazzaville. http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0,,2-11-1447_2212628,00.html

security structure. Similarly in Southern Africa, South Africa towers above the 13 other SADC member states as the region's economic and military power. The embryonic SADC standby brigade, created at the August 2007 Lusaka Summit, is also bound to be dominated by South Africa. But, Pretoria, given its interest in using SADC as a platform to further its continental ambitions, seems to have adopted a cautious, consensus-building approach within the regional body.

In Central Africa, the divergences in economic and political power are not, for the moment, as stark as in the West and South. Despite major economic and military imbalances, there is no one clear regional leader. Post-transition DRC continues to expand its potentially huge mining sector. President J. Kabila, the new head of the CEEAC, aspires for a more assertive regional role. However, his government's inability to extend its authority over all its territory, its reliance on UN peacekeepers to maintain internal security and the relative military strength of its neighbours, notably, Angola and Rwanda, constrain the DRC's emergence as the pivotal state in the region.

IV. Split Allegiances between Regional Groupings *— As Prof Jacques Ténier stated*

The political commitment of member states to deepen economic integration and establish standby forces is undermined by overlapping membership of multiple regional groupings, the reality of the so-called '*spaghetti bowl*'. SADC, for instance, suffered from lack of cohesion in its EPAs negotiations with the EU. Rivalry between those members who also belong to the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and those who belong to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) weakened its negotiating position. Similarly in Central Africa, Angola and the DRC are members of SADC⁶ while Rwanda and Burundi are members of the East African Community (EAC).⁷ If greater coordination and cooperation at the inter-regional level fail to solve the problem of split allegiances, then more discrete regional boundaries will need to be established.

⁶ Angola is currently chair of the Organ of Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), SADC's core security structure.

⁷ Rwanda and Burundi acceded to the EAC Treaty on 18th June 2007 and became full Members of the Community with effect from 1st July 2007. http://www.eac.int/about_eac.htm

V. Historical Fractures

Imbalances in economic clout are felt more acutely between countries whose perceptions of each other are still shaped, less at the formal level than behind closed doors, by memories of the 1998-2002 war and allegiances that formed at that time. This complex history of national and ethnic antagonism makes it much more difficult for neighbouring countries to agree on their common enemy; and a regional interventionary force will find it hard to achieve impartiality in the eyes of all concerned. Member states may be happy to sign onto FOMAC in principle but reluctant to give specific missions their full political and financial support in the event of conflict.

To overcome such mistrust, the stronger regional actors will have to demonstrate their commitment to regional economic growth and stability. A great deal rides, therefore, on the ability of the countries of the region to successfully restore peace in North Kivu. DRC and Rwanda, in particular, must make good on their commitments to deal jointly with all the illegal armed groups roaming in the region and address the root causes of instability in the province. They must therefore tackle illegal immigration, the presence of Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Burundi, widespread impunity for the crimes committed in the region since 1993, conflict over land tenure and intercommunity tensions.

VI. Conclusion

Regional Economic Communities and the African Standby Brigades avail the diverse countries of Africa the means to achieve a greater degree of economic, political and military self-sufficiency. To realise these benefits, however, member states will have to take bold steps to earn the trust and confidence of their neighbours. After all, the RECs and the regional Standby Brigades have the potential to become the building blocks for the future African Economic Community and common African security policy.

In Central Africa, the current slow progress in economic integration, relative to East, West and Southern Africa, is indicative of the still festering political tensions and zones of insecurity in the region. The

*the reality of common interests
and interdependencies as well as*

strengthening of current institutional foundations will, undoubtedly, be a slow and gradual process. We can, however, expect that, with the necessary international support, the incentive of regional growth and stability, as the best option, will eventually generate the necessary political will to overcome current fractures and inequities.

Thank you.