REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND SECURITY IN CENTRAL AFRICA – ASSESSMENT AND PERSPECTIVES 10 YEARS AFTER THE REVIVAL

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Introduction

In March 2008, the ten Heads of State of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) met in Kinshasa for an extraordinary summit to address the escalating tensions in Chad. In view of the repeated attacks from rebels against the government of President Idriss Déby and the series of combats in and around the capital of N'Djamena, the Community's members expressed their concern about the ongoing instability in their partner country and the region and affirmed their support of the Chadian government. In this perspective, the member states' political actors affirmed, once again, the regional process' increased emphasis on security issues since its resumption in 1998.

In February 1998, in a context of continuing regional troubles, unrest and instability, the Heads of the ten member states had agreed, in the Gabonese capital of Libreville, on the revival of the Central African Economic Community after a six-year period of inactivity. At that time, the region was deeply affected by the aftermath of the Rwandese genocide and the conflict in Burundi, the violent and long lasting war in former Zaire as well as a series of political crises and coups d'Etats in many Central African states. Recognizing that the community's year-long inactivity had largely been induced by these crises and conflicts, the member states decided to initiate a substantial reforming in view of developing the regional cooperation process further into a direction that would also contribute to the region's stability and peace. Hereby the awareness of the regional dimension of neighbouring crimes and conflicts and notably the risk of regional spill-over largely underlay and fostered the initiative of giving new dynamic to regionalisation. Strengthening and intensifying cooperation was considered by the states as a vital approach towards promoting development, not only through economic growth but also through consolidated peace and security. The Central African Heads of State took herewith a decision fully in line with and covered by the concomitant engagement on the continental level towards promoting cooperation in the field of security and building a Pan-African peace and security architecture. Thus, ECCAS' field of action was enlarged towards security issues, in addition to the original economic orientation, and it was agreed to establish specific security bodies and mechanisms to endorse this reform.

An agenda broadening towards peace and security issues has also happened with the other Central African regional institution, the Central African Monetary and Economic Community (CEMAC), during the last years. Created in 1994 to replace the former customs union UDEAC, and operational since 1999, CEMAC is certainly more strongly adhering than ECCAS to its economic objec-

tives of promoting trade between its members and developing a common market. Nevertheless, increasing tensions in the Central African Republic (CAR) forced the community in 2002 to further address the issue of regional security and to deploy within its member state a multinational force, the FOMUC, even if such a measure had never been foreseen in its treaty.

The revival of ECCAS after six years of crisis-induced hibernation and its agenda's reorientation towards security issues, as well as the set up and deployment of a CEMAC multinational force constitute clear manifestations of a new trend in Central Africa towards approaching security and stability concerns increasingly on the regional level. In 1999, ECCAS officially affirmed the "promotion of peace, security and stability in the region" as one of its central missions.[1] And on the members' Conference in October 2007, the Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso emphasized that "the success of integration is also conditioned by the capacity to make the region a harbour of peace".[2] This trend goes hand and hand with the continental aspirations towards peace and security cooperation. It also reflects the developments in other regions where more and more economic communities are emphasizing the security dimension of their collaboration by adapting their agendas and institutional structures accordingly.

In Central Africa, the connection between security and regional cooperation rises however a couple of questions. Why, despite this new and enlarged conception of regionalism and the repeated commitments towards a regional security approach, insecurity remains considerably high and is still threatening all the countries in the region? The political crisis in Chad, opposing the government and various rebel groups, is now enduring for years, and is additionally aggravated by the country's considerably strained relations with its neighbour Sudan that regularly bring the two rivals on the verge of war. Despite the now yearlong presence of multinational troops, the situation in the CAR still remains volatile, and villages in the East of the country are frequently victims of attacks by armed bandits and militia. And in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the repeated ceasefires, peace talks and agreements have not succeeded in completely stopping the now decade-long conflict, as combats and riots still continue to regularly erupt, notably in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, generating flows of refugees within the country and across its borders.

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1. See the Community's website: http://www.ceeac-eccas.org
2. 'La réussite de notre intégration (était) aussi conditionnée par notre capacité à faire de notre sous-région un havre de paix.' The President of the Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, as quoted by Afriquecentrale.info (www.afriquecentrale.info) on October 30th, 2007

So why – 10 years after the increased new orientation of the Central African regionalisation processes towards security issues – the real contribution of the aforementioned regional bodies towards sustainable security in the region is still rather low? What is hence wrong with the current approach?

Angela Meyer[3]

Regional Cooperation in Central Africa:
a Comeback with New Focus

Similar to most other African regions, the bases of the Central African regional cooperation processes can be traced back long before the 1990's. Initially, they had been launched with the aim of enhancing intraregional trade and exchange and promoting economic development. After years of stagnation, the comeback of regionalisation in Central Africa during the 1990's has been marked by a significant review of the main organisations' agendas and a broadening towards security concerns.

CEMAC: A young community with old roots

Even if CEMAC is often presented as a relatively young community, created in 1994 by Cameroon, Gabon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville and Equatorial-Guinea, and active since the ratification of its treaty in 1999, its institutional basis is built on the structure of the Central African Costumes and Economic Union (UDEAC), which it has officially superseded. UDEAC's origins, and hence the roots of Central African regionalism in general, can be traced back long before and partly be found in the early post-colonial area. At the moment of their independencies, the young Central African states decided to maintain the economic ties established during the colonial period among them by France and agreed in 1964 to create a regional customs union in the aim of promoting economic development.[4] The three following decades of UDEAC's existence were marked by a high degree of passivity and malfunctioning. The lack of commitment from the member states to delegate competences to the supranational level, to regularly pay their contributions and to fulfil their obligations as members, moved the union progressively into a state of dormancy. It was in the 1990's context of general revival of regionalism on the African continent when the Central African states decided to give new life to their dormant cooperation and to establish a new community on the UDEAC's

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4. During the colonial period, France established the Federation of French Equatorial Africa (AEF) set under a General Government. The purpose of this community was to ease the administration of the French colonial territories in Central Africa. In 1958, on the eve of decolonisation, AEF was replaced by a more loose community that however maintained the close relationship between the Central African then-colonies. UDEAC was created in 1964 by Cameroon, Gabon, the Central African Republic, Chad, and the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville and became effective in 1966. Equatorial-Guinea joined the Union only twenty years later. See also Rolf J. LANGHAMMER (1978). Die Zentralafrikanisches Zoll- und Wirtschaftsunion: Integrationswirkungen bei Ländern im Frühstadium der industriellen Entwicklung. Tübingen: Mohr; and Claude N'KODIA (1999). L'intégration économique: Les enjeux pour l'Afrique Centrale. Paris: Harmattan

ruins. This renewed motivation was emphasized by the perception of the Heads of State that, under the new global economic circumstances, regional approaches may indeed prove more appropriate and efficient than national ones. In this perspective, the community's prior goal was defined as the promotion of its member states' harmonious development by integrating their single capacities into one unified framework. As a monetary union, the community is based on a system of single currency, the Franc CFA, and intends to establish an economic union by the year 2014.[5]

From its beginning on, the CEMAC cooperation has first of all been focussed on trade and economy-related matters. Nevertheless, the intensification of political unrest in one of the member states, the CAR, prompted the community in 2002, three years after having officially taken up its functions, to set up and deploy a multinational force, the FOMUC.[6] This development presents a pivotal step in the organisation's history. Indeed, it presents in Central Africa's regional history the first case of a joint intervention in one of the member states that proves incapable to sufficiently guarantee peace, security and stability within its borders – and this without any specific provision in the organisation's treaty. In July 2008, after repeated prolongations of its mandate, the FOMUC has officially been transformed into the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace (MICOPAX) under the authority of the other regional community in Central Africa, ECCAS.

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5. The treaty of the CEMAC foresees the establishment of an economic union in three steps (1999-2004; 2005-2009; 2010-2014). The first step encompasses legal harmonisation and common economic and financial legislations, joint actions in economic sectors and horizontal issues such as education and research to coordinate national policies as well as coordinated external trade relations. The second primarily focuses on establishing free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. The final step will be used to evaluate and finalise the achievements of the first and the second steps. Despite a very comprehensive body of legislation, the implementation on the national level has been quite slow and not as scheduled. At the end of the second stage, the agreement on the free movement of citizens has, for instance, not been put into reality so far, as most states still require visa for the entry in their country from CEMAC citizens. (Convention régissant l'Union économique de l'Afrique centrale U.E.A.C., July 1996.)

6. The deployment of the "Force Multinationale en Centrafrique" (FOMUC) was decided on the CEMAC's member states' extraordinary summit in October 2002 and started in December 2002. The troops were originally composed of 380 soldiers provided by Chad, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville to replace the UN mission MINURCA removed in 2000. Initially in place to assure the security of then-CAR-President Ange-Félix Patassé, to restructure the national army and consolidate peace and security in the capital of Bangui, the mandate was considerably revised when General François Bozizé forcefully took power through a coup d'Etat in March 2003. Since the initial deployment, the mission has regularly been prolonged and was also operating in more remote areas in the country, notably in the North-Western provinces. In May 2008, the number of troops has been raised to 500 after the arrival of additional Cameroonian contingents. On 12 July 2008, the FOMUC has been transformed into the Mission for the consolidation of Peace (MICOPAX) and has passed under the authority of ECCAS.

ECCAS: Out of hibernation

The roots of ECCAS can be traced back to the early 1980's where they had originally been laid as part of a broad continental project. In 1983, the Economic Community of Central African States had been created within the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) backed Lagos Plan of Action in order to prepare on the regional level for continent-wide integration.[7] In this perspective, ECCAS' original aim was to promote economic cooperation among its members and hereby contribute to a general amelioration of living conditions and development across the continent. The community is composed of the same members as CEMAC, plus in addition Burundi, the DRC, Angola and Sao Tome and Principe[8]. From its beginning on, ECCAS' development has been particularly slow or even stagnant, primarily due to a lack of commitment from its member states. Between 1992 and 1997, this inactivity was further intensified by the outbreak of crises and conflicts in the majority of its member states, causing the community's complete failure to act, often referred to as period of "hibernation". The decision to re-launch ECCAS in 1998 presents a significant commitment of the states to revive dormant structures and potentials as these were considered, especially in the given context, as relevant for responding to the region's conflict proneness. ECCAS' revival at the Libreville conference held in 1998 not only consisted in a resumption of the community's activities but also implicated a comprehensive reform. The mandate has substantially been broadened to cover also security concerns, besides the original economic orientation, and therefore to allow for communitarian activities to promote the region's peace and security. In line with this agreement, the Heads of States decided on their meeting in Malabo in 2002 to establish a Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), a Commission for Defence and Security (CDS), a multinational rapid reaction force (FOMAC) and an early warning system (MARAC) to support the Community's new mission. The decision to reform ECCAS was not only a reaction to the degradation of security and stability in the region and the weakness of single-state solutions. It was also taken in line with the concomitant developments on the continental level and in accord with the African Union's definition of a common peace and security policy and initi-

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7. The "Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000", backed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was drafted in April 1980 by a number of African political leaders on a conference in Lagos, Nigeria. Its major aim was to increase Africa's self-sufficiency. For this purpose, the Plan envisaged the establishment of three regional arrangements in order to promote economic development on the sub-regional level. In Western Africa, this task was given to the already existing Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). A Preferential Trade Area was created to cover the countries of East and Southern Africa and later on replaced by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Finally, regarding Central Africa, ECCAS was created in 1983 with the aim of achieving and maintaining economic stabilisation through harmonious cooperation between its member states.
8. Rwanda has withdrawn its membership from ECCAS in 2007

ative to strengthen and promote security cooperation and conflict resolution within the continent and the regions.

A new focus on security in line with new continental objectives

On the continental level as well, the resumption of cooperation and the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 to substitute the moribund Organisation for African Unity (OAU) brought along a new consideration of security, defence and peace aspects on the communitarian level. The culmination of crises and conflicts all over the continent, the weakness of the states to adequately respond and re-consolidate the situation within their borders, as well as the changing and decreasing external support urged the African states at the end of the 1990's to reconsider the objectives of their cooperation initiative on the continental level and to emphasize and strengthen its potential for the enhancement of peace and security. Whereas the 1963 adopted OAU Charta had been built on the principal of national sovereignty and the prohibition against interference into internal affairs, the AU was given a clear security role besides its mandate to promote socio-economic integration. As key body of its security architecture, the AU has set up in 2004 a Peace and Security Council (PSC) with the role of efficiently and timely responding to conflicts and crises on the continent. The PSC is assisted by a Panel of the Wise including five African personalities as advisors to the Council and a regionally embedded early warning system. In addition, by 2010, there shall be an African Standby Force (ASF) relying on five regional standby brigades with headquarters, planning elements and logistic bases in Northern, Western, Eastern, Southern and Central Africa.[9]

What is particularly interesting about the new African continental peace and security architecture is its decentralised dimension. The idea behind the AU's security policy is in fact to strengthen efficient communitarian security structures on the regional level as pillars to support the consolidation of peace, security and stability on the entire continent. In this perspective, in Central Africa, especially the newly established common security structures of ECCAS are

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9. On their meeting in Addis Ababa in May 2003, the African Chiefs of Defence Staff have adopted a Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force. The force shall be established until 2010 and conduct African peace operations on the continent. It will be composed of five standby brigades of 3000 to 5000 troops each, to be set up by regional communities in Northern, Eastern, Western, Central und Southern Africa. See: African Union (2003). Protocol framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee. Document adopted by the Third Meeting of African Chiefs of Defence Staff. Addis Ababa, 15-16 May 2003.

largely responding to the plans made on the continental level. The continental early warning system will function in coordination with five regionally based early warning systems. This provision has largely influenced the decision of the Central African Heads of State to plan the establishment of MARAC. In a similar way, FOMAC can be understood as Central Africa's planned contribution to the African Standby Force, comparable to the West African ECOWAS Standby Brigade (ECOBRIG) or the EASBRIG brigade in Eastern Africa.

A weak regional contribution towards sustainable security

The effectiveness and result of the Central African regionalisation processes' new orientation towards security issues may appear questionable in view of the fact that the region still presents one of the most conflict-ridden areas on the continent. Recurrent reports on the political instability in Chad, on armed banditism and militia attacks in the CAR and on still erupting violent riots in the Eastern part of the RDC may certainly justify and endorse the necessity to increasingly approach security issues also on the regional level. On the other hand, the endless violence, insecurity and instability of the previous years is also rising the question why the effective contribution by regional bodies to security has been relatively low and limited so far, despite the increased regional security commitment. Certainly, it might appear premature to already evaluate the effectiveness of these processes and initiatives only 10 years after their reactivation. However, we must recognise that more ad hoc and pragmatic initiatives such as the Tripartite+1 mechanism in the Great Lakes Region – composed by the DRC, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi – have proved quite efficient in dealing with specific security issues. Nevertheless, other African regions, for instance West Africa, that have re-initiated their cooperation processes more or less at the same time seem on a quite more successful way towards strengthening their cooperation for regional security – even if these progresses should certainly not be overemphasized but considered with care as difficulties and weaknesses remain.

In this perspective, it appears justified to ask what is going wrong with the Central African approach so that the regional contribution of Regional Economic Communities such as ECCAS and CEMAC towards security and stability is still so weak.

To answer this question, it may be interesting to further analyse the regional security approach on two levels:

First, what have been the main reasons that let the members broaden their cooperation also towards security issues beyond the initial economic orientation?

Second, what is problematic about the way these new security provisions have been implemented? And, on this basis, what can be said about the major motivations and intentions of the Central African political leaders behind regional cooperation?

Responding to New Developments and Challenges

It is possible to relate the decision of the states to resume and diversify their cooperation on the regional level to four major events and developments: first, to the global economic developments, second to the states' raising awareness of their weakness and powerlessness as single actor to provide security, third to the increasingly obvious transnational dimension of security and related threats, and fourth to the post-Cold-War international (and continental) context.

At the moment of their establishment, the central objective of the Central African regional communities had been a clearly economic one. UDEAC, and later on CEMAC, and ECCAS were all created to intensify the economic ties between their members, often already forged during the colonial era, to encourage and facilitate trade within the region, and to eventually set up a common market (ECCAS) or economic and monetary unions (UDEAC/ CEMAC). This initial motivation however soon vanished. In the Cold-War context and especially in the 1980's, bilateral economic agreements with European states proved more profitable for the Central African political elites than commercial exchanges with their neighbours. This understanding was additionally strengthened by the existence of still deeply rooted trade relationships to the former colonial powers and relative low levels of economic complementarity within the region due to the relative similarity of national economies, especially after the 1980's recession. In the 1990's, the new post-Cold-War economic context of globalisation and increased interdependency however partly interrupted most of the privileged bilateral ties and agreements. In addition, prices for export goods came increasingly under pressure. More and more, African states become aware of their vulnerabilities as isolated actors on the world market. Under these conditions, regional cooperation appeared as an appropriate way to join forces, to partly compensate the increasing loss and to rise the national economic weight on the international level. However, the series of crises and conflicts that ravaged Central Africa in the 1990's made it very difficult and intricate for the states to intensify intraregional trade and create common markets. As has become particularly obvious in the case of ECCAS, the proper functioning of the regional process and the scheduled implementation of the defined economic objectives proved impossible with partner countries in a state of war. Achieving the common economic goals and hence rising the competitiveness of the emerging economies on the world market became therefore closely linked to the condition of peace, security and stability in the whole region. In this perspective, the broadening of the agenda to include security issues became a key prerequisite for a successful economic cooperation.

This understanding of security as essential condition for economic development and cooperation came along with the awareness that insecurity and instability were manifestations of the states' and their representatives' weakness and limited capacity to guarantee security and order within national borders. The conflicts and crises that destabilized an important number of Central African states in the 1990's were all the results of internal tensions between different fractions trying to benefit from the governments' weakness and inability to exercise their legitimised powers. The international dimension became more and more blurred and primarily took the form of external support for the different internal conflict parties. The crimes in Rwanda and Burundi, the Congolese conflicts, as well as the series of political crises and upheavals in the CAR, in Chad and the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville can all be considered as manifestations of the state actors' weakness to satisfy the security needs of the population, to exercise control over the entire national territory and to sufficiently moderate and monitor centrifugal movements, notably in the light of decreasing support from Western governments. This made it evident to the Central African states that a collective neighbourly reaction to a state's failure with the aim of supporting and strengthening the destabilized state authority may reveal as a promising option to consolidate security on the regional level, such as has been the case in the CAR.

The option of resorting to a regional approach to compensate lacking national security capacities becomes even more evident in view of the transnational nature of security and insecurity in Central Africa. Due to the weak control and the permeability of national borders, instability and violence can easily spread from one country to the other. The uncontrolled transborder traffic of arms or the flow of people, be it refugees, combatants, rebels or bandits originating from a country in conflict can easily destabilize neighbouring states and stimulate further tensions and conflicts. Under such conditions, a regional concerted security approach may prove an appropriate option to emphasize and address the potential regional impact of national insecurity and thereby to prevent a destabilization of the entire region.

Finally, the decision to include security questions on the regional arrangements' has to a significant degree been influenced by the changing international context and the diminishing direct external support. With the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the superpowers' race for influence on the African continent lost its intensity. With no major concurrence, there was no real need for cost intensive support of African political elites in order to guarantee their ideological alignment and secure access to resources. At the same time, it became possible to move the focus towards the newly created states in East and Central Europe as well as towards the emerging nations and economies in

Asia. This revised commitment by European countries and the United States was also translated by decreasing willingness to provide much efforts and manpower for the consolidation of security and stability on the continent. Inauspicious experience, such as the US intervention in Somalia, and the African conflicts' cruelty, exemplified by the Rwanda genocide, made it difficult to the Western democracies in the first half of the 1990's to find the necessary national support for sending own troops to the region. This changing context urged the African states to emphasize the security role of their originally exclusively economic communities in order to jointly compensate the vanishing external support. As mentioned above, the reorganisation of continental cooperation and the step-by-step establishment of an African peace and security architecture went hand in hand with a strengthening of concerted security capacities on the regional level. This development was moreover endorsed by the willingness of the international community to financially or logistically support African regional security initiatives and operations, such as the FOMUC in Central Africa or the ECOMOG in Western Africa.[10]

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10. The FOMUC operation in the Central African Republic enjoyed financial and logistical support from the European Union and France. Since the creation of the African Peace Facility Programme in 2004, large parts of the mission's budget had been covered by the EU, whereas France was providing most of the logical support, partly under its RECAMP Programme on the Reinforcement of African Peace-keeping Capacities. Since 2004 the EU has spent some 23 million euros to cover the FOMUC's budget. The rest has been provided on a bilateral basis, notably by France, Germany and China. CEMAC's contribution was only of 1%. See also: "EU relations with the Central African Republic" published on the Website of the European Commission under: http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries/countries/country_profile.cfm?cid=cf&type=long&lng=en (26.06.2008)

The Problem of Approaches and Intentions

The way the Central African national political actors have chosen to respond to this increased need to address security also on the communitarian level raises a couple of problems. Analysing these problems allows to shed light on the underlying prior motivations of Central African national political leaders and hence their essential expectations towards regional cooperation and the new security orientation.

This, in turn, seems indeed crucial for addressing the initial question why the present contribution of regional cooperation towards enhancing and promoting stability and security in a sustainable way has been rather limited in Central Africa.

Understanding security

A first problem is presented by the understanding and conception of security and hence by the related means that have been chosen to address security on the communitarian level.

Whereas, in a global sense, the concept of security has increasingly been enlarged in the 1990's through the development of new concepts, such as *Human Security* or *Comprehensive Security*[11], the developments on the regional level indicate that the Central African communities still adhere to a primarily narrow and militaristic approach. In principal, security is here defined as a concept with a strong military and defence dimension. As a matter of fact, the

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11. After the end of the Cold War, the fading threat of a major international (world) conflict encouraged many authors to withdraw from the narrow neo-realist conception of security as military and national concern. From the multitude of newly proposed conceptions some became widely accepted. (Cf. John BAYLIS (1997) International Security in Post-Cold-War Era. In: Baylis, John / Smith, Steve (1997). The Globalisation of World Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.). The concept of Human Security has been developed by the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) with recognition that "the concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people. (…) Forgotten where the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives." (United Nations Development Program: Human Development Report 1994. New York 1994. pp. 22). The concept encompasses a wide range of security aspects, ranging from economic issues, over food, health and environmental ones, to so called personal, community and political concerns. The concept of Comprehensive Security, elaborated by Barry Buzan, still considers the military aspect of security but sees it as being only one dimension of security. It defines in addition also a political, a social, a societal, an economic and an environmental dimension. (See Barry BUZAN (1991). People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold-War Era. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf)

broadening of CEMAC's and ECCAS' agendas both primarily resulted in the set up of joint military facilities and the establishment of regional military organs. The decision to establish COPAX, CDS, FOMAC and MARAC, regular joint military trainings as well as multinational operations and missions, such as the deployment of observers for the DRC elections in July 2006, present the major elements of ECCAS' new turning towards security issues. The prior reaction of CEMAC to growing instability in the CAR and the government's inability to provide a sufficient level of inner security has been the launch of the multinational military operation FOMUC in 2002.

A more comprehensive approach that would go beyond the purely military dimension and address also socio-political or economic aspects inherent to the majority of conflicts and crises, is still not sufficiently conceived and considered.

Why such a narrow conception of security may be responsible for the limited contribution of regional cooperation towards security and stability consolidation is due to several factors.

The approach of crises through military means only focuses on the manifestations of insecurity and not necessarily on its sources and reasons too. The deployment of troops may certainly be an effective way to restore law and order in a situation of tensions and riots. It is however inappropriate to tackle also the deeper and mostly structural causes for destabilisation that most often are located on the political, social or economic level. In the CAR, for instance, the raise of instability since the end of the 1990's which let to the deployment of multinational troops, first by the international community and since 2002 by CEMAC, was primarily motivated by general discontent over the worsened socio-economic situation, the non-payment of salary arrays for civil servants, teachers and soldiers, as well as ethnic favouritism in the government's and the army's composition that eventually generated a series of mutinies in 1996. The presence of several international troops helped, with no doubt, to temporarily rebuild law and order in the capital of Bangui. However, the ongoing dissatisfaction and strikes over outstanding payments and a bad economy, as well as high levels of criminality, hold-ups and banditism in the North-Western provinces clearly indicate that security is not sufficiently restored yet and that challenges need also to be considered in non-military fields. Economic, political, social and human issues are indeed key for tackling the root causes of instability and insecurity. The government is incapable to sufficiently respond to its population's concerns, to provide security and well-being via its institutions, and especially to guarantee the regular payment of salaries and soldiers' pay. This causes general discontent, regularly leading to strikes and insurrections. The government's inability to arrange with the political opposition and to share

power with major political actors generates conditions for the emergence of rebel movements in the weakly controlled periphery. The main objectives of the CEMAC's intervention have been to respond to the clear symptoms of instability through its military presence. Being supposed to accompany the country into a state of stability and order, FOMUC's major tasks have been the fighting of rebels and bandits, the strengthening of the national army FACA and the monitoring of elections. The weakness of the state, its incapacity to satisfactorily address the political, social and economic needs of the population and its powerlessness to monitor and control subversive powers in the country have however not openly been addressed on the communitarian level. The MICOPAX mission that has officially replaced the FOMUC mission in July 2008 might bring some change in this direction as the mandate has been enlarged. Besides the still conserved aim of consolidating peace and security in the CAR, the mission is now also supposed to help revive the political dialogue in the country. For this purpose, a new civilian branch has been added and the personal of 500 peacekeepers includes soldiers and civilians. It remains to be seen if this reform will really lead to effective improvements or if it is just a simple case of renaming under new authorities.

Certainly, this prioritisation of military approaches and solutions and the focus on the establishment of military instruments and institutions in Central Africa may be put in line with the simultaneous and similar developments on the continental level. It is indeed true that also the AU is expressing the increased emphasis on the consolidation of peace and security in Africa in form of the planed creation of a standby force and the conduction of peace operations. However, in the founding document of its Peace and Security Architecture, the Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, signed in February 2004 in the Libyan city of Sirte, the concepts of security and defence are defined in a very comprehensive and multi-dimensional way. The document, in fact, underlines that "the causes of intra-state conflict necessitate a new emphasis on human security, based not only on political values but on social and economic imperatives as well."[12] In contrast, the Protocol on the establishment of COPAX, regulating the Central African peace and security architecture, favours a narrow approach of the concepts and clearly emphasizes their military dimension.

This strict adhering to a militaristic understanding of security in Central Africa is additionally contrasted by developments in other African regions. The Organ for political, defence and security (OPDS) of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), originally set up in 1996 to intervene in conflicts and to

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12. African Union (2004). Solemn Declaration on a common African Defence and Security Policy. Sirte 28.2.2004 (Art. 6)

act in a preventive way to consolidate peace in the region, is progressively emphasizing the preventive dimension of its mandate. Since 2001, OPDS is based on a Inter-state Politics and Diplomacy Committee (ISPDC) that complements its Inter-state Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC), in view of better promoting stability and security, not only through reactive but also through preventive measures. SADC's communitarian security policy thus including among its objectives the promotion of good governance and democracy, as well as the respect of human rights, OPDS is often considered as the basis of a common foreign policy.[13] However, it would be wrong to overestimate the effective role of OPDS for the region's security and stability. Although the approach might be good as it favours a more comprehensive conception and stresses the importance of preventive measures in contrast to reactive ones, OPDS is regularly encountering major difficulties in properly fulfilling its role, notably due to divergences among the SADC member states. Here again, the good intentions and commitments appear as largely remaining confined to paper.

Approaching security

This narrow conception of security is closely linked to the narrow way regionalisation is conceived and implemented in general and the goals that can hence be found behind the communitarian security approach.

In Central Africa, regionalisation clearly follows a logic of intergovernmental cooperation. In contrast, the idea of regional integration remains rather underdeveloped. Indeed, the institutional architecture and framework of ECCAS and CEMAC make it evident that the major purpose is to ease the – primarily economic – relations between the states and to promote their mutual support. Communitarian policies have only been defined and implemented in a rather small field of sectors. The transfer of power, competencies and resources from the national level to regional supranational institutions and organs is considerably limited and slow. Even if, on their meetings, the Heads of State are regularly adopting common policies to partly supplement national ones, the implementation of such decisions is usually tedious and long-winded. Communitarian bodies are rather powerless and unimportant within the process. Financially, they depend from the member states' willingness to regularly pay their contributions. From this perspective, the secretariats and technical committees seem only to exist to support and assist the main decisive organ, which is in every community the Conference of Heads of State.

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13. See for instance, Jakkie CILLIERS (1996). The SADC Organ for Defence, Politics and Security. IISS Occasional Paper No 10 – October 1996

Such a form of organisation thus prevents the creation of a strong supranational acting level, as well as the strengthening of actors and institutions on the communitarian level. On the contrary, it emphasizes the role of the states and gives national policy makers additional decision power and competencies.

Concerning the security dimension, regionalisation might appear, under these conditions, as an option to detract from the obvious powerlessness. As a matter of fact, the states' weakness, or more precisely the political elites' awareness of their vulnerability and insufficient capacity to consolidate national stability can be considered as having been important incentives for the enhanced approach of security issues on the regional level. Bad economic performance and high levels of corruption, lacking authority over the own territory, and powerlessness against rebel and other centrifugal groups clearly exemplifies the difficulties or even incapacity of African leaders to sufficiently guarantee development, well-being and security to the populations. At the same time, this weakness as well as the decreasing international support and the changing form of assistance make them become aware of their vulnerability and the limits of their power. In such a context, regional cooperation is likely to appear as an option to compensate and partly overcome these weaknesses and even to try to strengthen the national capacities. Under these conditions, regionalisation is considered, not as a process leading to the creation of integrated new supranational acting levels, but, on the contrary, as a mean to give the states new roles and power on the regional level and thereby to "artificially" boost and magnify national authority and sovereignty.

In a similar way, political actors may see regional cooperation as a certain guarantee of support and confirmation of their authority by regional partners and allies in case their power is compromised by civil insurrections, rebellions or putsch attempts, or by foreign pressure. Closely linked hereto, joint security activities can also be used by a community's members for realising their geo-political interests in the region. The FOMUC mission presents a very illustrative example for both scenarios. This communitarian military operation has initially been set up by the CEMAC states with the mandate to protect former CAR President Ange-Félix Patassé who had been victim of several attempted coup d'Etats, especially between 2001 and 2003. Nevertheless, when former army Chief General François Bozizé succeeded in March 2003 to overthrow the President and to seize power, the FOMUC troops did not intervene.[14] Explanations for this inactivity can partly be found by having a closer look at the operation's multinational composition. The main contributor of troops was Chad, together

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14. See here for instance the article in the Berliner Tageszeitung by Dominik JOHNSON: Umsturz in Zentralafrikanischer Republik. (TAZ, 17.03.2003, p. 11)

with the Republic of Congo and Gabon. The bilateral relations between the CAR and Chad had considerably deteriorated in the years before the coups, especially after both Presidents had accused each other in 2002 of backing rebels on their territories. The overthrow of Patassé therefore considerably met the interests of the Chadian President Idriss Déby who by the way even actively supported the coup of François Bozizé with arms and troops and is still providing the President's life guard in Bangui. This certainly leads to the assumption that the multinational peace mission has obviously been subject to (geo-)political calculations instead of exclusively aiming at consolidating peace, security and stability in the region. Moreover, after the military coup, the CEMAC Heads of State unanimously recognized General Bozizé as new President and urged the AU to follow suit despite the Union's principle of not accepting coup leaders as political leaders.

In a comparable way, the Chadian president Idriss Déby regularly asks his regional partners on their meetings to officially support and confirm him as Head of State and to condemn the numerous putsch attempts he has been victim of in the previous months and years. Déby's most recent attempt in this direction have been the convocation of the extraordinary ECCAS summit in Kinshasa in March 2008 and his efforts to win political support from the other members although the concurrent political crisis in Chad clearly shows the weakness and vulnerability of his authority.

The problem of such an understanding is that it ignores the potential of regional processes to compensate state weakness by supporting, complementing or even partly substituting it in fields of action where single state approaches do not any longer seem appropriate or sufficient. Especially in the 1990's, the transnational dimension of insecurity has been more and more emphasized by the increasing challenge presented by border crossing combatants, criminals or arms traffic, as well as by new awareness of environmental catastrophes and epidemics. In this light, the limited capacities of Central African governments to provide a sufficient level of security, to meet the population's security needs and to control the whole national territory have become more evident, and single state approaches prove more and more inappropriate in an increasing number of fields. In this context, communitarian policies and the promotion of other acting levels beyond the nation state may appear as a possibility, not only to pool resources and capacities but also to allow for an efficient new distribution of tasks and responsibilities between different – state, non-state and supranational – actors.

In Central Africa, such a conception is largely compromised by the fact that security still has a predominant national component and that the aim of regional security policies is seen in strengthening authority. Security is hence closely

linked to the consolidation and strengthening of the existing political structures and systems.

Including or excluding

The implementation of such an approach of regional integration, based on a logic of complementarity, is finally impeded, in Central Africa, by the quasi-exclusion of non-state actors from the regionalisation processes and the formulation and orientation of communitarian security policies.

As the regionalisation process is primarily driven by the states, or more precisely their governments, it does not leave much space for other actors, and even more or less excludes them from intervening and participating. Even if singular initiatives have been launched in the previous years to partly open up the process, non-state actors still have rather marginalised positions in Central Africa's regionalisation. While in other African regional communities, such as the Southern African SADC or the West African ECOWAS, specific civil society forums have been set up in order to give public opinion more strength to influence and contribute to the process, the Central African Heads of State are still rather reluctant to similar developments.[15]

This makes it clear, once again, that regionalisation is not considered as a way to pool capacities and integrate them on a new level of acting but, on the contrary, as an approach of weak regimes to support each other mutually in rebuilding their national capacities.

As a consequence, the regional security approach is basically determined by the states and their direct representatives. It hence primarily focuses on their interests and does not explicitly take into consideration the civil society's concerns.

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15. The West African Civil Society Forum (WASCOF) has been created in 2003 and presents a network of all major societal organisations and institutions in the region. Its threefold aim is to foster dialogue between ECOWAS and the civil society, to control the implementation of common agreements on the national level and to contribute to the promotion of peace and security in the region. WASCOF is based on a complex institutional structure and is part of the ECOWAS institutional architecture in view of enabling its representatives to exert influence on regional governance processes. The SADC Council of NGO (SADC CNGO) has been established in 1998 by major southern African civil society organisations. It acts independently but in close cooperation with the SADC institutions and actors. Its major aim is on the one hand to strengthen the civil society as actor in the regional process and on the other hand to move the process also into fields that are most relevant for the population. There exists a Memorandum of Understanding between the Forum and the SADC, and NGO representatives are regularly invited to present their requirements and recommendations at the beginning of the SADC summits.

This can largely explain why, in Central Africa, public interest in the regionalisation process has been rather low so far.[16]

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16. The problem of weak identification with the regionalisation process by the population has by the way faintly been addressed at the CEMAC Summit of Heads of State in Yaoundé in June 2008. As a response, it was agreed to institute a CEMAC Day to be commemorated every 16 March in each member state.

Towards a New Political Order: Recommendations and Policy Options for a Central African Regional Integration

In summary, it is possible to emphasize three main characteristics of the Central African regional approach that can explain why the contribution towards sustainable security has been considerably unimportant so far.

First, the principal aim being not regional integration but regional intergovernmental cooperation, the Central African security engagement is supposed to primarily strengthen and support the member states' governments through multinational forces and common defence mechanisms and to rebuild their weak and insufficient capacities. It is conceived by the states' representatives as a way to protect their interests, to support political allies and to mutually confirm sovereignty and authority if these are compromised by subversive forces or conflicting interests. In this regard, communitarian security strategies and activities remain quite superficial and are not expected to address issues and policy fields considered as traditional reserve of the state, such as notably questions of domestic policy. As a consequence, the Central African regionalisation process is not supposed to lead to the emergence of a new and strong supranational acting level. Hence, it provides no vital and sustainable solution to the states' incapacity in responding to their populations' security needs and to the partial inappropriateness and inefficiency of single state approaches in addressing security challenges with transnational dimensions or of general regional concern.

Closely linked to this problem, the second concern can be raised about the extent of security actions and policies on the regional level. Operations are primarily reactive and on an ad-hoc basis. They are supposed to end as soon as the national government has overcome its apparent weakness and temporarily regained its proper acting capacity. They are first and foremost to respond to manifestations of instability, such as rebellions, in a member state. Therefore, these policies are not able to provide any sustainable solution to the increased insecurity in Central Africa, notably by also asking for its major causes rooted in the states and their weak governance.

And third, as a result, the process is lacking in self-dynamic and remains significantly depending on the willingness of the member states and their main political decision makers. In this perspective, the provision of security through communitarian action is not conceived in a sense of continuance, pro-activeness and comprehensiveness, and policies are not intended to compensate and comple-

ment national approaches on the long-term where these prove inadequate and insufficient.

From this point of view, regionalisation is not intended, in Central Africa, to generate a new political order based on the idea of integration and power sharing in view of adequately responding to the current security situation. Instead it is aimed to preserve and guarantee the governments' exclusive powers and to consolidate the existing political state-based structures.

"Regionalism à la carte"

As a matter of fact, an intergovernmental security cooperation process as it currently exists in Central Africa may hold a couple of advantages.

Presenting a form of "regionalism à la carte", interstate cooperation is likely to easily benefit from a considerable high level of acceptance. As long as the process' developments do not compromise the members' autonomy and are not requiring many commitments and contributions, political leaders perceive regionalisation rather as an option that helps them, on the contrary, in pursuing their proper interests. This high degree of acceptance is additionally promoted, in Central Africa, by the weak or even inexistent control supranational bodies exercise over the member states. The predominant position of the Conference of Heads of State within the institutional structure leaves the main decision power with the states' representation. The monitoring of their action – or inactivity – is considerably underdeveloped or even inexistent. Communitarian institutions are primarily executing bodies with no significant power. Consequently, their capacities to control the implementation of communitarian policies by the members and to push the process forward by threatening with penalties or exclusion are considerable weak and insignificant. The treaties of CEMAC and ECCAS both foresee the set up of a communitarian Court of Justice to control the respect of communitarian law and the conformity of national policies. In reality, their effective power to control and to apply punitive measures to deviating members is considerably weak. Their functions are largely limited on giving advice in the implementation of treaties and conventions. In a similar way, also non-state actors have very limited influence on the regional process and can't exercise real control over its progress. Although the Central African communities are slowly inviting representatives from the civil society to take part in the process, this participation is more or less limited to their expression of interests and opinions. The main decision power and the effective consideration of these interests within regional policies still remain with the states and their direct representatives. In brief, such a regionalism à la carte offers the states a new plat-

form where their political actors can demonstrate their authority and artificially boost their power without fearing to be pushed into directions that may compromise their interests. This consequently generates a considerably high level of acceptance, especially as far as there is no effective control over the timely payment of contributions and the implementation of policies.

The other side of the coin is however quite problematic. It is worth noting indeed that the interest-driven nature of these processes is likely to easily lead to discordance among the states and consequently generate deadlocks. Because of the cooperation's strictly intergovernmental character and the weakness of control mechanisms, supranational institutions are not able to intervene in order to resolve such impasses and revive the process. Regarding Central Africa, deadlocks in the regionalisation process are usually primarily explained by the absence of a clear lead nation, as well as by the problem of co-existence of two communities that partly encompass the same members and have similar mandates and objectives. Even if these issues are certainly negatively affecting the progress of the process to some degree, its efficiency and timeliness are also considerably hampered by clashes of interests and the hereby generated political divergences and impasses. The emergence of a consensus and the concerted implementation of actions that would be essential for enhancing the process are often impeded by disparate and competing interests among the Heads of State and the lack of adequate (supranational) mechanisms as mediator or driving force. For long, the strained relationship between the Presidents of Gabon and Cameroon, Omar Bongo and Paul Biya, have caused the absence of either the one or the other of both Heads of State at regional summits and complicated joint decisions.[17]

Also in other regions, where the problem of missing lead nation and co-membership is not so evident and where regionalisation processes and joint security mechanisms are often presented as more advanced and developed than in Central Africa, the timely implementation, well-functioning and efficiency of communitarian structures are frequently hampered by political disaccord and discrepancy among member states.

In Southern Africa for instance, the progress of communitarian security initiatives is regularly impeded by the difficulty of SADC member states to adopt a common position towards crises and frictions in the region. Whereas from an

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17. The presence of President Biya and President Bongo at the CEMAC summit in Yaoundé in June 2008 presents a first sign for the normalisation of the two countries' bilateral relations after Paul Biya had assisted the commemoration of the Gabonese National Day in Libreville in August 2007. See also APANEWS (23.06.2008) online on:
http://www.jeuneafrique.com/pays/gabon/article_depeche.asp?art_cle=APA74728omarbcameca0

institutional point of view, the process gives a quite complex and advanced impression, with the South African Republic as main leading force of the regionalisation process, and already substantial contributions to the African Peace and Security Architecture achieved, its credibility is largely compromised by the recurrent lack of consensus on political and security issues such as for instance the crisis in Zimbabwe, the past conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or the intervention in Lesotho. In the last two cases, the interventions by some member states that had initially been presented as SADC missions lacked the necessary communitarian mandate and were subsequently considered as military interventions by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, respectively by South Africa and Botswana.

In a similar way, even in West Africa where the ECOWAS regionalisation process is often presented as showcase, especially as far as security issues are concerned, the integration process' efficiency is constantly challenged by the differing interests and perspectives of member states. The divide is particularly evident between Francophone and Anglophone countries. In September 2003, the ECOWAS community didn't find consensus to unanimously condemn the attempted coup d'Etat in Cote d'Ivoire as negotiations were primarily blocked by a conflict of interests between members supporting the government, such as Liberia, and those accused of backing the rebels, such as Mali and Burkina Faso.

In defiance of its relatively high acceptance, such a "regionalisation à la carte" is therefore unlikely to enable and promote a substantial, consistent and sustainable contribution to the region's security. As has been said, the raising insecurity in Central Africa is a manifestation of the weak capacities of national political structures and the partial inappropriateness of the states to adequately provide security to their populations and guarantee inner stability. As a consequence, regional processes that are not supposed to generate new and better appropriate political order but, on the contrary, to confirm the old ones and consolidate national capacities, do not present the right approach to solve the current insufficiencies and insecurity problem in the region. What is needed is a form of regional cooperation that encourages the partial transfer of competencies and responsibilities from the national level to supranational institutions and non-state actors and proposes a new and more efficient way of power exercise. This would hence allow a form of governance to emerge where responsibilities are distributed among actors on different acting levels, according to their appropriateness, and challenges addressed on the best suited level. The participatory character of this form of regional integration would provide a new basis of legitimacy. It would create a vital alternative to the not any longer appropriate exclusive power exercise of state actors and additionally promote the role and capacity of civil society actors in contributing to and shaping the communitarian process.

Achieving such an integrated form of regionalism would require several commitments from the different concerned actors, above all a fundamental rethinking of regional cooperation.

Central African Governments

The preceding discussion has revealed that Central African regional cooperation is conceived in a way to consolidate the current political structures and to foster the exclusive authority of national states and their representatives. Conscious of their weakness, notably on the global level, national political actors have re-launched regional cooperation in order to intensify intraregional trade in a context of regional stability and absence of major conflicts. They use it thereby primarily to increase the weight of their national economies, to acquire new roles and functions on the communitarian level and to serve their (geo-)political interests.

What would hence be needed is a considerable rethinking and reconceptualisation of regionalisation, not as a mean to artificially boost weak national authority but as a way to achieve continuous stability in the whole region by helping the states reduce their vulnerability in the long term.

In this perspective, regionalisation needs to be understood as an evolutionary process jointly driven by actors on the national, the local or sub-national and the regional or supranational level that act and intervene according to their appropriateness and capabilities. Contrary to the current situation, such a process of supranational regionalisation requires stronger commitments from the states. It is nourished by the transfer of authority and responsibilities from the state level to the other levels and requires moreover greater acceptance towards interference into domestic affairs by supranational policies.

Currently, states' representatives are rather reluctant in this regard. The solution has to lie in that they change their way of perceiving the advantages of regionalisation and start to concentrate in particular on three specific aspects.

First, regional cooperation may allow for a more efficient use of resources and efforts. The still insufficient level of coordination of national policies and the underdeveloped status of the communitarian level, bodies and capacities currently cause a significant spoiling of scarce resources, efforts and capacities. The building and strengthening of communitarian capacities, together with the promotion of communitarian policies and the intensification of cooperation and networking would however allow to better coordinate activities within the

region. The resulting synergies would in return liberate resources that could notably be used for actions that still need to be addressed on the national level.

Regional communities can, secondly, act as mediators of interests. In the currently predominant conception, membership to CEMAC and ECCAS presents for most Central African states a way to better protect and even pursue their (geo-)political interests, by hiding at the same time their weakness and fragility. A better approach would however be to try to align and harmonise national interests on the regional level and to subordinate them to the overall aim of jointly promoting sustainable development and well-being in the whole region. Besides the advantages that such an approach would have for the region's prosperity in general, such a concertation of interests would considerably reduce the risk of deadlocks based on conflicting national interests in decision making processes. It would in addition also minimise the fear of weak and fragile states that their regional "partners" could take advantage of their vulnerability and enforce their political interests against him under the cover of communitarian activities and interventions. On the contrary, if emphasis is put on the promotion of development in the entire region, the vulnerability and fragility of one member would be seen by the others as an obstacle towards achieving the set aim and would hence entail appropriate support measures to again foster the region's development.

Finally, sharing power, notably with the non-state actors and the civil society, has to be perceived as a way to foster and strengthen the currently weak state legitimacy. Giving the society sufficient possibilities for active participation and to influence communitarian policy making would help to better address their needs and concerns and hence to reduce the risk of public discontent nourishing civil tensions and conflicts.

All this however requires the strengthening of regional institutional capabilities in view of building supranational bodies and structures in a way that they could monitor the respect of the jointly set goals and prevent the prevalence and encroachment of national interests.

The Civil Society

Non-state actors should be encouraged to further influence and participate in the regionalisation process as it presents an appropriate way to address their needs and concerns where single state acting proves insufficient to do so. Non-state actors should perceive the cooperation with state actors and with the international community on the communitarian level as a chance for having their

interests better considered. Improving the participatory mechanisms on the communitarian level and making use of them would allow the civil society's actors to counterbalance the intergovernmental nature of the process and to give more importance and attention to issues and concerns other than those emphasized by the states.

Therefore, they should promote regional approaches also in policy fields where these are currently still less developed but where they could ease the satisfaction of people's concerns, such as in social, societal or environmental questions.

For civil societies, regional integration could finally also present an opportunity to better cooperate among them on the intraregional and interregional level, as well as to better communicate with the international community.

The promotion and use of the offered possibilities for such networking has, again, positive effects on the process itself, as it is likely to give it the self-dynamic it is currently still lacking.

The International Community

The role of the international community in this process should be supportive. By recognising the importance of regional approaches for security and stability in Central Africa, the international community should promote the development of strong and operational communitarian bodies and the progression of regional integration beyond the present state of intergovernmental cooperation. Therefore, it should encourage improvements regarding both the intensity and strength, and the content and orientation of cooperation in Central Africa.

As regional integration is also moving forward on the European continent, the European Union should, on the one hand, promote the intensification of the regionalisation process by favouring, when appropriate, bi-regional cooperation to bilateral relations. This could present an additional incentive for Central African states, as well as to the continent in general, to push forward regional processes and give more capacities and responsibilities to supranational institutions as these would then become the main communication partners for the European Union.

The promotion of bi-regional cooperation and the support of the African integration agenda play already an increasing role in the European policy towards the African continent and its countries. One of the objectives of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership adopted in Lisbon in December 2007 is in fact the promo-

tion of the socio-economic and political integration of the African continent as this is considered an essential contribution towards development, economic growth and employment, as well as for the eradication of poverty. Regional communities are hereby considered as key partners for the EU in Africa.[18]

The Strategic Partnership builds in fact on a seven years-long process that has been launched in Cairo in 2000 in view of strengthening the cooperation between the two continents. Over the years, the process has fostered the bi-regional dimension of the dialogue between Europeans and Africans and gives increased priority to the intensification of ties between the EU and the AU, as well as between the EU and African regional organisations. In this perspective, the EU has already started to increasingly develop trading relationships on the regional level through the implementation of specific Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) between the EU and several regional blocs – even though it remains to be seen whether the EPAs will effectively strengthen the regional integration processes. In a similar way, the EU's support of conflict resolution and peace consolidation on the continent is more and more directly addressing regional actors. The 2003 created African Peace Facility is intended to financially support peace keeping operations initiated and implemented by African regional organisations, such as the FOMUC, or by the AU.

The strengthening of the bi-regional dimension of their cooperation with Africa should be for Europeans of particular importance as it brings in fact a double advantage.

While more and more emerging economies, such as notably China, have started to compete for economic, trade and political relations with African countries by offering a "no-string-attached policy", Europe has the advantage that it can directly cooperate with entire regions or even the whole continent by moving its economic and political dialogue from the bilateral to the bi-regional level. This encourages the emergence of a new and comprehensive supranational exchange level that is not easily accessible for most other nation states.[19]

A second advantage can be seen in that the intensification of bi-regional relations with Africa could also help to conciliate the interests of the European states on the continent and to minimise conflicts of interest within the EU. An integrated joint European policy towards Africa and joint cooperation with the regional communities would allow for concerted and coordinated activities in

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18. Council of the European Union (2007). The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. A Joint Africa-EU Strategy. Lisbon, 9 December 2007
19. It has certainly to be recognized that also Japan through TICAD Forum and the USA trough the AGOA have set up integrated policy and economic dialogue with Africa.

order to attenuate and overcome potential rivalries and moreover bypass traditionally rooted bilateral relationships.

Regarding, on the other hand, the content and orientation of regional cooperation in Central Africa, the role of the international community should be to encourage a broader and more comprehensive approach than the current one. Notably as far as security is concerned, the adherence to a narrow conception and the primarily military approach of security challenges considerably impedes a sustainable solution of conflicts as it doesn't sufficiently address the sources located on the socio-economic and political level. The international community should therefore promote a stronger involvement of the civil society in African regionalisation processes in general and support their participation in regional security initiatives.

Civil societies and other non-state actors indeed play a crucial role. While bringing in new capacities and resources, their potential lies especially in moderating the current predominance of states and their interests within the process. Civil society actors are key for re-guiding and re-orienting regionalisation into security relevant fields and exercising control over the effective implementation of policies. This presents a fundamental basis for successful and efficient regional integration, and for encouraging and promoting the exchange, dialogue and cooperation between state and non-state actors.

In this perspective, the international community should particularly support and encourage the process' democratisation and emphasize its capacity to stimulate the process' evolution towards the emergence of new political dynamics. Adequate ways could be presented by the promotion of appropriate interaction facilities for instance in form of forums, internet based exchange platforms and networks.

The role of international community should remain an exclusively supportive one. The goal should be to encourage the regional process' progressing in order to emphasize and promote its potential for the consolidation of security and stability, by always respecting the principle of own responsibility and ownership.

Under such conditions, Central African regional integration could be able to develop its full potential and capacities and present an appropriate and viable way towards guiding the region closer to peace, security and sustainable development.