

8 Politics of regional integration in Central Africa

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INTRODUCTION

It should be acknowledged that regional integration dynamics in Central Africa have been lagging far behind that of western, eastern and southern Africa where important advances have been made over the last decade in the promotion of regional co-operation. Taking the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a case study, this paper analyses the politics of formal regional integration in Central Africa and argues that it is a two-level game. It supports this argument with an overview of the different dynamics of regional integration, and by evaluating the DRC's role in regional organisations.³

The DRC was a deliberated choice. It is generally agreed that stabilisation and pacification of the DRC as well as its economic development strongly rely on regional developments. Arguably because of its geographical position on the continent, the DRC simultaneously belongs to four Regional Economic Communities (RECs), namely CEEAC (Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale, or Economic Community of Central African States), SADC (South African Development Community), COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) and CEPGL (Communauté Economique des

Pays des Grands Lacs or Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries). In addition to these organisations, the DRC participates in several other regional bodies.

Given its demographic and economic potential, it could be expected that the DRC would become a major actor in these organisations and a key player in a regional integration process in the Central Africa Region, similar to for example Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya in their respective regions. However, this has not been the case. From the early 1990s onwards, regional and national political instability as well as violent conflicts have turned the Great Lakes Region into what has been described as a regional 'war complex' and a number of countries into military adversaries. Despite efforts to promote peace that have eased tensions and created new opportunities for regional integration, the DRC has not been able to strengthen its regional position. This can be ascribed to a lack of political vision, political will, human and financial capacities as well as the overall regional climate. Moreover, its current endeavour towards regional integration is not the outcome of a well-defined policy but rather of opportunistic short-term strategies.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part analyses the particular position of the DRC within regional organisations and discusses how internal and external dynamics have influenced the process of regional integration. The second part deals with the prospects and challenges of regional integration in Central Africa.

THE DRC AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION: BETWEEN OPPORTUNISM AND PASSIVITY

This section deals with the politics of regional integration as a two-level game (Putnam 1988), and considers the national dynamics as well as the external settings that influence the process. Regional integration is shaped by internal logics (domestic demands and interests, including those of the decision makers) and external forces (at regional, continental and international levels). It is the entanglement and tension between the two levels that result in a governmental policy or general position towards regionalism.

In this regard, the role of global geopolitics and international actors must not be underestimated. The regional integration processes in (Central) Africa must be contextualised in a broader past and current international agenda. The

colonial legacy is clearly manifested in certain regional bodies such as CEMAC (Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale or Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa), the CEPGL or the East African Community (EAC). Moreover, continental endeavours towards integration that contain important ideological elements – the 'African unity' discourse – as well as regionalisation trends on a global scale – including the European Union model – continue to play an important role. The globalisation and market-driven dynamics have also influenced the shape of the African regionalisation experience.

The involvement of international actors such as the EU or the UN to foster both security and economic regional integration in Africa therefore appears to have had a significant influence on the processes. That is why it is necessary to avoid putting too much emphasis on the 'choices' made by the DRC government with regard to Congolese involvement in regional processes. Such choices are strongly dependent on global pressure and sometimes appear as donor-sponsored initiatives rather than the result of actual internal, political dynamics. Constrained by external and internal factors, the state adopts reactive approaches and positions to the detriment of pro-active policies. This not only applies to the DRC, it is a phenomenon that affects many states with weak institutional capacities and can create challenges of ownership of the regional processes as well as some of the wider policy dimensions.

The strategy, which consists of an attempt to increase the number of alliances through regionalisation processes, provides a useful mechanism for state security/power reinforcement when the state's survival is at stake (Clapham 1996). As an instrument of foreign policy, regional integration is employed as a lever to gain legitimacy and external support or patronage while facing an internal or external threat. As the following analysis will demonstrate, during a period of weakness regional integration has been a channel by means of which the DRC could garner external economic, political and military advantages. In contrast, Mobutu's Zaire used regional integration as a mechanism for controlling its neighbours and securing its allies during a period of relative regional hegemony. The end effect is that it allowed Kinshasa to benefit from various advantages resulting from its multi-memberships of regional organisations, to increase its donor attractiveness, and to activate different leverages depending on particular circumstances.

From this perspective, this section discusses how regional power structures and dynamics have influenced the course and current state of the integration

process in Central Africa. This is illustrated by considering alliances, rivalries, personal power policies as well as the struggle for leadership in Central Africa. This section also looks at the DRC's strategies for participation in four regional communities (CEEAC, CEPGL, SADC and COMESA) taking into account internal and external constraints, including the economic factors. From our analysis it appears that the DRC's political decision to join different regional bodies have been mainly driven by short-term and incidental political logic and alliances, and not by taking into account long-term interests. This is in line with the problematic nature of governance in the DRC.

The politics of regional integration in Central Africa

The DRC occupies a singular position in Africa. Its economic potential, its vast natural resources, as well as its geopolitical significance make it a key player in the heart of the continent and provide an important focal point for its direct neighbours. The relationships between the DRC and most of the sub-Saharan states are characterised by a mix of resistance and attraction, so that it is not surprising that the DRC is a member of four RECs and a multitude of regional intergovernmental bodies.

The DRC and the central region

During the Mobutu era, the Congo/Zaire progressively reached the status of a pivotal state in Central Africa. Soon after Mobutu's rise to power and the consequent stabilisation of the country, regional integration was one of the instruments at the disposal of Mobutu to develop his power politics in Central Africa. With the aim of reshaping the regional process and influencing the region, he succeeded in getting Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) to agree to the creation of a 'Union of the Central African States' (UEAC). Officially founded in April 1968, this initiative clearly rivalled the already established UDEAC (Union Douanière et Economique de l'Afrique Centrale or Central African Customs and Economic Union) from which Chad and the CAR had resigned after long-lasting tensions between these landlocked states and the coastal ones (Gabon and the Republic of Congo (RoC)). However, without the participation of the latter two, this body had very limited economic impact. In December 1968, shortly after the establishment of this union, the CAR, probably under French pressure, quit the organisation before rejoining the UDEAC

in 1971 (Meyer 2006). This signified the end of the project. In 1977 President Mobutu tried to launch a new organisation under the banner of an 'economic community of the central African countries' which would have consisted of CEPGL and UDEAC member states, but again without success (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998). Some years later a similar initiative has been again proposed by Gabon, but in a completely different framework, namely the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action which advocated the creation of an African economic community. The Lagos Plan became a reality with the signing of the CEEAC founding treaty in 1983 in Libreville (Awoumou 2003).

From the above it is clear that politics played a deeply formative role in the shaping of CEEAC and continues to define its functioning today. CEEAC – and the same applies to the evolution of CEMAC – is suffering from a diversion of interests and internal rivalries. The organisation is seriously hampered by struggles for influence and leadership between Gabon and Cameroon, not to mention the rising tensions between the oil-rich Equatorial Guinea and these two countries. As the most senior member of the 'President's club' of the region and former arbitrator in several regional disputes and conflicts, President Omar Bongo of Gabon is trying to retain his political position in Central Africa while President Biya's Cameroon, as the most successful economic state of the region, would like to play a more prominent role that is consistent with its status. President Bongo for his part remains a key player of the French policy in sub-Sahara Africa and wields considerable influence in the so-called 'French-African village'.

The relatively low profile of Angola within the framework of CEEAC is noteworthy in the sense that its accession to CEEAC in 1999 can be seen as a clear bid to re-orientate its strategy towards the Gulf of Guinea. Luanda believes that it can dominate a community in which other hegemonic powers, such as South Africa, would not challenge its leadership (Oxford Analytica 2007). Despite some concrete efforts – the strengthening of its diplomatic presence in the region for instance – Luanda does not appear to have the necessary will to move beyond the wait-and-see stage at present. Angola has already demonstrated that it is able to influence the geopolitical situation of Central Africa *inter alia* through its decisive interventions during conflicts in the RoC and the DRC.⁴ Despite recent tension with the DRC, Angola remains a key ally of President Kabila. Luanda remains a major military power in the region and continues to increase its economic position through oil exploitation and a savvy policy towards China, Brazil, the United States and Europe.

The intervention of FOMUC (Force Multinationale en Centrafrique or Multinational Force in the CAR deployed by CEMAC at the end of 2002) clearly reveals the Central African alliances. Initially the aim was to ensure the political survival of former President Patassé, but then the countries in the region collaborated to bring him down through a rebellion led by the current President Bozizé. The key ally in this shift was Chad, who maintained a considerable military presence to protect Bozizé. The DRC was also involved in this episode of the violent political history of the CAR. Patassé was an ally of former rebel leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba, who used it as a rear base for his own rebel movement. He deployed troops in support of Patassé – also backed by Libya – which explains why the fall of Patassé put additional pressure on Bemba to accept the power-sharing agreement in the DRC.

The DRC and the eastern region: CEPGL

The history of the CEPGL is also a perfect illustration of the dominance of political objectives over economic ones. Its creation goes back to 1976 and is mainly the result of Joseph Mobutu's attempts to maintain its regional pre-eminence, for which regional integration was a useful strategy. The CEPGL's objective of mutual economic development was an ideal instrument by which Zaire could keep its small neighbours under scrutiny and advance internal and external security concerns in the Great Lakes Region.⁵ Moreover, Rwanda and Burundi could be useful political and strategic allies in Mobutu's quest for regional leadership – notably against Uganda and Anglophone Africa. At the same time Mobutu needed to secure the support of these countries against internal dissension, including Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Parti de la Révolution Populaire. In this regard, the strong personal and political relationship that Mobutu maintained with the Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana was crucial for Kinshasa, making Rwanda a key ally of the Mobutu regime in the region. However, relations between both Zaire and Rwanda on the one hand and Burundi on the other were tense. Border incidents as well as alleged involvement of Kinshasa and Kigali in Burundi's internal political situation created a climate of distrust between the CEPGL partners and hindered the overall functioning of the community.

Despite these problems the CEPGL had some successes, such as achievement of the freedom of movement in the Great Lakes thanks to the so-called 'CEPGL card', the building of the Ruzizi II dam and agricultural programmes. However,

from an assessment of the process during this period, it is obvious that the CEPGL was used as an instrument to serve the political and strategic interests of Zaire. The organisation never went beyond a club of heads of state who all used it as a tool to protect the status quo in their respective countries. The envisaged security served more to protect the rulers' chances of staying in power than to benefit their populations. However, the CEPGL did facilitate the cross-border traffic of people and goods, which gave impetus to the development of largely informal regional trading networks and connected local markets in Rwanda, Zaire and Burundi to each other.

The start of the Rwandan war in 1990 and the renewed civil war in Burundi in 1993 plunged the CEPGL into stagnation. Several attempts have been made to resuscitate the organisation: After an unrealistic failed attempt in 1994–1995 during the Mobutu era, Laurent-Désiré Kabila initiated a conference in 1997 but this never took place (Mwaka Bwenge 2006). The latest attempt dates to 2004, following the end of the second war in the DRC, and eventually succeeded in April 2007 mainly due to considerable financial involvement and political lobbying by the international community. In this sense it should be noted that the international community attaches more importance to the CEPGL than does its members. Several countries have stressed the need for a renewal of this organisation, yet, as will be illustrated below, seemingly the CEPGL member states do not share this need.⁶ The effective revival of the organisation today is hindered by a lack of political will, weak institutional capabilities and political divergences between its member states. With the same causes producing the same effects, it seems doubtful that the CEPGL can be effectively restored without a fundamental change in political positions of its member states. The lack of political will is in part the result of the Congolese wars. The issues between Rwanda and the DRC have not yet been fully resolved, as it remains closely linked to the prevailing unstable situation in the Kivu provinces.

The sluggishness of the revitalisation process as well as the current stasis also indicates that regional political and security obstacles that are extremely difficult to overcome. Indeed, the same analysis about the political motivations of the member states applies to the present situation, but in reverse. Rwanda especially seems to favour the idea whereas the DRC, despite official statements, seems to be rather reluctant. The ensuing advantages for Rwanda would indeed be significant, mostly for its economic sector. The country is suffering particularly from energy shortages and therefore would be more than eager to

reinvigorate the projects around the Sinelac and the hydro-electric generators on the Ruzizi River.⁷ Moreover, Rwanda could take advantage of broader access to the Kivus market as well as of joint exploitation of shared resources such as the methane in the Kivu Lake.

The DRC, however, is not keen to collaborate on common economic projects with a state that is still widely regarded as an enemy. Kinshasa perceives the revival of the CEPGL as a convenient instrument at the disposal of the Rwandan government which would allow it to retain its influence on the economic and security issues within the eastern provinces of the DRC. Furthermore, some in the DRC fear the progressive incursion of Rwandans and that they would settle in the eastern provinces. In this regard, the issue of double citizenship plays a role. In order to prevent the organisation from focusing too much on Great Lakes issues and Rwanda from using it as a tool for its own political and economic purposes, the DRC intends to extend CEPGL activities to the whole country.

For its part, Uganda seems to be hesitating between two options, despite pressure from the current member states and the international community that it should form part of the community. On the one hand, Uganda sees the CEPGL as a redundant body which could become a competitor of EAC, but on the other hand, Kampala would like to collaborate in certain areas and benefit from the energy programmes.

The DRC and the southern region: SADC

The case of the DRC's SADC membership is particularly relevant when looking at internal constraints and dynamics determining an integration choice. The DRC became a member of SADC in 1998 shortly after Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rise to power and a couple of months before the outbreak of the second Congo war.⁸ This decision was based on a purely political and immediate survival rationale. Because of deteriorating relations with his former mentors – especially Rwanda – Kabila needed to gather support elsewhere, since CEEAC could not provide him with any support – the community was at this time rooted in profound lethargy and Rwanda was still one of the member states.

The DRC accession to SADC – mainly supported by Zimbabwe and Angola – opportunely allowed Kabila to demand the activation of the SADC security mechanism in his favour when the rebel movement started its military campaign in eastern DRC. The Congolese appeal for SADC military assistance

caused dissension within the organisation and SADC leaders could not reach a final consensus on a common approach to the crisis. In August 1998 Zimbabwe (then chair of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security), Namibia and Angola decided to intervene 'on behalf of SADC' – outside a clear and unquestionable SADC mandate – and to provide Kabila with military assistance against the rebel groups supported by Kampala and Kigali. They did so by concluding a Mutual Defence Pact (Ngoma 2005). This direct intervention in the conflict effectively saved the Kabila regime by stopping a direct attack on Kinshasa. The troops from Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia remained in the DRC until 2002. Angola remains militarily involved in the DRC and is also a partner in the different security sector reform programmes. Kabila's political opportunism echoes the political and security motivations behind the intervention of the 'SADC allies'. It gave them an opportunity to ensure the protection of their economic and political interests in the DRC as well as to prevent the accession of an unfavourable regime in Kinshasa.⁹ Moreover, the Congo conflict could have had a spill-over effect and jeopardised peace in the entire region.

Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that the current level of DRC involvement in SADC seems relatively low despite strong economic relations between the Katanga province and the SADC countries. We could therefore question the actuality of its membership in the southern community. SADC has concluded protocols (such as the trade protocol) that the DRC has neither signed nor ratified (Jakobeit et al 2005). SADC is more engaged in the political and security field, such as a mission to support the implementation of the Nairobi and Goma processes.

Political economy of regional integration

Beyond the political motivation, it is important to underscore the economic factors that have also played a significant role in the Congo's efforts to strengthen its regional ties through REC memberships. The DRC economy is predominantly based on three major trans-border economic basins around the Katanga, the Bas-Congo and the Kivu provinces. However, these basins are poorly connected with the rest of the country because of a lack of efficient communication and transport infrastructure. In this sense, the DRC can be considered to be a semi-landlocked country. As Pourtier (2003a) points out, 'the DRC's territory is constructed on the peripheries around an inaccessible centre'. The result is that

most of the merchandise is directly exported via neighbouring countries: from the two Kasai and Katanga towards southern Africa; from the Oriental Province towards Uganda and Kenya; the Kivus towards Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi; the Bas-Congo towards the ocean, Angola and northward towards Douala; and the Equateur towards the CAR. Through informal trade flows, investments and emigration, the economy of the Katanga, which is the DRC's most industrialised region, is relatively well integrated into SADC markets. The same applies to the Kivus and the COMESA economies, which explains the DRC's accession to that REC (Pourtier 2003b). From this perspective closing of the border with Rwanda for instance would be particularly harmful for the Kivu provinces and have severe socio-economic repercussions.¹⁰ Regional economic integration therefore constitutes an important stake for the DRC and its economic development. The Congolese government's lack of capacity to exercise control over its borders and trade flows largely explains why these are still controlled mainly by informal networks.

The DRC can count on vast natural resources and its economic potential has long been depicted as one of the most promising of the continent. Congolese natural resources remain at the heart of regional politics, as was illustrated during the past conflicts, when these resources were mainly exploited by regionalised, informal and illicit networks. This regionalism 'from below' included trans-border and clandestine networks and involves a multitude of state and non-state actors, all aimed at illegally exploiting and profiting from the Congolese natural resources (MacLean 2003; Taylor 2003). Natural resources have not only helped to shape the power strategies pursued by the warring parties but have also offered opportunities for local and international actors, both legal and criminal, and have provided an important livelihood for rural populations – who were unable to continue their agricultural activities due to insecurity during the war.

With the ongoing stabilisation of the country, foreign investors are increasingly eager to develop trade and economic activities. Economic actors of neighbouring countries have found formal regional integration to be a suitable tool for facilitating the import of raw materials and reaching the DRC market. There are also huge energy stakes: The hydro-energy projects around the Inga III dam (3 500 MW) as well as the 'Grand Inga' and its huge energy potential (39 000 MW) are of interest of its direct neighbours and beyond. The 'struggle' to link the African national electric networks to Inga has already become a

reality. Among the most interested partners are the countries of the PEAC (Pool Energétique de l'Afrique Centrale or Central Africa Power Pool),¹¹ a specialised organ of CEEAC as well as the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) whose purpose is to connect SADC member states into a single power electricity grid. In October 2004 five members of the SAPP – the Congolese SNEL, the South African Eskom, the Angolan Empresa Nacional De Electricidade, the Namibian NamPower and the Botswana Power Corporation – set up a joint venture called WESTCOR (Western Power Corridor) which will pool regional energy resources and commercialise the projected Inga III hydro-electric project. This is of strategic importance particularly to Pretoria since South Africa is currently experiencing chronic power shortages. The interconnection of networks through the Inga hydro-electric projects serve as an important integrative booster for the continent.

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

In this section the prospects and the challenges that the DRC is facing in terms of regional integration are analysed. Compared to previous periods, the DRC now appears to be placing greater emphasis on integration within the 'core' of the Central Africa Region. This is not to say that the DRC is putting all its eggs in one basket by putting aside its commitment to other regional organisations. It is important for the DRC to be able to maintain close ties with eastern and southern Africa both for economic and political reasons. This evolution goes in hand with an ongoing effort to consolidate the integration processes in Africa. Yet serious weaknesses such as a lack of political leadership and appropriate institutions hinder the integration of the Central Africa countries. This section concludes by asserting the need for the establishment of a clear, comprehensive and coherent strategy from the DRC with regard to regional integration.

Refocusing on its 'central' integration?

Some developments indicate that the DRC is currently turning its attention towards a northern/western integration – and thus a more 'central' integration. In 2005, in the framework of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiation with the EU, Kinshasa quit the eastern and southern African bloc which then consisted of 16 of the 19 COMESA member states. The purpose of this

move was to enable the DRC to join the CEMAC group, consisting of CEMAC countries and São Tomé and Príncipe – the so-called CEMAC+ group.¹² The Congolese Minister for Trade and Economy, André Philippe Futa, recently confirmed this intention (Buakasa 2008). This is a significant development, since the deepening of regional integration is one of the key principles guiding the EPA's negotiations. One must nevertheless recognise that this stated objective presents serious challenges: as mentioned in a joint Overseas Development Institute-European Center for Development Policy Management report (Stevens et al 2008), there is currently little harmonisation between the EPA agenda and the regional integration process in Africa. Still, when each of the regional bodies achieves a customs union – COMESA scheduled its completion for 2008 whereas SADC foresees that it will be completed in 2010¹³ (Qobo 2007) – the DRC will have to choose which union it will join, as individual countries cannot participate in more than one customs union.

The aforementioned reorientation might therefore indicate that the DRC favours an economic integration with its 'central' neighbours – even if this may not be a definitive, long-term policy. The positive economic benefits could be significant; there is important potential for developing a regional integration axis and a trans-border economic basin around the Congo and Ubangui rivers. This river basin is particularly well endowed with natural resources (hydro-energy, forests, agricultural resources, oil, etc). A rehabilitation and development of the waterways could provide a unique opportunity for economic development and regional co-operation.

However, in view of its relatively important trading links with the southern and eastern African areas, it would have been logical based on purely economic grounds, for the DRC to have focused its integration efforts both on SADC and COMESA. The current intra-trade level within the CEMAC+ region is especially limited¹⁴ and does not offer the same economic opportunities as the other groupings. This has been confirmed by a recent survey on regional economic potential, which was carried out at the request of the DRC government. It concluded that COMESA integration represents the best option in terms of economic development.¹⁵ The Federation of the Enterprises in Congo also appears to prefer negotiations within the framework of the SADC or the ESA format (Buakasa 2008). Therefore it would seem that the decision to join CEMAC+ has been driven both by external and internal political factors. First, it should be noted that some of the CEMAC countries as well the European

Commission played a considerable role in integrating the DRC in the negotiating group. Second, its relations with its eastern neighbours remain volatile. Finally, Kinshasa has progressively been gaining self-confidence after years of conflict and now appears to want to play a greater and more pivotal role in 'central' integration. In this position it would not compete with the hegemonic powers such as South Africa. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the DRC, in 2008, is occupying the CEEAC presidency, which could be taken as a sign of renewed interest by Kinshasa in its 'central' neighbours.

Towards a gradual rationalisation/consolidation

The integration dynamics in Central Africa are in a gradual process of rationalisation; CEEAC and CEMAC are coming progressively closer as a result of co-ordination initiatives and co-operation programmes in various areas. The process started in April 2005 after the signing of a co-operation agreement in Libreville between CEMAC, CEEAC and the regional office of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and has already resulted in some interesting decisions (made at the Douala experts meetings in November 2007), such as the application of the same common external tariffs and the harmonisation of commercial laws. In fact, CEMAC could in the future function as a sub-group of CEEAC¹⁶ which could possibly eventually culminate in full assimilation. This notion is in line with the conclusions reached at the CEEAC Brazzaville summit in October 2007, which called on the president of the CEMAC commission and secretary-general of the CEEAC secretariat to develop, through a steering committee, a framework for the harmonisation of the policies, programmes and activities of the two organisations.

The ultimate goal is to let these bodies give way to a unique community in charge of the integration of the whole region.¹⁷ However, important political divergences between the Central African leaders could prevent the fulfilment of this ambitious objective. At this time it remains uncertain whether the situation will ultimately be to the advantage of CEEAC or CEMAC. It is true that CEEAC has gained a more prominent stature in comparison to CEMAC within the framework of gradually realising continental integration. At the 2006 AU Banjul summit CEEAC was confirmed and designated as one of the eight recognised RECs, while CEMAC was not (AU 2006). This dynamic could neverthe-

less speedily reverse in favour of its 'sister community' as a result of a changed outlook of the heads of states.

Such an integration would be in line with a general trend towards consolidation which is taking place at the continental level. Encouraged by the international community – the EU among others – and continental endeavours towards the Abuja objectives,¹⁸ the South African Customs Union and SADC as well as COMESA and the EAC respectively are making overtures to each other to harmonise their programmes and rationalise their memberships (Qobo 2007). In line with this a joint summit is being organised in October 2008 in order to start negotiations for a grand free trade area between the EAC, COMESA and SADC.

Rationalisation and consolidation also affect the integration dynamics in eastern Africa. There are indications that Burundi and Rwanda are increasingly oriented towards their eastern neighbours. Both countries recently joined the EAC which is becoming more dynamic than other RECs. They rely strongly on the EAC member states for land-based transit and foreign trade (Pourtier 2003a). The advantages of the eastern community apparently outweigh that of the adjacent organisations of Central Africa. This gravitation towards eastern African organisations is confirmed by the fact that Burundi has recently applied to join EASBRIG while Rwanda has been a member of since its inception (Cilliers 2008).

Searching for regional leadership and political vision

The current weaknesses of the 'central' integration project are intrinsically linked to an absence of balancing mechanisms which could overcome problems with collective action when trying to reach and promote a co-operative integration (Mattli 1999). This relates to the difficulties in realising integrative attempts, even when regional integration is rationally desired by all actors because of the economic and political mutual benefits that would flow from it. In reality, the central African countries do not play either a purely competitive or co-operative game. The policies on integration generally contain both competitive and co-operative elements. Basically, there are two kinds of impediments to co-operation: first, the problem of free-loaders and the self-interested behaviour of those hoping to obtain short-term gains and second, the issue of co-ordinating common objectives. In Central Africa states tend to consider regional integration as a zero-sum game, in which there are winners and losers, determined

by whether a member state manages to maximise its own security, political or economic gains, at the expense of that of another state. The commitment to regional integration seems limited. Regional (geo)politics and the interests linked to regional integration have not always matched, to the detriment of progress towards integration.

To overcome these dilemmas, one or more states must take the lead to facilitate the resolution of collaboration/co-ordination games. Moreover, it requires strong institutional mechanisms which could monitor and compel the states to implement joint decisions. The Central African region lacks both for it on the whole does not have appropriate follow-up and enforcement mechanisms. The executive secretariats or the courts of justice are not sufficiently empowered with the adequate and decisive authority required to drive the process. In fact, integration efforts are characterised by marked inter-governmentalism and accompanying challenges, such as fragile institutions, inadequate transfers of power to supranational entities, states' primacy in the decision-making process, concentration of the competencies in the conferences of heads of state, limited financial and human involvement from the member states, and a recurrent lack of enforcement of the common legislation (Meyer 2006).

Perhaps more importantly, there is also no driving force which could stimulate the integration and foster the reform agenda. There are currently no clear leader(s) who could take up this role and develop a long-term vision on regional integration. The DRC could in principle take the lead but is at present a political and military dwarf which does not have the capacity to lead on the strategic and security policies of Central Africa. Furthermore, its recovery could create renewed tensions and indeed become problematic for the deepening of regional integration. In a sense, regional integration in Central Africa is facing a paradox: on the one hand neighbouring countries do not have any interest in seeing the emergence of a giant at their borders. On the other hand, if the DRC does not play a greater role, it could jeopardise the whole process. Neither Gabon nor Cameroon is big enough to take up this role single-handedly, and will only play a significant role if they succeed in reducing their rivalries and act in concert. As for Angola, it still has to deal with considerable internal economic and social constraints, which at present prevent it from accepting greater regional responsibility in Central Africa despite its military and financial means.

From a Congolese national perspective, it is difficult to identify any long-term political vision. As we saw earlier, the DRC is simultaneously a member

of a number of regional bodies (which are in some cases redundant). In reality this multi-membership places serious constraints on the DRC and has several drawbacks, among them high costs, membership arrears, division of meagre diplomatic, economic, human capacities and energies, conflicting interests and a lack of external credibility.

Accordingly, a strategy designed to rationalise this multi-membership policy could prove fruitful. Indeed, the DRC will ultimately have to prioritise one regional organisation or another in order to avoid committing itself to conflicting measures or policies that could arise if the different communities achieve full integration. The DRC strategy should be integrated into a long-term and comprehensive policy regarding regional integration. It should be comprehensive and clearly define obtainable and sustainable objectives, which should be based on an in-depth and realistic analysis of long-term economic and political interests. It should be supported by sufficient financial and human resources and specific instruments, including tailored training for diplomats on relevant issues and the development of a placement policy for Congolese officials to be integrated within regional institutions.

CONCLUSION

Since the middle of the 1990s, the traditional conception of security – seen as the absence of any military threat against the state – has been challenged by a human-centred definition of security. Yet major threats to human security have a regional/transnational nature. Environmental disasters, diseases, protracted conflicts and their spill-over effects do not usually stop at the border of a country. A state acting unilaterally is ill-equipped to deal efficiently with such threats, even more so when the state in question is a fragile one. Moreover, the conflicts which have agitated a number of Central African states in recent years and have had disastrous effects upon the local populations, have demonstrated the patent incapacity of those states to ensure a secure environment for their citizens. Thus, some parts of human security would appear to be better handled through a regional channel. Several regional organisations in Africa have recently tried to expand their capacities in the field of security – partly because internal conflicts were one of the main roots of their prolonged lethargy – and also to provide an institutionalised framework for co-ordinated and multilateral actions, including for the collective management of security risks. However, these regional integration efforts

have not yet delivered the economic, political and security benefits that may have been expected when the different agreements were adopted years ago. Compared with the integration dynamics in other parts of Africa, the poor results of the Central African experience are particularly striking.

The lethargy of the Central Africa Region can be explained by several political and economic factors. One element is the regional (geo)politics of antagonism and alliance, which have largely shaped the process of integration. A second element is the lack of leadership and political will as well as the absence of adequate institutions empowered with an appropriate level of monitoring and enforcement authority. Moreover, common characteristics of Central African states, such as over-centralisation and concentration of power in the hands of a very small elite, as well as their related shortcomings have been reproduced at the regional level. As Qobo (2007) rightly notes, '... Africa's regional integration project as well as its slow and tortuous integration into the global economy is an integration of incomplete states'. In Central Africa fragile, state-centred regional structures focusing on the short-term safeguarding of national economic, political and security interests have been the main characteristics of integration processes. For most of the Central African regimes, regionalism has been an instrument they could use to pursue their own agendas and further their short-term interests and/or to enhance prestige and their regional diplomatic profiles. The Kinshasa Extraordinary Summit on the Chad crisis in February 2008 corroborated the accuracy of this statement. It allowed President Kabila to play a more prominent role on the regional scene and to gather regional support for Deby's allied regime.

In view of all these elements it is not surprising that regional organisations in Central Africa find it difficult to move beyond simple co-operation agencies and mutual reinforcement mechanisms for state security. Countries in the region continue to favour a traditional military approach to crises, as the analysis of the protocol on the establishment of COPAX (Conseil de Paix et de Sécurité de l'Afrique Centrale or Peace and Security Council of Central Africa) or even the FOMUC intervention in CAR demonstrates: the operation has not really taken into account either the root causes of the conflict or its human dimension (Meyer 2006). Although several recent developments, including the launching of ICGLR, are encouraging in this regard, a greater involvement of non-state actors and the private sector, as well as the strengthening of the role of the regional parliaments in the integration dynamics, could contribute to a more comprehensive approach which also takes into consideration the human dimensions of security.

In this overall process, the case of the DRC is especially relevant. From our analysis it can be concluded that both political motivations and economic incentives have played a major role in the DRC's efforts to strengthen its regional ties through REC memberships. This is not to say that the DRC's integration policy is the result of a well-defined and well-designed strategy. The CEEAC presidency of the DRC illustrates the lack of vision inherent in the DRC regional policy. In fact, this presidency is supported by neither a real political project nor a clear programme of action. Several factors have contributed to this situation. First, the DRC is a fragile, post-conflict state that still has to deal with serious internal security challenges. Simply stated, Kinshasa currently lacks the financial and human capacity to deal efficiently with regional integration processes. Second, there is a lack of political will coupled with shortcomings concerning the ownership of the decisions taken at the regional level. This is among others linked to a certain sensitivity regarding the issue of sovereignty. The governmental policy towards regionalism is fundamentally marked by distrust as it can imply interference and delegation of powers to a supranational authority. Furthermore, lack of consistency within the government hampers the development of a consensual policy. Lastly, the constraints related to the critical role played by its provinces (Katanga, Kivus, Bas-Congo) at the borders in the definition of a national position regarding the regional integration issue should not be underestimated. A definitive choice concerning the integration in a unique regional body would at this time be difficult to make: Kinshasa has to take into consideration the sometimes contradictory economic interests of these provinces.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are recent interesting developments in this field that can be regarded as steps towards a greater commitment of the government to regional integration. Apart from the CEEAC presidency, the DRC is chairing the Nile Basin Initiative for one year from July 2008 onwards after having paid its long overdue contribution. Moreover, the DRC is currently in a process of joining the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa. Finally, Kinshasa will host the next summit of heads of states of the ICGLR in December 2008.

Overall, it remains to state that any analysis of this process will necessarily conclude with the impression that the DRC's policy towards regional integration is driven mainly by a combination of opportunism and passive and reactive behaviour.

NOTES

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- 2 Koen Vlassenroot is the Director of the Central Africa Programme of Egmont and Professor of Political Science at the University of Ghent (Belgium).
- 3 The analysis of the processes of multiform informal regional integration offered by a multiplicity of non-state actors, including civil societies, transnational corporations, cross-border small-scale traders and illicit networks, is beyond the scope of this paper. However this dimension – the ‘new regionalism approach’ – has a particular resonance in Central Africa. As most of the Central African states are to be considered fragile, with limited control over their territory and weak capacities in the delivery of basic services to their population, a multitude of non-state actors have come to the fore and have established informal regional and cross-border networks that have resulted in a ‘regionalism from below’. The context of protracted conflict has offered particularly propitious conditions for the development of such networks, be it licit or illegal.
- 4 Angola’s initial reasons for intervention in this country were based upon its domestic war with UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola or the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and the need to secure the oil-rich Cabinda enclave.
- 5 The safe-guarding of state security was incidentally at the core of the CEPGL project. Article 2 of its founding treaty states: ‘La Communauté a pour objectifs: 1. D’assurer d’abord et avant tout la sécurité des Etats et de leurs populations de façon qu’aucun élément ne vienne troubler l’ordre et la tranquillité sur leurs frontières respectives’ (CEPGL 1976, art 2).
- 6 The re-launch of CEPGL is benefiting from considerable regional and international attention. As preliminary funding, €50 million have been put forward by the European Commission. Donors such as Belgium, the Netherlands and South Africa have also showed an interest in strengthening the organisation and in co-operating to further its development. At regional level, CEPGL has been designated as a priority in the framework of International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).
- 7 Rwanda and Burundi are heavily dependent on hydro-electric dams for the provision of electricity. One of the priorities of the reinvigorated CEPGL is therefore to rehabilitate and refurbish the Ruzizi II dam as well as to connect the electric networks between the three countries. The erection of a new hydraulic dam, Ruzizi III (82 MW), on the river by the year 2012 is also foreseen (CEPGL 2007). Feasibility studies have begun for a fourth dam on the same river which will have about a 205 MW potential.
- 8 As Ngoma (2004) rightly pointed out, ‘it is notable that the SADC regional grouping refused to accept Zaire into the organisation and yet later accepted Laurent Kabila’s “Democratic Republic of Congo”, which was democratic in name only’. Besides, it appears that the accession of the DRC into SADC increased tensions between Kabila and Museveni to a point of no return (Clark 2001).

- 9 Some analysts, such as Ngoma (2004, 2005) do not share this point of view.
- 10 In this sense, it was observed that the Kenya crisis in the spring of 2008 also affected the eastern DRC's economy. One example is the regional trade in petrol; because petrol no longer arrived from the Mombasa port, fuel shortages occurred in eastern DRC
- 11 The DRC is also part of the Eastern Africa Power Pool aimed at strengthening the connection between the countries' power grids. The participating states are the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Egypt.
- 12 The EPAs were due to be signed by 31 December 2007. However, to date no agreement has been concluded between the Central Africa Region as a whole and the EU. Cameroon is the only state in this group that has signed an interim EPA, though limited to goods. Negotiations are therefore continuing. The DRC currently benefits from the 'everything but arms' initiative thanks to its status of least development country. This means that Kinshasa has duty-free and quota-free access to the EU. With regard to the ESA side, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda have signed an interim EPA with the EU as a bloc. The Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe concluded another one while the rest of the ESA members have not agreed to any accord (Stevens et al 2008).
- 13 In the treaty establishing the community (art 27), a customs union is also meant to emerge from the CEEAC but in view of the current state of affairs, this seems a remote objective whose point of achievement has been postponed constantly.
- 14 The exports and imports within the community represent 0,8 per cent and 1,4 per cent respectively of the total trade (Fontagne et al 2008).
- 15 Interview with a government official in April 2008.
- 16 A division of labour could be easily envisaged, in which CEMAC could focus on economic and monetary issues while CEEAC could take charge of peace and security issues. The handover of FOMUC by FOMAC in July 2008 points in this direction.
- 17 CEEAC 2007. This new dynamic is in line with a financial agreement concluded in January 2003 between the EU and CEEAC/CEMAC, which is conditional on the merger of the two organisations.
- 18 See for instance the Accra Declaration (AU 2007); the Protocol on Relations between the AU and the RECs (AU 2008a); and the draft report (AU 2008b).

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