The democratization of international organizations

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Economic Community of Central African States

by

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CENTRE FOR STUDIES ON FEDERALISM

1. Introduction

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS; in French: CEEAC) has been set up in 1983 by eleven Central African states. Its initial goal was to promote exchange and collaboration among the members and give an institutional and legal framework to their cooperation. Compared to the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and the Economic Community of Great Lake Countries (CEPGL), ECCAS is the largest of the three economic communities in Central Africa. Except for Rwanda, it regroups the members of CEPGL – Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – and CEMAC – Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo Brazzaville and Equatorial Guinea - as well as Angola and Sao Tome and Principe.[1] Covering an area of some 6,4 million km^2 (approximately 22% of the African continent), ECCAS has a total population of some 135 million (approximately 13% of Africa's population).

During the 1990's, the Community entered a severe crisis, due to financial and political problems of its members. Between 1992 and 1997, ECCAS was fully paralysed and its institutions inactive. The revival in 1998 was accompanied by a reform of the Community's institutional architecture and a broadening of the agenda beyond the exclusively economic focus and towards political and security issues.

This chapter assesses and evaluates the democratic nature of ECCAS and emphasizes major challenges ahead. It focuses particular attention on the different efforts and initiatives undertaken since 1998 to promote democratic governance within the Community. Both the institutional structures and especially the planned Community Parliamentary Assembly as well as ways to involve the civil society in the regionalisation process are hereby part of the analysis.

A first section gives a presentation of ECCAS' history, mission and institutional structure. A second section then assesses the state of democratic governance on the ECCAS level by applying the IDW macro-indicators. In a final section, major challenges ahead are outlined and discussed.

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[1] Rwanda withdrew its membership to ECCAS in 2007.

2. Historical and institutional outline

2.1. The "creations" of ECCAS: initial difficulties, hibernation and re-launch

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) was created in 1983 as part of the Lagos Plan of Action, adopted by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) to promote the establishment of a single Pan-African common market by the year 2000. [2] The main initial objective of the Community was to prepare, on the regional level, for continent-wide economic integration. ECCAS began functioning in 1985, when the founding treaty had been ratified by all members, Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo Brazzaville and Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sao Tome and Principe. Over the years, the Community's membership underwent several fluctuations: In 1999 Angola changed its initial observer status against full membership, and in 2007 Rwanda, struggling with coordinating its membership in four regional communities, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), CEPGL and ECCAS, quitted ECCAS in 2007.

Set up in the wake of the Lagos Plan of Action, ECCAS was initially conceived as a pillar of the African Economic Community (AEC). It was considered a step within the broad project to create an African common market. Its central objective was defined as promoting and strengthening economic and social cooperation and self-sustained development "in order to achieve collective self-reliance, raise the standard of living of its peoples, increase and maintain economic stability, foster close and peaceful relations between member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent" (ECCAS 1983: Art.4). To realize this aim, the 1983 adopted treaty provides a road map towards the establishment of a regional single market, including the abolishment of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the set up of an external

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[2] 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 on a conference in Lagos, Nigeria, by African political leaders. 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.

common customs tariff and a common trade policy towards third countries, the progressive attainment of free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, as well as the harmonisation of national policies in a number of policy fields, such as industry, transport, energy and agriculture. (Meyer 2006)

In its first decade of existence, ECCAS only showed poor performance, and contacts with AEC remained considerably limited. From the 1990's on, the Community suffered from the lack of commitment of its members and their failure to regularly pay their contributions and provide sufficient resources and capacities. In addition, Community activities were affected by the rise of crises and conflicts in the region. In 1992, ECCAS entered a state of complete inactivity for several years. While the financial bottlenecks largely hindered the proper functioning of regional institutions and implementation of policies and activities, the conflict proneness of the region and especially the engagement of some members on opposite sides in the DRC war paralysed the economic cooperation and exchange within the Community (ibid).

At an extraordinary summit held in Libreville, ECCAS states convened in 1998 to give new impetus to their cooperation and re-launch the regionalisation process. The Community embarked on a wide institutional reform and revised of the agenda. The promotion of economic cooperation and development through the progressive creation of a Central African single market was kept as the main central aim. Formal contacts with AEC were established in October 1999 and the importance of ECCAS as major economic community in Central Africa confirmed on the continental level.

In addition, the Heads of State decided to put a new focus of their cooperation on peace and security. Indeed, the experience of the past years made sates increasingly aware that the achievement of the set economic goals requires a situation of political stability and security. Trade and cooperation may indeed prove impossible as long as partner countries are in a state of war. Based on these considerations, it was decided to enlarge ECCAS' mandate and to add the joint promotion of peace, security and stability as a new objective.

At their summit in Equatorial Guinea's capital Malabo in June 1999, the Heads of State defined four main priority fields for the Community:

- to develop capacities to maintain peace, security and stability, which are essential prerequisites for economic and social development;

- to develop physical, economic and monetary integration;
- to develop a culture of human integration; and
- to establish an autonomous financing mechanism for ECCAS.

2.2. ECCAS' institutional architecture

After ECCAS' revival, the Central African Heads of State also agreed to revise the Community's institutional structure and to create a number of new institutions besides the already existing ones.

2.2.1. Already existing institutions

The main decision making bodies still remain the Conference of Heads of State and the Council of ministers.[3]

The Conference presents the supreme authority of ECCAS. It gathers once a year the member states' political leaders. The Conference is entitled to formulate the overall policy of the Community and defines major policy orientations. It monitors the implementation of Community decisions and regulations by every member state. In case of delay or default, it may report to the Community Court of Justice, as soon as the latter will have become operational. Moreover, the Conference determines the staff regulations of the General Secretariat and appoints the Secretary-General and the deputy Secretaries-General, as well as the Financial Controller and the Accountant. It prepares ECCAS' annual budget and fixes the contributions due by every member state.

In the performance of its duties, the Conference is assisted by the Council of Ministers. The Council is composed of the member states' Ministers responsible for economic development matters. The Council meets twice a year in regular session. It is responsible for the functioning and development of the Community and makes recommendations to the Conference in view of the overall achievement of the Community's aims. It guides the activities of the other ECCAS institutions, notably the Secretariat and the technical and specialised committees. The Council is advised by the Consultative Commission, comprising experts appointed by the member states. The

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[3] For the following, refer to Treaty establishing the Economic Community of Central African States. Libreville, 1983.

Consultative Commission's major duty is to review questions and projects submitted by other ECCAS institutions and to advise the Council in performing its duties. The Commission is moreover entitled to create specialised technical committees, if this is recommended by the Council of Ministers.

The central administrative organ is the Executive Secretariat, based in the Gabonese capital of Libreville. It is responsible for the execution of decisions and directives adopted by the Conference and the regulations issued by the Council of Ministers. The Secretary-General is the head of the Secretariat. He is assisted by three deputies, a financial controller, an accountant and the Secretariat's staff. The Secretary-General oversees the institution's three departments for human, peace, security and stability integration; for physical, economic and monetary integration; and for programme, budget, administration and human resources issues.

ECCAS' founding Treaty from 1983 moreover provides for the creation of a Community Court of Justice. According to article 16 of the Treaty, the main function of this Court shall be to ensure that "the law is observed in the interpretation and application of (the) Treaty" and to "decide disputes submitted to it" (ECCAS 1983: Art. 16). The Judges are therefore expected to guarantee the respect of the Community's legal documents and the consistency of decisions, directives and regulations made by the other ECCAS institutions. It can also be asked to decide on cases of disputes brought either by a member state or the Conference over lack of competence, misuse of power or infringement of the Treaty. Furthermore, the Conference of Heads of State and the Council of Minister can consult the Judges on any legal issue and ask for their advisory opinion.

2.2.2. New institutions

With the revival of ECCAS in 1998, a number of new institutions have been added to ECCAS' institutional architecture in order to reflect to new orientation of Central African regional cooperation.

These include on the one hand joint security and defence organs and mechanisms. In line with the acknowledged need to go beyond economic cooperation and also address peace and security issues on the regional level, the ECCAS Heads of State decided in 1999 to create a joint Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa

(COPAX). They adopted the Council's Protocol in February 2000 and its standing orders in June 2002 on the occasion of their 10th summit in Malabo (ECCAS 2000).

COPAX is the central body for the promotion, maintenance and consolidation of peace and security in the area covered by ECCAS. It has three key technical organs. The Commission for Defence and Security (CDS) gathers the member states' chiefs of staff and commanders-in-chief of police and gendarmerie forces. It advises the Conference of Heads of State on security and defence issues as well as on the organisation of joint military operations if needed. The Central African Early-warning-system (MARAC) collects and analyses data for the early detection and prevention of crises. The Central African multinational force (FOMAC) is a Peace Support Operations (PSO) capacity composed of contingents provided by the member states to carry out regional peace operations. The ratification process for the protocol on the establishment of COPAX was completed in January 2004 and the new organs and facilities are progressively being put in place. The broadening of ECCAS' institutional structure to include specific defence and security bodies and mechanisms was done in coordination with the African Union's efforts to define a common peace and security policy. Similar to regional peace and security capacities in other African regions, COPAX and its components present the regional pillars of the continental African Peace and Security Architecture (Meyer 2009).

On their summit in 2002, the Central African Heads of State agreed, on the other hand, to set up a Community Parliamentary Network, called REPAC, and adopted a detailed Protocol.

2.3. The Central African Parliamentary Network (REPAC)

2.3.1. The creation of REPAC

According to the Protocol's Preamble, the Réseau des Parlementaires de l'Afrique Centrale is considered as a "prelude" for the Community's Parliament, and therefore established "provisionnally" ("*à titre provisoire*") (ECCAS 2002). The transformation of REPAC into a full Community Parliament – called "the end of the transition period – will be decided by the Conference of Heads of State (ECCAS 2002: Art. 7).

The Parliamentary Network is understood as a "space for dialogue, concertation and consensus for the Community's populations' representatives," in view of

"efficiently working towards ECCAS' integration" and allowing "democratic participation of citizens in the decision making process to express alternative propositions of sustainable development (ECCAS 2002: Preamble). It may astonish that the Preamble starts by acknowledging the necessity of all States' willingness for achieving regional integration into a viable Community, and does not explicitly highlight the importance that such a process is also sufficiently supported by the population in order to be sustainable.

REPAC will be composed of 50 seats, filled by five Deputies from each of the 10 member states, elected for a period of five years by and among the national Parliamentarians.[4] As outlined in Article 6 of the REPAC Protocol, the competences attributed to the Parliamentary Network will be restricted to giving advice on matters related to the ECCAS Treaty, notably on the following issues: human rights and fundamental freedoms, social integration, citizenship, environment, science and technology, minority rights and gender issues as well as on policies aiming to promote networking and integration in educative systems, public health, communication and energy. Moreover, the Network shall be entitled to provide statements on issues regarding free mobility and the revision of ECCAS' founding Treaty. REPAC is supposed to meet twice a year for a session of up to 15 days, headed by an internally nominated President and assisted by a Secretariat.

At the present moment, REPAC is about to be set up and to become fully operational. The premises of its secretariat have been opened in spring 2010 in Malabo in Equatorial Guinea. Since December 2010, a series of meetings and workshops are regularly organised to gather national parliamentarians from the ECCAS member states and raise their awareness and knowledge about the regionalisation process and specific Community policies.

The process to come here has been rather long and tedious. Following the adoption of the Protocol in 2002, negotiations over financial support started in 2005 and mainly involved the African Capacity Building Fund (ACBF). These tough negotiations finally let to a grant of US Dollars 1,5 million for a period of 4 years (ACBF 2008). Since 2009, a REPAC Coordinator has been nominated to carry out all preparatory work, develop annual work programmes, organise staff nomination and equipment of the Network's secretariat, and take all necessary measures for the election of Deputies within the national Assemblies and the start of activities. The inauguration of REPAC has often been scheduled and finally

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[4] The initially foreseen number of 55 deputies had been reduced to 50 after the withdrawal of Rwanda in 2007.

postponed as preparations were not yet finalised. According to REPAC's Coordinator, major challenges were posed by the difficulties in finding additional financial support for capacity-building measures and the relatively slow proceedings in ACBF. Moreover, the Protocol's ratification by the ECCAS member states was often delayed which eventually led to a provisional application of the founding document by the Conference of Heads of State on 30 October 2007, in accordance with Article 25 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.[5]

2.3.2. First manifestations

As long as the Network is not yet completely in place, ECCAS regularly organises seminars to prepare the national Parliamentary Deputies for the official start of activities.

From 1 to 2 December 2010, a major event that can be seen as significant step forward in the set up process and first manifestation of REPAC has taken place in the Cameroonian city of Douala, in form of a two days seminar on regional peace and security cooperation in Central Africa. Upon invitation by the REPAC Coordinator, 21 national Parliamentarians from 8 Central African countries have met to exchange on the role of ECCAS for preventing conflicts and consolidating peace and security in Central Africa. According to REPAC's Coordinator, the seminar was intended to inform the MPs on the Central African joint Peace and Security bodies and capacities that are currently being set up. In this perspective, the event also aimed to raise their awareness on how they can support the regional cooperation process. An important focus was laid on the parliaments potential to encourage the governments to ratify the regional Conventions covering security issues, such as on small arms control (Kinshasa Convention), or against human trafficking.

This meeting is the first in a series of events to be organised in view of initiating the creation of REPAC. Most recently, Central African parliamentarians have met in the Congolese capital of Kinshasa, in view of debating how they can further support the building of the Community.[6]

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[5] Information based on an online interview conducted by the author with REPAC's Coordinator in August 2009.

[6] Information mainly based on interviews conducted by the author with REPAC's Coordinator in January and June 2011.

3. The democratisation of ECCAS. State of the art of the development

The following session will assess and evaluate the development of democracy within ECCAS, according to several indicators: the relation between inter-state governance and supranational elements; the issue of appointment, control and power limitation, the extent of democracy on the national level as well as the evolution of input legitimacy and participation on the Community level.

3.1. Inter-state governance and supranationalism

Despite the decision of the Heads of State in 1998 to substantially enlarge ECCAS' institutional basis by creating new institutions and bodies, the Community is still considerably marked by a significant level of intergovernmentalism. This becomes particularly evident when analysing predominant position of states, notably as regards the distribution of power in the decision making processes.

In the 1983 established Treaty, the "Principles" defined in Article 3 foresee that "the high contractive parties undertake to observe the principles of international law governing relations between states, in particular the principles of sovereignty, equality and independence of all states, good neighbourliness, (and) non-interference in their internal affairs (…)" (ECCAS 1983: Art. 3).

This orientation on intergovernmental cooperation instead of supranational integration is consequently reflected by the effective distribution of functions and responsibilities among the different bodies and institutions of the Community. It is moreover largely maintained also after the comprehensive reform process launched at the end of the 1990s.

The main authority is given to the states and their direct representatives on the regional level. ECCAS' central decision making body is the Conference of Heads of State, composed of the political leaders from the ten member states. On its annual meetings, the Conference decides upon the main policy orientations of the Community. These decisions, adopted by consensus, have binding character for member states and Community institutions and become automatically enforceable 30 days after their publication in the official journal of the Community. The Conference is moreover entitled to produce directives that are binding for the ECCAS' bodies and

institutions concerned (except the Court of Justice, once established) and have to come into force upon notification (CEMAC 1983: Art. 11).

The other institution to possess major decision making power is the Council of Ministers that acts by regulations. Alike the Conference's decisions and directives, also the Council's regulations have binding effect and are automatically enforceable in all member states 30 days after their publication. They become effective for concerned Community institutions immediately upon notification.

In contrast, the Parliamentary Network shall only be entitled to take part in the decision making process by giving advice in the above outlined fields, either when asked by one of the other ECCAS bodies or on its own initiative. As this advice shall not have any binding character, it will be upon the states' representatives to either consider or ignore the Deputies' opinion.

In a similar way, also the Court of Justice's principle function shall be to provide advice on legal matters. Whereas it shall also have the competence to take binding decisions, this only concerns cases of lack of competence, misuse of powers or infringement of procedural requirements of the Treaty. Moreover, such cases can only be brought forward by the member states or the Conference (ECCAS 1983: Art. 16).

The Secretariat is a purely executive body with no decision making power. It primarily serves to assist the Conference and the Council and to prepare and carry out their decisions and directives.

3.2. Appointment, control and power limitation

The predominant position of the members' Heads of State and their direct representatives is also reflected by the power they can exert on the Community institutions as well as by the possibilities they possess to influence their composition. Regarding the Secretariat, the Conference decides upon the nomination and revocation of most of the directors and leading officials within ECCAS bodies and institutions, notably the Secretary-General and his deputies, as well as the Financial Controller and the Accountant. The Heads of State moreover also determine the staff regulations. Similarly, the membership, procedure and statutes of the Court of Justice shall be determined by the Conference (ECCAS 1983: Art. 18).

According to the Protocol establishing REPAC, the Network shall be composed of Deputies nominated by and among national Parliamentarians. This reflects a situation that can be found in almost all other regional communities in Africa.

To ensure the independence of the parliamentary members and the separation of powers within the Community, article 12 of the REPAC Protocol specifies the incompatibility of the function as REPAC Deputy with those as member of a national government or national Court, member of the ECCAS Court, or any other position within the Community's institutions and bodies.

Control functions and responsibilities in general, attributed to the regional parliament are quite limited. Indeed, as has been said above, REPAC's Deputies shall only be entitled to give advice. It can be asked or decide by itself to express its opinion in a list of 14 issues, including human, fundamental and minority rights, Community citizenship, gender and emancipation, environment, public health, research and education (ECCAS 2002: Art. 6). In return, no real legislative power is foreseen. In this perspective, the MPs' ability to effectively control and influence the decision making process will be considerably weak. Decisions on the regionalisation process' orientation and major policies will hence most probably remain in the hands of the Heads of State.

In a similar way, as mentioned above, also the Court of Justice will only be able to decide upon cases of a member state's failure if pinpointed by another state or the Conference of Heads of State. In other words, the selection (or negligence) of cases handled by the Court will completely depend upon the Heads of State. This concerns also the Judges' capacities to control the acting of ECCAS' intergovernmental institutions, and Community bodies. In general, their ability to identify cases of unconstitutional behaviour by themselves will therefore be rather unimportant.

3.3. Democracy at national level

The central role and position of organs directly representing the states in Community decision making and appointment seem problematic for several reasons. One is the weak nature of democracy on the national level.

Democratic principles have been promoted in Central Africa, as in the rest of the African continent from the beginning of the 1990's on. The commitment of these

states to strengthen democracy has therefore increased in line with a new global political context in which democratic governance and the rule of Law were given more weight. According to Joachim Emmanuel Goma-Thethet, the introduction of multiparty systems was achieved in Central Africa through three different, not always constitution-friendly approaches: by the holding of national conferences (Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Chad, the DRC, the CAR), by arms and violence (Chad, Rwanda), and by constitutional reforms or specific laws (Cameroon, Burundi) (Goma-Thethet 2003).

Still today, the respect and application of democratic principles are often called into question and subject to frequent critique. In 2008, the Democracy Index, calculated by the British magazine *The Economist* to assess the status of democracy, was for all ECCAS countries in the lowest quartile of all 165 ranked countries.[7]

In Central Africa, a major challenge to democracy is given by the conflict proneness of the region. Following the conflicts and crises that broke out in the region in the 1990's, a high number of ECCAS member states are currently still in a post-conflict state. Democracy is therefore not always built on very solid inner political and societal bases. In several states, such as Chad or the CAR, the acting political leaders came into power not in a constitutional and democratic way, but through coup d'état. Although, for instance in the CAR, elections have since then been held and confirmed the Head of State, President François Bozizé, the national reconciliation process has only started in 2008 and the dialogue between the government and major opposition movements is only at its early stages.

Over the last years, several initiatives have however been taken on the Community level to promote and strengthen democracy and democratic principles within the member states. One of the main important steps in this regard has been the joint Declaration on support of electoral processes in the ECCAS member states, adopted in 2005 and the subsequent creation of a specific unit within the Community Secretariat. Up to now, ECCAS has conducted electoral observation missions in almost every of its members. In cooperation with the European Union Support

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[7] The Democracy Index has been published by the Economist Intelligence Unit to reflect the situation in 165 independent states and two territories in the year 2008. A previous edition had already been produced in 2006. The index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture. See: http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy%20Index%202008.pdf.

Programme to ECCAS (Programme d'appui à la CEEAC en matière de paix et de sécurité, PAPS-CEEAC), workshops are regularly offered as training and preparation of the election observation activities and to further promote democratic principles on the Community level. According to ECCAS' website, the major aim behind this initiative is to promote the holding of free and fair elections in the region and to increase the quality of democracy in Central Africa as essential element for the strengthening of peace and security.[8]

3.4. Input legitimacy and participation

Possibilities offered to the citizens to actively contribute and take part in the ECCAS regionalisation process in a more direct manner are considerably weak. Also, and maybe as a consequence, public awareness and perception of activities and policies performed at the ECCAS Community level remain low. In this context, the supportive role of the civil society is increasingly acknowledged not only by international donors but also by ECCAS and the Member States (ECCAS/EU 2007). In particular, civil society organisations are more and more perceived as important links between the Community and the population. Moreover, their involvement is especially promoted in the field of peace and security, notably in activities aimed to prevent conflicts and crises and mediate between conflicting parties.

As a decisive step in this regard, ECCAS has created in 2007 the position of civil society expert. This expert is in charge of establishing and strengthening links to Central African civil society organisations and to coordinate their involvement in ECCAS' activities. The expert's major duties include the identification and contact of relevant groups as well as the organisation of workshops and other events to raise the civil society's awareness on ECCAS and encourage contributions to the process. The expert is moreover entitled to prepare and put in place adequate channels and ways to ease and promote this cooperation.

In this context, several initiatives have been launched by the Central African civil society in view of fostering a stronger participatory approach on the Community level and give more weight to the population's concerns. Two of these initiatives are the Community for Security and Alternative Policies (CSAP) and the Projet de

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[8] See: www.ceeac-eccas.org

Renforcement des Capacités de la Société Civile dans la Prévention et la Gestion des Conflits en Afrique Centrale (Capacity building Project for civil society organizations for conflicts prevention and management in Central Africa) (PREGESCO) (see Box 1 and 2 below).

The advantage of these forms of direct democratic participation, involving the civil society as main actor, are primarily related to the fact that these networks exist outside the official Community structures but stay in close contact and interaction with them. They normally have a high level of self-determination and autonomy. The other side of the coin is that their independence makes it often also more difficult for them to get recognized and have their opinion, advice and requests heard and considered by the main decision-makers.

Box 1: Community for Security and Alternative Policies (CSAP) [9]

The Community for Security and Alternative Policies (CSAP) has been established by several Central African civil society organisations, under the initiative of "COR, Consulting and Communication" (COR, C&C). COR, C&C is a Congolese think-tank with the aim to improve debate on and public participation in public policy decision making processes. The official inauguration of CSAP has taken place in January 2009 at a meeting held by Central African civil society organisations, prior to the ECCAS Heads of State's summit on security sector reforms (SSR) in Kinshasa (ECCAS/EU 2009). The creation of CSAP responds to the need to strengthen the civil society's integrated approach of conflict and security issues in the region and to foster their role also on the Community level. CSAP therefore aims to develop a regional network that links civil peace and security initiatives in the different Central African States. Hereby, the Community intends on the one hand to promote the population's knowledge about peace and security and to initiative on the other hand a multi-stakeholder debate on how to strengthen peace and security in Central Africa. The institutional structure of CSAP comprises at the regional level a Board of representatives from civil society organisations to coordinate joint activities, and on the national level, coalitions made up of national and local networks and organisations. For the time being, the nature of the relations to ECCAS is not yet clearly defined. Whereas ECCAS' expert in charge of the civil society assisted the inauguration of CSAP and welcomed the initiative, links between the two Communities still remain rather loose.

In this perspective, in Central Africa, two major challenges remain for the effective and efficient involvement of the civil society as promoter for democracy in the regionalisation process.

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[9] The description of CSAP is based on correspondence with the director of COR, Consulting & Communication who is also Coordinator of CSAP, as well as on: COR, Consulting & Communication (2009) and COR, Consulting & Communication (2009a).

> **Box 2: Projet de Renforcement des Capacités de la Société Civile dans la Prévention et la Gestion des Conflits en Afrique Centrale (PREGESCO)[10]**
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> PREGESCO is a project jointly launched by civil society organisations from eight ECCAS states.[11] It is coordinated by the Congolese NGO "Service de Renforcement des Appuis aux Communautés de base en Afrique Centrale (SERACOB). Based in Kinshasa, SERACOB was founded in 1993 by NGO-collectives in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda. Its aim is to strengthen the capacities and efficiency of Central African NGOs and grass root organisations in management matters. Although mainly operating in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda, SERACOB has been designated by the ECCAS member states as focal point for civil society capacity building activities. SERACOB is progressively enlarging its cooperation with other civil society networks in the region, mainly in Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Congo, the CAR and Gabon. In 2004, the SERACOB network has initiated the project PREGESCO, with the financial support of the ACBF (ACBF 2008).
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> PREGESCO's aim is to improve economic and social governance in Central Africa by promoting the active and effective participation of the civil society in conflict prevention and management in the region. In this perspective, a four-step implementation process was elaborated that included the strengthening of regional civil society networking, the training of civil society actors, the promotion of space for dialogue and exchange for state and non-state actors, as well as the sharing of experiences by specific dissemination activities.
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> Cooperation with ECCAS has primarily taken place in form of mutual participation of ECCAS and PREGESCO officials in different events and activities. ECCAS delegates have notably been part of the project's steering committee in charge of overseeing the programme's implementation. In return, PREGESCO's members have regularly been invited to assist the meetings of some ECCAS's institutions and were regularly accredited to participate in election observer missions conducted by ECCAS and the African Union (AU). However, no financial support to the project was provided by ECCAS and its member states; a circumstance that, according to the 2008 Activity Report, deeply challenged the project's performance (PREGESCO 2008).

First, current cooperation between the Community and the civil society sector is considerably limited in scope and activities. Currently this cooperation is above all developed as regards peace and security issues. This is certainly justified by the conflict-proneness of the Central African region and the long-time negligence to actively involve non-State actors in conflict management.

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[10] Information on PREGESCO is based on PREGESCO's annual report for 2008 (PREGESCO, Rapport Annuel 2008 (préparé par la Coordination régionale avec la participation des Coordinations nationales) (Kinshasa, 2009), as well as on information on the Programme's website http://pregesco.org.
[11] Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Chad.

Whereas main conflict resolution mechanisms on the regional level as well as decision making still remain in the hands of the member states' political leaders and their direct representatives (Meyer 2009), the recently increased cooperation with regional civil society organisations on peace and security issues seems to reflect the growing awareness that these groups can make important contributions. They are indeed considered key for disseminating knowledge on security and conflict prevention among the population, providing early warning and acting as mediator for conflict settlement.[12] However, to promote ECCAS' democratisation, civil and public participation is also important in other fields of action.

In addition, civil society organisations are primarily carrying out dissemination and awareness raising activities or are involved in implementing ECCAS security policies on the local level. Certainly, these groups are particularly appropriate for fostering public debate and ensuring local implementation as they are directly connected to the people on the ground. Nevertheless, to enhance democratic governance, it also appears essential to have these groups and their representatives also take part in Community decision making processes. These, however, continue to be dominated by state actors.

A second concern is related to the need to directly address and involve citizens, also at the very local level. In other words, if cooperation between ECCAS and civil society organisations is to bring effective improvements in the democratic functioning of ECCAS, it has to be ensured that the population is directly affected and able to influence this cooperation. In the case of the two previously presented and certainly promising civil society organisations networks, the contact to the local population is intended to be provided through the existence of national coordination offices. For CSAP, these are made up of coalitions of national and local organisations that implement the network's goals and objectives within the ECCAS member states. In the case of PROGESCO, national focal points have been set up to carry out the regional activities and decisions on the national and local level. The challenge hereby lies however in the ability to guarantee a smooth and constant flow of information, communication and coordination between these local centres and actors on the regional level. This is indeed important to ensure that the needs of local people are expressed and effectively taken into consideration. This ability is frequently

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[12] Notice on the holding of the Atelier CEEAC-Organisations de la Société civile, 28.09.2007, on ECCAS website: www.ceeac-eccas.org.

compromised by significant financial problems. In the case of PREGESCO, for example, the annual report on 2008 indeed stated the problem that the national focal points were no direct beneficiaries of the project's budget (PREGESCO 2009). On the one hand, such a circumstance is likely to strain the relations between actors on the different acting levels. On the other hand, limited financial resources are likely to largely impede the performance of local actors and to consequently reduce their commitment.

4. Challenges ahead and concluding remarks

With the decision to set up a regional Parliamentarian Network, the current advancements of this initiative and the growing engagement of civil society movements in Community building, ECCAS seems to be on its way towards increased democratic governance, even if the road ahead still appears quite long. The recent achievements in the preparation of REPAC's inauguration can in fact be considered as very promising. However, it is not yet evident whether REPAC will be able to effectively soften ECCAS' intergovernmental nature and foster a stronger supranational framework, in view of serving as engine for the integration process and increasing the Community's democratic legitimacy. In its current form as network of national Deputies primarily intended to express non-binding opinions, it remains to be seen if REPAC can effectively provide a similar counterweight than might have a regional parliament. In this perspective, it will be crucial whether REPAC will, in the long term, be replaced by a Community Parliamentary Assembly with increased functions and abilities to influence decisions on the regional level. Several observers also discuss the possibility of uniting REPAC and the Parliament of CEMAC that has recently been inaugurated in April 2010. Forming a unique Central African regional Parliament would certainly allow to save costs and resources, avoid double efforts and give more weight to such an institution.[13]

Also the increased involvement of civil society representatives in Central African regional cooperation presents a positive development towards strengthening democratic elements in the policymaking process. A major problem that needs to be

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[13] This issue has notably been addressed at the second session of the CEMAC Parliamentary Assembly in February 2011.

addressed is however the weak financial contribution made available by the Community and the member states to support such trans-national civil society initiatives. Although officially recognised by ECCAS, PREGESCO, for instance, has received no significant funding from the Community and has therefore been supported by other funds, notably grants from ACBF. Despite the acknowledgement of ECCAS and its Secretary-General, Louis Sylvain-Goma, of the importance to regular involve civil society initiatives like PREGESCO in Community activities,[14] this cooperation is still not set on a firm foundation for ensuring sustainable benefits on all side. As a consequence, for the time being, a major role in supporting this evolution is hence played by the International Community, especially the European Union (EU). Within the above mentioned support programme PAPS-CEEAC, the European Union provides multi-faceted assistance and cooperation for capacity building, not only in the field of conflict prevention but also policy implementation and good governance. The programme moreover aims to support ECCAS in strengthening the role and involvement of civil society organisations within the regionalisation process.

Key for further strengthening this now chosen yet still only slowly implemented road map and assuring that these first advancements are effectively built on a firm and solid basis will be in particular three aspects.

First, it has to be ensured that the population is sufficiently aware and sensitised for the regionalisation process if they are to support and contribute to its evolution. Involving national parliamentarians more actively, as is intended by the currently organised REPAC workshops, could be one way. This however implies that there will subsequently be enough exchange and interaction between these Deputies and the population on the national level. Another role could be played by the civil society. Here, it is on the one hand essential that these groups are effectively encouraged to increase their activities and presence on the Community level, by notably cooperating beyond national borders. This presupposed on the other hand also that they are sufficiently recognized by the population as their direct representatives and mouthpieces, and by the governments as serious and reliable interlocutor. This last

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[14] "Nous *vous impliquerons régulièrement dans le fonctionnement de notre institution, afin que votre contribution à son essor ne souffre d'une quelconque entrave.*" Statement of the ECCAS Secretary-General Louis Sylvain-Goma at a meeting with PROGESCO representatives in Libreville, Gabon, on August 12, 2009, quoted on the website of ECCAS : http://www.ceeac-eccas.org/index.php?rubrique=documentation&cat=1&id=291.

condition is in Africa often challenged by a climate of mistrust regarding in particular civil society organisations that receive foreign or international support.

Second, it seems essential to further elaborate the availability of checks and balances between the different institutions' and bodies' powers. In its current form, ECCAS' institutional architecture gives the Conference of Heads of State and the Ministerial Council the largest responsibility as regards the nomination, appointment, and dismissal of officials, including the ECCAS judges. The same applies regarding the right to decide upon unlawful or failed behaviour by an ECCAS member or a Community institution. Also, with no regional Court of Justice, Court of Auditors or powerful Parliament, ECCAS has for the time being no appropriate supranational body that could audit and monitor the Community's budget, and thereby ensure more transparency and accountability regarding the regional institutions' spending and Member States' contribution. In view of all these points, increasing the competences of the Court and enlarging the mandate of the Parliamentary Network seem here fundamental. Also the transformation of the Secretary from a merely assisting technical institution into a more powerful body with more thematic functions, following the example of CEMAC and its recently inaugurated Commission, may be an option to consider. Whereas the realisation of such a move first and foremost lies with the Heads of State and their annual Conference as central policy making organ, the International Community could play a supportive role. In line with the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, adopted in Lisbon in December 2007, and aimed to promote socio-economic and political integration of the African continent (Council of the European Union 2007), incentives to further strengthen ECCAS Parliamentary capacities could for instance be provided by an intensification of links, networking and cooperation between European and Central African Parliamentarians. Such a provision could indeed give the Network, and later the regional Assembly more importance within the regional structures as they would become a direct interface to the European Parliament.

Finally, and above all, ECCAS' evolution towards democratic governance will first and foremost depend upon the commitment of the States. Currently, a major problem seems to lie in the tediousness with which Community policies and decisions are implemented on the national level. This gap between rhetoric and reality considerably slows the progress. It therefore remains to be seen, over the years to come, whether

the Central African States will demonstrate their support for the regional process they have embarked on by stronger financial commitments, increased assent towards progressively shifting more power to the Community level and by recognizing civil society representatives as important actors and channels for ensuring broad support by the population.

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