

# Understanding regional economic policies in Central Africa

*Struggling to integrate in an intertwined region*

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This background paper is part of a series on the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations (PEDRO) and builds on an earlier paper conducted under the Political Economy of Regional Integration in Africa ([PERIA](#)) project. It was prepared in March 2017. In line with ECDPM's mission to inform and facilitate EU-Africa policy dialogue, and financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, the studies analyse key policy areas of seventeen regional organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so they address three broad questions: What is the political traction of the organisations around different policy areas? What are the key member state interests in the regional agenda? What are the areas with most future traction for regional organisations to promote cooperation and integration around specific areas? The studies aim to advance thinking on how regional policies play out in practice, and ways to promote politically feasible and adaptive approaches to regional cooperation and integration. Further information can be found at [www.ecdpm.org/pedro](http://www.ecdpm.org/pedro).

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# 1. Introduction

This report presents a political economy overview of economic integration in Central Africa. It focuses in particular on the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC). Both build on common origins and share the same objective of promoting economic integration and development among overlapping groups of highly diverse countries.

The overlapping membership and roles of ECCAS and CEMAC remain a key issue in regional discussions. These are frequently cited along with lack of finance to explain the slow pace of integration in the region. Work is ongoing to harmonise or 'rationalise' the organisations in areas such as freedom of movement for persons and goods; security; transport; energy; budgetary and monetary rules; and financing mechanisms, among others. But question marks hang over the political traction both bodies wield in their engagement with member states and the political interest of member states and functionaries in these connected regional organisations, particularly given the current low levels of policy implementation, cooperation and overall integration among member states.

Central Africa is a complex region in which to work regionally. The literature, and indeed geography, suggest Central Africa is defined more as a periphery, or leftover, of other regions than a coherent region in itself. Nonetheless, far from being "a shapeless, amorphous political space ... there is instead a hive of competing authorities across the region, born of specific historical relationships and dynamics" (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015). Though that may give a logical basis for regional initiatives, organisations and *fora* for countries to engage, all are undermined by "conflict and gamesmanship" (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015), internal and cross-border conflicts, alliances and anti-alliances.

Though conflicts in the Great Lakes region and the Central African Republic (CAR) and the threat of Boko Haram are drawing attention to a region that is often "left behind" (UNDP, 2016) or "ignored" (Mwanasali, 1999), they also underline the importance of regional responses to cross-border challenges. The conflicts also point to the importance of understanding the influence of the structural features of the region, institutional setups and current national and other interests that undermine the regional cause, particularly the promotion of economic integration.

This paper examines the actors and factors affecting regional economic integration in Central Africa by addressing the following three questions: i) what is the political traction of ECCAS and CEMAC in driving or steering the regional economic integration agenda; ii) what are the interests of member states in using ECCAS and/or CEMAC to address their economic challenges; and iii) which are the specific areas or sectors with most potential for ECCAS or CEMAC in promoting regional economic integration. This is a desk-based report, drawing on a limited number of interviews.

## 2. On the political traction of ECCAS and CEMAC

This section assesses the political traction of ECCAS and CEMAC, looking particularly at how both organisations facilitate or enable decision-making around their regional agendas and agreements. Further, it looks at the effectiveness of ECCAS and CEMAC in encouraging policy implementation. This can be either at the national level through transposition and implementation arrangements by national authorities, or through regional implementation. The section addresses the following questions: have ECCAS and CEMAC enabled decision-making around regional agendas? And have they contributed to implementation at national and/or regional level? If so, how?

## 2.1. Structural and institutional drivers and obstacles

### Shared roots

One way of understanding an organisation's political traction relates to the original drive behind its establishment. Both ECCAS and CEMAC essentially build on the what followed the French colonial Fédération de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française. Just before independence from France in 1959, the four members of the federation and the Franc zone, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo and Gabon, signed a convention creating UDEAC, (the Union Douanière et Economique de l'Afrique Centrale), whose treaty was signed in 1964. Joined by Cameroon the same year, Equatorial Guinea joined in 1983.

While UDEAC was soon stalling (Bach, 2016), the 1980 Lagos Plan of the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had spurred the formation of the wider ECCAS grouping in 1983. This brought together six UDEAC/CEMAC countries; three members of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL), namely DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo, Zaire at the time), Burundi and Rwanda; and lusophone São Tomé and Príncipe. ECCAS was quickly also "completely paralysed: by war and conflicts between and within its members" (Bach, 2016).

Partly to reactivate UDEAC, but also stimulated by the devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994, it was hoped that CEMAC, established in 1994, would help "to consolidate the effects of the devaluation through the deepening of economic integration"<sup>1</sup>. Though some such as Avom (2007) suggest the CEMAC treaty was "endogenously inspired", written by a team of university professors, economic operators, civil society and political actors from each country, according to Bach (2015) it was "explicitly conceived as replica of the EU's Maastricht treaty architecture and philosophy" ... "the latest expression of a succession of unsuccessful reforms that had been imposed by extraneous actors – essentially France and the World Bank". The CEMAC Treaty was operational after ratification in 1999, and revised in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, while ECCAS was dormant from 1992 until 1998, ECCAS was 'revived' in 1999, having signed the initial protocol on relations between the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The renewed mandate gave ECCAS a security mandate through the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), and a mandate to form a Free Trade Area (FTA) as part of the African Economic Community (AEC), as foreseen under the Abuja Treaty.<sup>3</sup> The ten existing member were joined by Angola in 1999. By further signing the 2007 Protocol on Relations between the African Union and the RECs ECCAS became one of the eight AU-recognised RECs, a status that CEMAC does not have. The two organisations have coexisted since, ECCAS headquartered in Libreville, Gabon, and CEMAC in Bangui, CAR.

Though Rwanda left ECCAS in 2008 to focus its efforts on integration into the East African Community (EAC), it rejoined in 2016 while remaining in the EAC (and indeed COMESA), something discussed in Section 3. Burundi remained in both trade blocs throughout, while Burundi, Rwanda and DRC remained in the (increasingly irrelevant) CEPGL.

CEMAC therefore represents a smaller group of countries with an inherited common currency, giving it some political legitimacy among member states. In contrast, ECCAS has less internal coherence and legitimacy, but greater political legitimacy at the African Union level, where CEMAC is not formally recognised. In many ways this is the crux of the conundrum of regional integration in Central Africa.

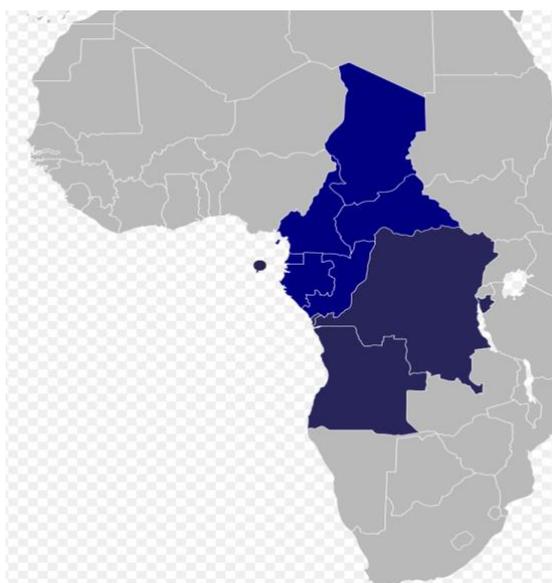
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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, rather than seeking macro-economic convergence towards the establishment of a single currency as in the EU, CEMAC was envisaged "as a way of instilling life and a new legitimacy to [an] already existing single currency regime[s]" (Bach, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/attachments/471\\_CEMAC\\_Traite\\_revise.pdf](http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/attachments/471_CEMAC_Traite_revise.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Plans for an ECCAS FTA were formally announced in 2005 (BMZ Report, p. 63).

**Figure 2 - CEMAC and ECCAS countries (ECCAS-only countries in dark blue)**



## 2.2. Expanding agenda and current reforms

### Aspirational agendas

As an AU-recognised REC, ECCAS has a broad regional agenda covering trade, infrastructure, energy, agriculture and peace and security. According to the ECCAS Treaty, its purpose is to “promote and reinforce harmonious cooperation [...] in all domains of economic activity [...]”. The 1998 revised agenda includes an ECCAS Free Trade Area (FTA) by 2004, to be followed by a customs union in 2008, later postponed to 2012 (Fotso, 2014). The underlying objective of the FTA was “to increase trade among member states and reduce their trade dependence towards the rest of world’ (Fotso, 2014) though this is yet to happen. Like other RECs, the agenda also expanded from an economic focus to conflict as part of the AU’s Peace and Security Architecture.

The revised CEMAC Treaty of 2008 similarly states its aims as moving “from a situation of cooperation that already existed between them, to ... economic and monetary integration” (Nono, 2014). The CEMAC Regional Economic Programme 2013-2025 lays out the priorities as energy, agriculture and agro-industry, forestry, livestock farming and fishing, and mining and metallurgy (WTO, 2013).<sup>4</sup> Regional policies also relate to transport infrastructure, the development of an energy pool, peace, security and stability, free movement of people, development of the sub-regional hydroelectric potential, implementation of a functioning customs union, regional food security programme (PRSA) and the implementation of a common agricultural policy (PAC) (Nono, 2014). Similarly to ECCAS, the scope of CEMAC activities goes considerably beyond monetary and economic integration.

Given that all CEMAC members are in ECCAS, regional trade policy is based on the harmonisation of the ECCAS and CEMAC trade areas (AfDB, 2011). However, efforts to harmonise trade classifications, tariffs and legislation are still on-going as part of steps to align customs procedures between the two.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, intra-regional trade is centered on the concept of ‘shared territoriality’. CEMAC’s Generalised Preferential Tariff is applied in CEMAC-zone members, and

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tpr\\_e/s285\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s285_e.pdf), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ceeac-eccas.org/index.php/es/ressources/appel-d-offre/385-mission-appui-a-l-operationnalisation-du-comite-conjoint-ceeac-ccmac-sur-la-nomenclature-le-tarif-et-la-legislation>.

ECCAS tariffs applied on extra-regional imports among non-CEMAC members. This aims “to avoid conflicts with existing institutions, given ECCAS’ failure to meet the time frame of its treaty and annexed protocols” (AU Commission, 2013). The AfDB identifies overlapping memberships and the delay in establishing a harmonised Common External Tariff (CET) between ECCAS and CEMAC as one of the main explanations for the poor intra-regional trade (AfDB, 2011).<sup>6</sup>

Beyond trade, ECCAS Member States established the Central African Power Pool (CAPP) in April 2003 as an ECCAS specialised agency. In theory it is responsible for implementing and coordinating regional energy policy, expanding the community infrastructure and managing the exchange activities of electric power on all ECCAS member countries (AUC, 2013). It centers on developing the Inga Dam in DRC, rehabilitating Inga I and II to restore their capacity of 1,775 megawatts, and developing the Inga III or Grand Inga Dam, hoped to have capacity of 40,000 megawatts (AfDB, 2011).<sup>7</sup> More recently, Ministers of Agriculture of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) also approved a Common Regional Agricultural Policy in 2014.<sup>8</sup> Despite its economic mandate, ECCAS has a limited role on regional industrialisation policy even though a draft *Strategie de Developpement du Secteur Industriel de l’Afrique Centrale* was prepared in 2013 but never published.

Being a monetary union, CEMAC has had a budgetary surveillance system in place since its formation in 1994 to ensure inflation is maintained under control and avoid macroeconomic imbalances. However, recent studies suggest that the criteria and indicators used are neither easy to calculate or respected leaving them open to abuse and thus undermining their utility (Guerineau et al., 2015).<sup>9</sup>

Although ECCAS is formally part of the AU Peace and Security Architecture, it was CEMAC that first deployed a multinational force in 2002 to address tensions in CAR under FOMUC. In 2007 the Central African heads of state agreed to transfer supervisory authority of the joint peace mission from CEMAC to ECCAS, under the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace (MICOPAX).<sup>10</sup> According to Meyer (2011), this transfer was part of the stated commitment to coordinate the responsibilities of the two regional communities CEMAC and ECCAS, and to increasingly focus ECCAS on security issues.

Largely dictated by events, the focus of ECCAS has therefore been drawn towards peace and security. Along with the fight against terrorism and maritime piracy, these were all cited as areas of progress by the President of Gabon, as incoming ECCAS chair, at the 16th ordinary summit in 2015.<sup>11</sup> Conflict and instability clearly undermine attempts to promote economic integration, but as Vanheukelom et al. (2016) further point out, regional cooperation is often spurred by the perceived costs of inaction in the face of cross-border conflicts, while future potential gains from more aspirational economic agendas create fewer political imperatives for urgent action.

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<sup>6</sup> “TEC plus élevé dans la CEMAC: 5 bandes (0% pour certains produits, 5% pour les biens de 1<sup>ère</sup> nécessité, 10% pour les matières 1<sup>ères</sup> et les biens d’équipement, 20% pour les intrants et 30% pour les produits finis)” chrome-extension://gbkeegbaiigmenfmjfcldgdpimamgkj/views/app.html.

<sup>7</sup> The energy generated by these hydropower schemes is to be distributed through regional energy grids. These include, amongst others, a 700 km interconnection line between Ngaoundéré and Maroua in Cameroon and N’Djamena in Chad, and a second section around 250 km long linking the two countries. See <http://news.trust.org/item/20150217142952-xc6ag>; for an overview of planned production units and interconnections, see <http://www.peac-ac.org/index.php/projets/projets-pip>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://ecdpm.org/talking-points/ministers-agriculture-central-africa-adopt-key-strategic-regional-frameworks/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.minfi.gov.cm/index.php/en/pressroom/actualites/344-CEMAC> See FERDI study here: [http://www.ferdi.fr/sites/www.ferdi.fr/files/publication/fichiers/rapport\\_cemac.pdf](http://www.ferdi.fr/sites/www.ferdi.fr/files/publication/fichiers/rapport_cemac.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> [https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw\\_WH1GWqbhZZOMQXIVczR6R2M](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw_WH1GWqbhZZOMQXIVczR6R2M), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ceecac-eccas.org/index.php/es/ressources/discours/173-allocation-de-sem-le-president-de-la-republique-du-gabon-nouveau-president-en-exercice-de-la-ceeac-16eme-session-ordinaire-de-la-ceeac>.

## Institutional forms

The ECCAS Treaty mentions six formal bodies<sup>12</sup>: the Conference of Heads of States; the Council of Ministers; the Consultative Commission; the General Secretariat; the Community Court of Justice and Specialised Technical Committees. A provisional Parliamentary Network (REPAC) was meant as a “prelude” to a Community Parliament though it is not clear if REPAC is yet operational (Meyer, 2011).<sup>13</sup> As in other regional organisations, the Conference of Heads of States serves as the supreme body, intended to meet once a year to define the organisation’s major policy priorities.<sup>14</sup>

The General Secretariat is based in Libreville, Gabon, and responsible for the execution of decisions and directives from the Conference and the regulations issued by the Council of Ministers. Headed by a Secretary General and three deputies, it is structured around three departments: human, peace, security and stability integration; physical, economic and monetary integration; and programme, budget, administration and human resources issues. The founding treaty also foresees an ECCAS Court of Justice, not yet operational, to enforce the Community’s legal documents and give advice in questions of law interpretation but to date this is not operational.<sup>15</sup>

After the revival of ECCAS in 1998 with a wider mandate, two additional bodies were included: the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) was established as the central body for the promotion, maintenance and consolidation of peace and security; the Central African Early-warning-system (MARAC) was also established to collect and analyse data for the early detection and prevention of crises.

Through the Conference of Heads of State, the member states maintain a dominant position in ECCAS. They determine the composition and procedures of all of the ECCAS institutions, including the (future) Court of Justice (Meyer, 2011). Given experiences in other regions such as SADC, this may help explain why the Court of Justice is not operational.

CEMAC differs from ECCAS in its institutional setup, reflecting its more established nature and focus. It is formed around a Monetary Union (UMAC), an Economic Union (UEAC), a regional Parliament, and Court of Justice. The CEMAC Executive Secretariat was upgraded to a Commission in the revised treaty of 2008, in theory providing it with more powers. Similarly the Parliament and Court of Justice aimed to strengthen decision-making and implementation beyond CEMAC’s customs union predecessor UDEAC. Unlike its ECCAS counterpart, the CEMAC Court of Justice has been in place since 2000 and the Parliament established in Malabo in 2010.<sup>16</sup>

Both the Economic and Monetary Unions of CEMAC each have a Council of Ministers with three ministers from each Member State. Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Trade generally participate in both. The Monetary union UMAC is underpinned by the Bank of Central African States (the regional central bank BEAC). CEMAC also has regional organs such as the Development Bank of Central Africa (BDEAC), an Action Group Against Money Laundering (GABAC), established in 2000 and “officialised” in 2016, and more than ten specialised institutions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.wipo.int/edocs/trtdocs/en/eccas/trt\\_eccas.pdf](http://www.wipo.int/edocs/trtdocs/en/eccas/trt_eccas.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php/the-central-african-parliamentary-network>.

<sup>14</sup> *The Council of Ministers* is scheduled to meet twice a year and is comprised of the member states’ ministers responsible for economic development. The Council is responsible for ECCAS functioning and development, makes recommendations to the Conference and is guides the activities of the other institutions. The *Consultative Commission* brings together experts appointed by the member states and is responsible for advising the Council and answering questions by other institutions. Furthermore, they can establish *Specialised Technical Committees* for support.

<sup>15</sup> See: [http://www.aict-ctia.org/courts\\_subreg/eccas/eccas\\_home.html](http://www.aict-ctia.org/courts_subreg/eccas/eccas_home.html).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php/news-archive/335-inauguration-of-the-cemac-parliament-in-malabo>.

<sup>17</sup> CEMAC Specialised institutions include: The Economic Commission on Cattle, Meat and Fishery Resources

Although figures from 2008 pointed to 130 staff in the CEMAC Commission and staff are said to be well qualified, the IMF (2013) suggests that “key institutions promoting regional policies are very constrained”, with institutions such as the BEAC, COBAC and CEMAC Commission understaffed, with budgeted positions not filled.<sup>18</sup> This compares to estimates of 100 staff in the ECCAS Secretariat (based on figures from 2011).<sup>19</sup>

The number of CEMAC specialised institutions is increasingly seen as part of the need for ‘rationalisation’. Further, political instability in the CAR has disrupted the activities of the CEMAC Commission, with staff evacuated from Bangui during the CAR conflict and yet to return (as of March 2017), a continuing bone of contention for those supporting the institution. It is also a potential point of tension with Equatorial Guinea, who has offered to host the Commission and has prohibited its own staff from returning to Bangui until formally given permission.

As Table 1 shows, the CEMAC institutions are spread out relatively evenly among the six member states, though Cameroon has the banking-system-related BEAC and COBAC. Until December 2016 Gabon had no CEMAC-related institutions but hosts the headquarters of ECCAS and Gulf of Guinea Fisheries commission. This distribution potentially reflects country interests, discussed in Section 3.

**Table 1.** Distribution of key CEMAC and ECCAS institutions among member states

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Location</b>                                  |
|--|--|
| <b>CEMAC Commission</b>  | <b>Bangui, CAR</b>                               |
| BEAC - Banque des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale                    | Yaoundé, Cameroon                                |
| BDEAC - Banque de Développement des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale  | Brazzaville, Congo                               |
| CEMAC Court of Justice   | N’Djaména, Chad                                  |
| CEMAC Parliament   | Malabo, Equatorial Guinea                        |
| COBAC - Banking Commission of Central Africa                     | Yaoundé, Cameroon                                |
| GABAC - Action Group Against Money Laundering                    | Libreville, Gabon                                |
| CICOS - Commission Internationale du Bassin Congo-Oubangui-Sanga | Kinshasa, DRC (not a CEMAC member) <sup>20</sup> |
| <b>ECCAS Commission</b>  | <b>Libreville, Gabon</b>                         |
| COREP - Commission Régionale des Pêches du Golfe de Guinée COREP | Libreville, Gabon                                |
| PEAC - Pool Énergétique d’Afrique Centrale                       | Brazzaville, Congo                               |

(CEBEVIRHA), the Inter-State Committee on Pesticides (CPAC), the Institute for Statistics and Applied Economics (ISSEA), the Sub-Regional Multi-Sectoral Institute for Applied Technology (ISTA), International Commission of the Congo-Ubangi-Sangha Basin (CICOS), Planning and evaluation of OCEAC projects: Organization for the Coordination of the fight against endemic disease in Central Africa (OCEAC), Regional centre for Applied Research on the Development of the Savannas of Central Africa (PRASAC), Carte Rose CEMAC: Automobile Liability Insurance Service; Inter-state school for customs officers (EIED), a Tourism School (EHT-CEMAC), Institute of Economy and Finance (IEF) and an inter-state center for higher education on public health (CIESPAC). See <http://www.cemac.int/apropos> and <http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php/central-african-economic-and-monetary-community>

<sup>18</sup> IMF report 2013.

<sup>19</sup> BMZ Report, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> See separate PEDRO CICOS study.

MARAC - Mécanisme d'Alerte Rapide de l'Afrique Centrale

Libreville, Gabon

COMIFAC - Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale Yaoundé, Cameroun

According to the CEMAC Revised Treaty, each CEMAC Member State is entitled to propose one Commissioner in charge of a specific sector. While this offers clearly identified champions among countries in the regional agenda, the distribution of positions within CEMAC and ECCAS have been contentious and relate a lot to member state interests and even political leader relations (Marchal, 2015).<sup>21</sup> Historically a Cameroonian headed the CEMAC Commission, a Congolese the BDEAC and a Gabonais the BEAC. CAR President Bozizé managed to end this practice in 2012, with implicit support from Equatorial Guinea's President Obiang. However, this reportedly soured relations between Bozizé and other Heads of State leading to their withdrawal of support to him and his fall from power in 2013: a punishment for his reluctance to accommodate his neighbours' wishes "despite the fact that they had been generous with him" (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015). The Head of CEMAC therefore has to be "sensitive to his host" regardless of how appointed. Equatorial Guinea is also bitter about the perceived hold on power by Cameroon and Gabon and used the fact that it had the biggest share of reserves at the operations account at the Bank of France to demand a change in system.

### 2.3. Financing Central African Integration

As with most RECs, lack of finance is commonly cited as a constraint to achieving regional objectives. Lack of member state contributions has affected both CEMAC and ECCAS in spite of mechanisms in place to address this. The ECCAS Community Integration Contribution agreement (CIC/ECCAS) places a 0.4% levy on imports from outside ECCAS, representing CFA7.6bn (approximately EUR11.5m) in 2008 and CFA 11.6bn (EUR17.6m) in 2009. However, member states have recently refused to finance specialised ECCAS institutions with international partners filling the gap. This saw the self-financing rate drop from 71 percent in 2007 to 30 percent in 2014.<sup>22</sup> Available figures suggest a budget of 42 bn Francs CFA in 2015 (approximately EUR60m).<sup>23</sup>

Though operating with a bigger budget and less Member States, CEMAC also faces financial constraints. It also has a Community Integration Tax (CIT) collected by member states, though again transfers have been irregular and below budget projections.<sup>24</sup> Though the CIT was based on a 1% import levy charged on goods apart from petrol, it has seen a decline of 23% from 90bn CFA (EUR135m) in 2015 to roughly 74bn CFA (EUR112m) due to poor application and/or failure to transfer the proceeds of the CIT.<sup>25</sup> Sources suggest that CEMAC members pay little more than salaries with the remainder financed by international partners<sup>26</sup>.

Dual membership means that CEMAC member states are expected to pay a 1% levy plus a 0.4% ECCAS levy, in addition to a levy of 0.05% on imports from non-members of OHADA (WTO, 2013). A

<sup>21</sup> Only the Director of the BDEAC is not elected by the Conference of Heads of States. The head of the BDEAC is chosen by the Bank's General Assembly, composed of representatives from the CEMAC Member States, the BEAC and the African Development Banks, as well as from external donors, such as France and Kuwait <http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php/central-african-economic-and-monetary-community>.

<sup>22</sup> BMZ Report, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> ECCAS, 2015, COMMUNIQUE FINAL DE LA xvième SESSION ORDINAIRE DE LA CONFERENCE DES CHEFS D'ETAT ET DE GOUVERNEMENT DE LA COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE DES ETATS DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, (N'Djamena, le 25 Mai 2015) [https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw\\_WH1GWgbhZLXFZcEUyWmhNaVU](https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bw_WH1GWgbhZLXFZcEUyWmhNaVU), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> IMF report 2013.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.info-centrafricaine.com/ceamac-budget-de-communaute-baisse/>.

<sup>26</sup> BMZ Report, p. 64.

recent proposal for a similar AU levy on imports implies an accumulation of such charges that may undermine their effectiveness - the combination of an EAC community charge and the AU proposal have led Rwanda to negotiate a separate financing mechanism with ECCAS<sup>27</sup>.

## 2.4. Implementation challenges

Though some suggest that CEMAC can point to “substantive realisations and has done more than ECCAS to make regional integration effective in Central Africa” (Nono, 2014), the rhetoric on regional integration in Central Africa stands in contrast to the evidence on the ground. A WTO (2015) review finds that “Whereas the monetary component of integration is operating effectively, there are still problems with regard to the free movement of persons, goods and services. The Common External Tariff has been adopted but is subject to exceptions which countries grant themselves unilaterally”.

This is not only an external view. In 2016, the annual CEMAC Days event wrapped up with a similar assessment: “Central Africa is failing in its efforts to achieve regional integration”<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, fifty years after the creation of the UDEAC, “the objective laid down by the founding texts of CEMAC, namely in relation to the realisation of a Common Market at the latest by 2011, is far from being achieved” (Nono, 2014)<sup>29</sup>. CEMAC Member States agreed to move from existing inter-state cooperation to a union capable of completing the economic and monetary integration process (Essien, 2014). In theory having a Commission is intended to initiate draft legislation and apply and implement Community policies and programs.<sup>30</sup> But a 2005 evaluation of CEMAC found that the change from UDEAC to CEMAC “did not translate into significant improvements in the functioning of CEMAC”, with continuing suspicion and defiance among states, non-application of the community levy. Even after the CEMAC treaty was revised, it has remained inter-governmental beyond its monetary functions, underpinned by France.<sup>31</sup>

Although the six CEMAC Member States agreed to remove visa requirements for community nationals, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea continue to require visas, citing concerns about population influxes and security. Both cite security reasons for restricting this (WTO, 2013) though “between some countries of the region movement is relatively fluid” (AU Commission, 2013). The reluctance of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea has even seen closed borders, mass expulsions, sometimes even followed by imprisonment<sup>32</sup>. All this chimes with recent remarks by the CEMAC President, that each state thinks it can develop autonomously, translating into slow progress on the regional agenda (ICTSD, 2016)<sup>33</sup>.

Regional cooperation through ECCAS has not gone smoothly either, with weak domestication of agreed procedures by member States.<sup>34</sup> Plans to become a free trade area (FTA) in 1993 and a customs union in 1997 were undermined by conflicts in the Great Lakes and by financial difficulties due to the non-payment of membership fees (e.g. Djemmo Fotso, 2014). Even after its relaunch and revised mandate in 1998, with an autonomous financing mechanism, there has been limited progress.

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<sup>27</sup> OHADA is the Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires (OHADA), set up in 1993 and covering the Francophone countries in West and Central Africa plus Comoros, Guinea and Guinea Bissau to harmonize business law in the 17 member countries.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/a/regional-integration-stalled-in-central-africa/3243284.html>.

<sup>29</sup> UNU Working papers 2014 (see background doc.).

<sup>30</sup> Essien, V., 2014, Regional Trade Agreements in Africa: A Historical and Bibliographic Account of ECOWAS and CEMAC [http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/CEMAC\\_ECOWAS1.html](http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/CEMAC_ECOWAS1.html).

<sup>31</sup> ECDPM CEMAC Evaluation, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> UNU Working papers 2014 (see background doc.).

<sup>33</sup> “ils croient également fermement que chaque État peut se développer de manière autonome, ce qui constitue le principal obstacle à l'intégration selon Pierre Moussa” <http://www.ictsd.org/bridges-news/passerelles/news/en-afrique-centrale-l%E2%80%99int%C3%A9gration-r%C3%A9gionale-peine-%C3%A0-se-concr%C3%A9tiser>.

<sup>34</sup> See: <http://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/eccas-trade-and-market-integration>.

While clearly there are institutional blockages to the functioning of CEMAC and ECCAS, and while some suggest an emerging division of labour between ECCAS and CEMAC, with CEMAC leading on economic and monetary issues, and ECCAS in the security sector (e.g. Nono, 2014), the underlying structural factors do not incentivise or create traction that either CEMAC or ECCAS can capture.

## 2.5. Structural challenges

### Limited underlying economic complementarity

Despite the economic *raison d'être* of both CEMAC and ECCAS, intraregional trade within Central Africa is still relatively low. The ECCAS region has the lowest share of intra-regional trade in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) of Africa's five subregions<sup>35</sup>. Intra-ECCAS imports as a proportion of imports from the world has dropped from 10.2% in 2011 to 0.2% in 2015, while intra-ECCAS exports as a proportion of exports to the world has dropped from 4.0% in 2011 to 0.2% in 2015<sup>36</sup>.

The same goes for intra-CEMAC trade, in spite of a common currency: intra-CEMAC imports dropped from 12.0% to 0.3% and intra-CEMAC exports from 5.40 to 0.2% (ComTrade, 2016). The low and declining levels of trade suggest limited economic interdependence but also little interest among economic and political actors in member states. Indeed, the CFA Franc is attributed with encouraging more integration with the "metropole" (France) than among African states (e.g. Avom, 2007)<sup>37</sup>.

While low levels of trade partly relates to data which fail to capture informal cross-border trade, for example in unprocessed agricultural goods and livestock which are anyway allowed to be traded, the high level of dependency on oil and natural resources also lower the potential for economic complementarities. Seven of eleven ECCAS countries are in the top twenty African oil producing countries: Angola (number 2); Equatorial Guinea (6); Republic of Congo (8); Gabon (9); Chad (11); Cameroon (12); DRC (16) while São Tomé & Príncipe is also an oil producer<sup>38</sup>. With the exception of the CAR, crude petroleum is a key resource for all CEMAC countries, accounting for 86% of CEMAC exports: "The Congo depends on it for 61% of its GDP, Gabon for half, Chad for 40%, and Cameroon for nearly 10%" (WTO, 2013). Oil revenues provide a third of government revenues in the region (ICTSD, 2016)<sup>39</sup>. The whole region's proven oil reserves were estimated at 31.3 billion barrels, representing 28% of total continental reserves, while annual average crude oil production has recently been at 2.8 million barrels a day or 140 million tonnes per annum, of which 57% came from Angola (AfDB, 2011)<sup>40</sup>. Timber is the second largest export product, affecting all except Chad and CAR.

<sup>35</sup> See: [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/aria7\\_eng\\_rev\\_30march.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/aria7_eng_rev_30march.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> This is due to a drop in intra-regional trade and not to an increase of imports from and exports to the rest of the world, as these have also dropped, albeit in a much less significant way.

<sup>37</sup> "L'union monétaire dans le cadre de la zone franc est apparue finalement davantage comme un facteur d'intégration avec la métropole qu'entre les pays africains." [http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID\\_ARTICLE=AFCO\\_222\\_0199](http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_ARTICLE=AFCO_222_0199).

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.africanvault.com/oil-producing-countries-in-africa/>.

<sup>39</sup> "Il y a bien sûr la très forte baisse des prix du pétrole, qui ont plongé d'un niveau de 120 US\$ en juin 2014 à moins de 32 US\$ aujourd'hui. Sachant que le pétrole représente à l'heure actuelle plus de 70 pourcent des exportations des pays de la CEMAC, et plus d'un tiers de leur recette budgétaire ... <http://www.ictsd.org/bridges-news/passerelles/news/le-fmi-encourage-les-%C3%A9tats-d%E2%80%99afrique-centrale-%C3%A0-acc%C3%A9l%C3%A9rer-la>.

<sup>40</sup> Other resources include gas reserves in Burundi and the DRC as well as the considerable hydroelectric potential of the Central African river network, which represents 60% of the potential of the entire African continent (AfDB, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Despite the abundance of resources, this does not translate into high energy access. Electrification rates in Central Africa vary from the relatively high levels in Equatorial Guinea (66%), Gabon (60%) and Cameroon (54%) to the very low levels in the Central African Republic (less than 3%), Chad (4%) and DR Congo (9%). This is in spite of the fact that crude oil is Chad's primary source of export earnings, while DR Congo has a very large hydropower potential (IEA, 2014).

Beyond the limited opportunities for trade and demand for economic integration that this creates, the reliance on crude oil exports exposes the whole region to the same risks of oil price fluctuations.

Carrère (2013) is more upbeat than others on the degree of diversification taking place in the CEMAC and ECCAS economies. He points to indications of rising exports of non-traditional products that are generally masked in the data by the “reconcentration” of traditional exports, many of which are exported inside the region, so less visible in the overall trade data. Though this suggests the beginnings of a positive trend, the overall dominance of traditional resource-based exports nonetheless suggests where political priorities lie.

A broad consequence of this is that “easy revenue from natural resource sectors may also reduce the incentives for governments to pursue industrial policies that can diversify the economy, create employment and increase incomes” (Whitfield et al., 2015) - the recent decline in oil prices may therefore be positive, by altering political incentives. That said, efforts to develop infrastructure and timber processing plants in Gabon, for example, are reportedly faltering - “One of the few companies making headway is the Singapore-based agribusiness Olam, which has close ties to the presidential palace.... This year, it will complete a new mining terminal at Owendo, opening up an important new channel to export the largely untapped manganese reserves”<sup>42</sup>.

### **A limited, disconnected regional market?**

Regional markets are also small. The combined markets of CEMAC countries cover nearly 50 million people, spread over more than 3 million km<sup>2</sup>. Nearly half the population live in Cameroon, which contributes 28.6% of regional GDP. Even looking at ECCAS, the market is estimated at only 175 million people spread over 6.5m km<sup>2</sup>. This compares with 160 million people in the five-country East African Community (EAC), or 350 million in the ECOWAS region.<sup>43</sup>

This low population density combines with a lack of cross-border infrastructure to undermine greater integration. The Central African region has the least developed infrastructure network on the continent, particularly concerning transport and energy.<sup>44</sup> Although 80% of people and goods in the region are transported by land, asphalted roads represent less than 20% of the whole regional road network which covers 150,000 km (AfDB, 2011). Chad, CAR and Equatorial Guinea have no connecting modern transport links while a bridge between Gabon and Cameroon, financed by the EU, immediately had a barrier erected (UNDP, 2016). Railway systems in Central Africa are not connected and railway lines are currently obsolete and underused (AfDB, 2011).

Although Central Africa is cited as the region with the most liberalised air transport sector, it is plagued by lack of connectivity between countries due to the collapse of several airlines in the region, the obsolescence of aircraft, low competition and limited airport infrastructure (AfDB, 2011). A 2011 World Bank study cites the limited air transport connectivity within the CEMAC region and a “complete lack of connectivity between the CEMAC-only members and members that also form a part of ECCAS (the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola)” (Ranganathan & Foster, 2011, p. 25) though this may have changed in recent years.

The region’s dense inland waterways could supplement or substitute road transport in some areas with multimodal alternatives but are underdeveloped (AfDB, 2011). Maritime transport is the most important mode of transport for Central Africa’s foreign trade (Pálsson et al., 2007). Still, the region’s

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<sup>42</sup> Africa Confidential, [Vote row threatens economy](#), 20th January 2017, Fallout from the disputed presidential election is affecting an already deteriorating economic outlook.

<sup>43</sup> See <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Index.html>. Accessed on 1 July 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Other areas where it lags behind are drinking water, sanitation and information and communication technologies.

port services have limited capacity. The waiting period for freight transport could take up to 80% of the total delivery period, all contributing to high maritime transport costs (AfDB, 2011).

The poor intra-regional connections are partly historical: “Instead of linking the Gulf of Guinea to the Indian Ocean, Central Africa (particularly Oubangui-Chari/ CAR) “became a cul-de-sac”... “The French state was not keen on investing heavily into its colonial dead-end-street” (Smith, 2015). As discussed in the next section, the mere geographical location of Chad would suggest its main trade partners to be Nigeria, Niger, Libya and the Sudans. Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern DRC are far more closely integrated to their Eastern neighbours in the EAC than other ECCAS countries, while Angola clearly has limited economic incentives to engage in the wider ECCAS economy.

### **Two regional organisations among many**

This then raises the issue of overlapping regional organisations. All CEMAC members are members of ECCAS, but ECCAS countries also have overlapping memberships. Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and DRC are all COMESA members, while Burundi and Rwanda are part of the EAC, which is considerably more advanced in its economic integration programme. Angola and DRC are also members of SADC where Burundi has recently also sought membership, partly due to tensions with Rwanda in the EAC.<sup>45</sup>

Angola, Burundi, CAR, Congo, DRC and Rwanda are also part of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, focused on peace and security. Cameroon, CAR and Chad also cooperate in peace-keeping, particularly against Boko Haram, under the oversight of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Maritime security and natural resources are also dealt with through the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), headquartered in Luanda, Angola<sup>46</sup>. This is not to mention Burundi, DRC and Rwanda’s membership of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI).

While this serves to highlight the dilution of any one regional agenda among many others, regional boundaries can also be problematic. ECCAS is reportedly cooperating increasingly with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), creating an inter-regional strategy to combat maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Similar coordination is being encouraged to address the Boko Haram threat, particularly to Chad and Cameroon though increasingly also CAR, an issue that is also being addressed through the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)<sup>47</sup>.

Though this clearly undermines country prioritisation of one regional process, not to mention the challenges for financing multiple memberships, it is not clear that any one organisation is entirely redundant - De Waal and Ibreck (2016) point to the need for “not only a multilateral approach, but also an approach of multiple and overlapping multilateralisms.” Though they are referring to the Horn of Africa, it may also be true for Central Africa and in particular seems apt for the DRC. Even if so, it is not clear that Member States attach their ambitions and loyalty to each organisation in the same way (further discussed in Section 3).

### **ECCAS-CEMAC Harmonisation**

Given the similar origins, overlapping membership and similar mandates of CEMAC and ECCAS, there is an argument that neither can have much traction as long as they duplicate each other’s

<sup>45</sup> [https://issafrica.org/iss-today/burundi-keeps-knocking-at-sadcs-door?utm\\_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm\\_campaign=ISS+Weekly&utm\\_medium=email](https://issafrica.org/iss-today/burundi-keeps-knocking-at-sadcs-door?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=ISS+Weekly&utm_medium=email).

<sup>46</sup> The Commission shall constitute a framework of consultation among the countries of the Gulf of Guinea for cooperation and development, as well as for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts that may arise from the delimitation of borders and the economic and commercial exploitation of natural resources within the territorial boundaries, particularly in the overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of our States. <http://cogrps.org/wp-content/uploads/Tratado-EN1.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> See the PEDRO LCBC/CBLT Study.

efforts. Discussions have therefore been ongoing about harmonisation and rationalisation, involving Heads of State and reportedly gaining more urgency with the re-admission of Rwanda in 2003.

In an attempt to exert external influence, the financial agreement between the EU, ECCAS and CEMAC was also made conditional on ECCAS and CEMAC merging into one organisation. In practice ECCAS has been given responsibility for EU support to peace and security in the sub-region through its security pact COPAX, while CEMAC is supported for the other two pillars of economic integration and natural resource management, a compromise that maintains the status quo.

Whether pushed from the outside, or internally, in 2007 the two organisations were asked by Heads of State to set up a steering committee to determine what could be done to harmonise integration policies, programmes and instruments. This steering committee was finally established in 2010 with an action plan, including a schedule covering the 2011-2023 period<sup>48</sup>.

With involvement of the AfDB (AfDB, 2011), this identified 12 areas for harmonisation between the two organisations: freedom of movement for persons and goods; security; trade policy; transport; energy; food security; information and communication technologies; budgetary and monetary rules; integration financing mechanism; and environment<sup>49</sup>. The third meeting of the Steering Committee in 2015 could only report progress on five of the twelve areas, prior to the meeting of Ministers in charge of Integration and Finance of ECCAS and CEMAC, itself also a result of attempts to ensure harmonisation if not rationalisation<sup>50</sup>. Although that may represent a degree of progress, a 2017 UNECA press-release talks of “time to go back to the drawing board and prompt States to move forward with the 12 urgent domains for action that had been earlier identified”<sup>51</sup>.

Though most interlocutors therefore subscribe to the need for rationalisation and processes are in place, ten years have passed since the latest push from Heads of State and fourteen since it was proposed by the EU, pointing to underlying reluctance.

## 2.6. External drivers and blockers

Beyond the dominant role of external financing in supporting and attempting to shape the agendas of both ECCAS and CEMAC, external parties inevitably affect other areas of the regional agenda. According to Gathii (2011), the 2003 financial agreement between the EU and the two institutions and condition of merging was “for the purpose of ultimately concluding an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Central Africa”. Rather than merging, and while rationalisation continues slowly, a “CEMAC+” configuration was agreed to negotiate the EPA for Central Africa. This comprised CEMAC countries plus Sao Tomé and Príncipe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The decision to allow CEMAC to negotiate on behalf of CEMAC+ countries suggests a degree of trust in the regional organisation and therefore some political traction and credibility. But member state interests differ markedly *vis-a-vis* their need or interest in securing an EPA for EU market access. Cameroon initialled an interim EPA with the EU in 2007, signed in 2009. Though the agreement is theoretically open to other Central African countries, Cameroon was the only signatory in order to prevent disruption to its (especially banana) exports to the EU after the trade provisions of the Cotonou Agreement expired in December 2007<sup>52</sup>. Against the advice of CEMAC officials and the

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<sup>48</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tpr\\_e/s285\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s285_e.pdf), p. 25-6.

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tpr\\_e/s285\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s285_e.pdf), p. 25-6.

<sup>50</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201504220912.html>.

<sup>51</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201702060536.html>.

<sup>52</sup> The EPA was approved by the European Parliament on 13 June 2013 and ratified by Cameroon on 22 July 2014. [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2009/january/tradoc\\_142190.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2009/january/tradoc_142190.pdf).

request of the President of the CEMAC Commission,<sup>53</sup> the Cameroon decision was reportedly swayed by EU promises of aid, reflecting their desire to have at least one Central African country sign an EPA.

The rest of the CEMAC+ group is largely made up of Least Developed Countries with free access to the EU under the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme. Gabon and Congo Brazzaville lost market access for a far more limited set of goods but were less concerned with signing an EPA, instead falling under the Generalised System of Preferences as of 2008. Provisional application of the Cameroon EPA reportedly became effective in August 2016. Though this appears to reflect pragmatism in relations with the EU, at the same time it undermines the CEMAC Customs Union and its Common External Tariff, to the degree that those agreements are functioning<sup>54</sup>. This then serves to highlight the challenge faced by regional organisations such as CEMAC or ECCAS in reconciling member state interests with regional stances towards external partners, in this case with regards trade.

### **Influencing national politics from the outside?**

International partners clearly provide a lot of finance to each of the countries in both ECCAS and CEMAC, while also heavily financing the two institutions to make up for financial shortfalls and support security missions (see above). They are nonetheless in a dilemma. To take one example, external actors “from France to the UN – have generally viewed CAR through the lens of the promotion of regional stability at the expense of standing firm for any kind of substantive democracy or inclusiveness in CAR politics” (Lombard and Carayannis, 2015). Similarly, while Gabon's 2016 presidential election triggered criticism from President François Hollande's government and the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticising the reelection of Ali Bongo in Gabon in August 2016<sup>55</sup>, “France has taken little tangible action against Gabon, where thousands of French people reside and French oil giant Total is a key player”<sup>56</sup>.

With external investment interests in the region, the security situation also leads to more pragmatic dealings with regional leaders. One report on Chad highlights its role as a “critical security partner” for the West in tackling jihadists and the regional impact of the Libyan crisis: “[President] Déby knows that he enjoys US and European tolerance for his strongman rule”<sup>57</sup>. This external financial support to the countries and regional organisations in the face of security concerns may therefore work at odds, reducing the political pressures on political leaders to open up in political and economic terms, while continuing to finance regional organisations that themselves are at the mercy of their member states for implementation of regional programmes.

As this suggests, the role and influence of France in Central Africa cannot be ignored in influencing domestic and regional politics. This goes beyond its historic link underpinning in underpinning the CFA Franc to include business and political networks (the infamous Françafrique), also including links

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<sup>53</sup> “Cameroon was warned against taking unilateral action, with CEMAC officials saying it would be in breach of the community's rules and would threaten its membership of the bloc. “[CEMAC] recommends that the Cameroonian authorities delay the [tariff] dismantling process billed for August 4 until the conclusion of a regional agreement,” Pierre Moussa, President of the CEMAC Commission, wrote in a letter to Cameroon's Economy Minister.” <http://africanarguments.org/2016/09/26/cameroon-goes-it-alone-with-controversial-eu-trade-deal-angers-regional-partners/>.

<sup>54</sup> See here, for example <http://www.camer.be/53918/12:1/union-douaniere-cemac-le-casse-tete-de-la-mise-en-oeuvre-de-lape-cameroun-cameroun.html>.

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.jeuneafrique.com/400499/politique/gabon-va-examiner-a-froid-cooperation-lunion-europeenne/?utm\\_source=Newsletter\\_JA\\_Eco&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=Newsletter\\_JA\\_Eco\\_06\\_02\\_17](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/400499/politique/gabon-va-examiner-a-froid-cooperation-lunion-europeenne/?utm_source=Newsletter_JA_Eco&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter_JA_Eco_06_02_17).

<sup>56</sup> Africa Confidential, January 2017 <http://www.africa-confidential.com/index.aspx?pageid=7&articleid=11891>.

<sup>57</sup> Africa Confidential, [Missing men mar Déby's win](http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11655/Missing_men_mar_D%C3%A9by%E2%80%99s_win).  
29th April 2016 [http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11655/Missing\\_men\\_mar\\_D%C3%A9by%E2%80%99s\\_win](http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11655/Missing_men_mar_D%C3%A9by%E2%80%99s_win).

through freemasonry, discussed further below. The deep impact of all this is an orientation and mobility of elites in all CEMAC and most ECCAS countries towards France that further strengthens the economic and political ties between each country and the metropole rather than the region.

### Summing up

Looking at their political traction overall, the picture that emerges is of two regional organisations with a degree of historical and political legitimacy and some cooperation, around issues of peace and security in particular. In the economic sphere, what integration there is, appears to be largely a residual from the origins of CEMAC as a Customs Union, in areas where the countries never exercised sovereignty in any case (Bach, 2015) rather than any willingness from states to implement regional commitments and somehow share sovereignty at a regional level.<sup>58</sup>

## 3. On the interests of member states in CEMAC/ECCAS

The other side of the coin to the political traction of CEMAC and ECCAS are the underlying interests of its member states in using regional processes to achieve national or narrower political goals. That is the focus of this section, with key member state interests summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Summary of Member State Interests in CEMAC-ECCAS**

| Country<br>(Central African regional org.)  | Main Interests in ECCAS/CEMAC   |
|---|---|
| Angola<br>(ECCAS)                           | Major regional trade interests (if any) are SADC; ECCAS interests are political/security related, with direct support to DRC's Kabila; close cross-border socio-cultural ties in Eastern Angola with Southern DRC. Somewhat hegemonic role.   |
| Burundi<br>(ECCAS)                          | Historical socio-economic ties to Eastern DRC but trade focus on EAC; potentially changing with current domestic situation and tensions with Rwanda ; in the short-medium term ECCAS interest is political/security related though requesting membership of SADC.   |
| Cameroon<br>(ECCAS & CEMAC)                 | Cameroon was <i>de facto</i> hegemon in the CEMAC region until recent years, with the largest economy and strong Presidential lead, now flagging. Until last mandate had always positioned CEMAC President; potentially rising market interest in neighbouring Nigeria (non-ECCAS/CEMAC) though constrained by CEMAC CET. |
| Central African Republic<br>(ECCAS & CEMAC) | Main focus on domestic political and security tensions; no strong interests in CEMAC or ECCAS beyond access to imports through Cameroon.  |
| Chad<br>(ECCAS & CEMAC)                     | Gaining increasing role in the region through military strength and role in combating Boko Haram strong role in CAR conflict and politics; sees potential pivotal role of location between North, West and Central Africa, financed by oil.   |

<sup>58</sup> Since 1988, "the stability and convertibility of the CFA remains guaranteed by France, but the European Central Bank (ECB) and its Financial and Economic Committee are to be informed about any plans for adjustment of the euro/CFA parity", requiring approval by the European Council, acting on the advice of the ECB and European Commission".

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Congo-Brazzaville<br>(CEMAC & ECCAS) | Primarily concerned with domestic politics.   |
| DRC<br>(ECCAS)                       | Multiple interests, highlighting the need for overlapping RO membership: Eastern DRC more connected to EAC and Northern Corridor; Southern DRC/Katanga, connected to SADC markets through Zambia; West DRC/Kinshasa connected with ECCAS/CEMAC though historical reluctance to submit to French-influenced CEMAC though joined CEMAC grouping for EU Economic partnership Agreement negotiations. |
| Equatorial Guinea<br>(ECCAS & CEMAC) | Joined CEMAC in 1983; minimal role or voice until oil production in the mid-1990s; now aspiring CEMAC lead with highest share of bank reserves from oil reserves; offer/desire to host CEMAC Sec. following conflict-driven exit from Bangui-CAR. Economically and physically close to Cameroon - reluctance to open border to workers given potential influx of better skilled.                  |
| Gabon<br>(ECCAS & CEMAC)             | Took on CEMAC lead under previous Pres. Bongo; CHose the head of BEAC until last mandate. Funded continuation of ECCAS during period of paralysis;. Similarly to Eq. Guinea - reluctance to open border to workers given potential influx of better skilled.  |
| Rwanda<br>(ECCAS)                    | Historical socio-economic ties to Eastern DRC, engagement in DRC wars and East DRC mineral interests; Trade focus is EAC as reflected when left ECCAS in 2007, rejoining in 2016; in the short-medium term ECCAS interest is political/security related.  |
| São Tomé e Príncipe<br>(ECCAS)       | Principally maritime interests. Joined the CEMAC+ EPA negotiation with DRC as limited other choices.  |

Though CEMAC states were majoritarily under French Equatorial West Africa, they also count among them Equatorial Guinea, previously a Spanish colony and Cameroon that came under the influence of Germany, Great Britain and France. When combined in ECCAS with the lusophone ex-Portuguese colonies Angola and Saint Tomé e Príncipe, and the ex-Belgian colonies of Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda, the region displays a wide range of historical experiences. Though far from determinant, the institutional and linguistic heritage nonetheless affects the ease with which countries can cooperate and integrate, not least from a legal point of view, while also facilitating specific commercial and social interactions across borders. This, then, is an important foundational factor in the region.

### **Championing integration?**

As Vanheukelom et al. (2016) highlight, regional hegemons or “swing states” can drive or undermine regional integration and cooperation. In theory, Cameroon might fill this role in CEMAC as the largest economy in the region, accounting for over half of CEMAC’s combined GDP. Nonetheless, it is small, representing in 2012 less than 10% of South Africa’s GDP and while influential in the region, takes a declining role in regional politics with the wealth of Equatorial Guinea providing it with more sway<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, while ECCAS dynamics are shaped by the three largest countries, DRC, Angola, and Cameroon; in the security sphere Chad and Rwanda also wield influence. Some interpret the recent fall in petrol prices as an opportunity for Cameroon and its President to regain more of a lead in the region, as reflected in the recent extraordinary CEMAC summit held in Yaoundé<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-05-12-strength-in-unity-and-vice-versa-central-africas-integration-problem/#.WKRSehLytBw>.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.cameroon-info.net/article/cameroun-integration-regionale-et-si-le-cameroun-quittait-la-communaute-economique-et-monetaire-des-278571.html>.

Without a clear regional champion, the region is shaped by a dispersion of interests and internal rivalries (Stevens, Hoebeke & Vlassenroot, 2008). This goes as far as member states interfering in each other's domestic politics.<sup>61</sup> A striking example is the meddling by neighbouring countries in the Central African Republic: President Déby of Chad "considered himself the kingmaker in CAR and indeed he was": the Seleka rebel movement that took over Bangui in March 2013 was supported by out-of-uniform Chadian soldiers (Marchal, 2015)<sup>62</sup>. Cameroon then stepped in to host CAR's deposed President Bozizé as a way to express discontent with Chadian President Déby. Similarly, Bangui believes that Chad has put a veto on exploitation of extractive resources south of the Chadian border, thereby adding to the complex inter-state relations (Smith, 2015b). Many of the difficulties in progressing with regional agendas in the late 1990s also related to the Congo wars that drew in Rwanda but also Angola, Chad, Burundi, Libya, Namibia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

Levels of mistrust also filter down to the population level. In CAR "Chadians (and Sudanese" are labeled the 'absolute foreigners'" whose offspring can never be CAR citizens (Marchal, 2015). Again in CAR, Smith (2015b) talks of "Concessionary politics ... as a privileged mode of turning lack of institutional capacity into a productive resource ... The more governance is outsourced, the more can be charged by a rentier-cum-gatekeeper state which monetises its own deficiencies"<sup>63</sup>. Marchal argues that "the CAR state actually functions the way it does because of the way it fits into a regional process of state-building ... extremely violent and characterised by internal wars and high levels of coercion" ( Marchal, 2015b)<sup>64</sup>.

### **Fragile domestic contexts**

The fragility of the Central African political context is reflected in high scores on various rankings regarding corruption and poor governance. According to the Fragile State Index 2016,<sup>65</sup> three out of the eleven ECCAS member states belong to the top ten fragile states (the CAR, DRC and Chad). Likewise, Congo Brazzaville, Chad, the CAR and the DRC are in the top 20 of the Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>66</sup>. Additionally, the Central African countries generally score low on the Human Development Index, with the exception of Sao Tome and Principe (143rd position out of 188), Equatorial Guinea (138th position), Congo (136th position) and Gabon (110th position)<sup>67</sup>.

These indices reflect internal political settlements. Multiparty systems of government were achieved in Central Africa through three different means: by holding 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; cited in Lombaard and Carayannis, 2016). Assuming political survival is the goal, elections have thus far had little role in shaping political priorities and national interests in regional projects or otherwise. This is reflected in the longevity of presidential mandates (See Table 3 below)<sup>68</sup>. Though arguably this provides stability,

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-05-12-strength-in-unity-and-vice-versa-central-africas-integration-problem/#.WKRMcXlrJBx>.

<sup>62</sup> That also meant that withdrawal of his support had consequences, as occurred with Bozizé who was forced to seek support from South Africa's Jacob Zuma when Déby thought that CAR was seeking to exploit oilfields on their border.

<sup>63</sup> Lombard (2015) talks of "tensions between an economic realm that is largely built through concessions managed by 'foreigners', a state affected by a deep ambivalence on the loss of sovereignty (this later being given away to foreign companies to get its rulers richer) and the need to sustain itself at the risk of being overthrown, and a population that alternately seeks to escape and profit from state predation".

<sup>64</sup> Marchal, R., 2015b, CAR and the Regional (Dis)order, in Ed.s Lombaard and Carayannis, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> See <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/>.

<sup>66</sup> See [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016).

<sup>67</sup> See [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr\\_2015\\_statistical\\_annex.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2015_statistical_annex.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> "The motivations, calculations, and coalitional strategies of ruling elites have significant influences on policy choices and changes and thus policy choice and implementation cannot be separated from ruling elites' strategies to ensure political survival" (Whitfield et al., 2015).

it also leads to highly personalised power that carries over to regional dynamics and interactions.

**Table 3** - Regional presidents and their longevity

| Country                      | President                     | Period  |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Angola                       | José Eduardo dos Santos       | 1979 – present                                  |
| Equatorial Guinea            | Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo | 1979 – present                                  |
| Cameroon                     | Paul Biya                     | 1982 – present                                  |
| Chad                         | Idriss Déby                   | 1990 – present                                  |
| Rwanda                       | Paul Kagame                   | 1994 – present                                  |
| São Tomé e Príncipe          | Manuel Pinto da Costa         | 1975–1991; 2011 – present                       |
| Republic of Congo            | Denis Sassou Nguesso          | 1997 – present                                  |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | Joseph Kabila                 | 2001 – present                                  |
| Burundi                      | Pierre Nkurunziza             | 2005 – present                                  |
| Gabon                        | Ali Bongo Ondimba             | 2009 - present (son of Omar Bongo, 1967 - 2009) |
| CAR                          | Faustin-Archange Touadéra     | 2016 – present                                  |

The nature of politics varies across countries, but Lombard's (2015) description of CAR underlines the enormous complexity of politics within states: there is a tension between “the economic realm that is largely built through concessions managed by ‘foreigners’ [often 2nd or 3rd generation regional immigrants], a state affected by a deep ambivalence on the loss of sovereignty (this later being given away to foreign companies to get its rulers richer) and the need to sustain itself at the risk of being overthrown, and a population that alternately seeks to escape and profit from state predation”. With these domestic politics, the potential for regional cooperation is clearly limited.

### Club or competition?

All this raises questions about the interest of Member States elites in regional cooperation and integration, or whether CEMAC and ECCAS simply serve for “club diplomacy”<sup>69</sup>. Meyer (2008) suggests that political actors use regional cooperation as “a certain guarantee of support and confirmation of their authority by regional partners and allies in case their power is compromised by civil insurrections, rebellions or putsch attempts, or by foreign pressure”.<sup>70</sup> Some states, such as Chad, want to be seen as willing and capable partners in tackling security challenges, particularly in the eyes of France and the US (Shepherd and Melly, 2016)<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, personal tensions are cited as obstacles to cross-country or regional cooperation, for example between Congolese Sassou-Nguesso and Chadian Déby who “scrupulously avoid each other while mutually supporting one

<sup>69</sup> Bach (2016) quotes Heine's (2013) definition of Club Diplomacy as “the conduct of inter-state relations through peer interactions within an insulated environment”.

<sup>70</sup> She points in particular to the way in which the Chadian president Idriss Déby “regularly asks his regional partners on their meetings to officially support and confirm him as Head of State and to condemn the numerous putsch attempts he has been victim of in the previous months and years” (Meyer, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> [http://noref.no/var/ezflow\\_site/storage/original/application/03f6e73f42b6e21f2984e3cc322dff4d.pdf?utm\\_source=Chatham%20House&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=7861728\\_End%20of%20Year%20email&dm\\_i=1\\_S3M.4OI5C.NUSS5Z.HHNB5.1](http://noref.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/03f6e73f42b6e21f2984e3cc322dff4d.pdf?utm_source=Chatham%20House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=7861728_End%20of%20Year%20email&dm_i=1_S3M.4OI5C.NUSS5Z.HHNB5.1).

another's personal hold on power<sup>72</sup>.

Similarly Gabon and Cameroon are said to struggle for influence and leadership in the region. Until Ali Bongo took over from his father, Gabon was the oldest member of the region's 'President's club'. Former president Bongo had acted as an arbitrator in several regional disputes and conflicts and was considered "a key player of the French policy in sub-Saharan Africa, wielding considerable influence in the so-called 'French-African village'" (Stevens, Hoebeke & Vlassenroot, 2008, p. 169). Today, Paul Biya from Cameroon is considered by many as something of the Godfather of the region, with Ali Bongo in 2009 saying "President Paul Biya has always considered me as his son ... I had to come and see him so he could give me sound advice"<sup>73</sup>. Though quite anecdotal, this kind of statement along with the freemasonry of Presidents Bongo, Sassou-Nguesso, Déby and ex-president Bozizé all point to the close relations among leaders, as well as the links to French networks of masons.

Though personal relations clearly play an important role in Member State positions and power games within the two regional organisations, security threats clearly also shape elite interests in engaging regionally. In the case of Chad, the risks of disruption to its trade routes through the region where Boko Haram has been arising, Déby has placed himself at the forefront of tackling regional security threats, from Mali to northern Nigeria. Insecurity would particularly affect livestock trade, Chad's second largest export earner after oil and the source of livelihoods for large numbers of its people. In that respect the country is seen as an important partner of the international community: "Chad is widely seen as a beacon of stability in a turbulent region" (Shepherd and Melly, 2016).

While Angola finds itself somewhat isolated from the rest of the ECCAS region, its border with DRC has historically been porous while Angola has played a strong role in defending Kinshasa in its internal struggles in the East and during the Great African War (1998-2003)<sup>74</sup>. Angolan elite interests therefore seem to be security driven, though opportunities to benefit from the extractives also appear to drive its interests in the region, if not in the regional organisation. As Stevens et al. (2008) state, "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 [CAR] and the DRC ... and continues to increase its economic position through oil exploitation and savvy policy towards China, Brazil, the US and Europe".

For Rwanda, the official line regarding its re-entry to ECCAS is a way to strengthen socio-economic ties and widen its market beyond the EAC, where it had decided to focus in 2007<sup>75</sup>. This also fits in Rwanda's larger economic strategy, which is focussed on reclaiming its national market ('local production for local consumption'), while keeping its trade liberalised<sup>76</sup>. While surely part of the concerns, the nature and slowness of economic integration hints at a more political interest in being part of ECCAS, but also the security concerns. Though Eastern DRC is primarily dealt with through the ICGLR, where Rwanda is also a member, the overlap of members with ECCAS potentially allows ICGLR-related issues to be further discussed through the ECCAS forum, offering more opportunities for high-level discussion and negotiation among heads of state.

Even before the founding of ECCAS, the DRC under Mobutu tried to shape regional politics through regional organisations. In 1968, Mobutu convinced Chad and the CAR to found the Union of the

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.makaila.fr/2016/08/abdoulaye-miskine-le-rebelle-de-la-discorde-entre-idriss-deby-et-sassou-ngueso-par-rigobert-ossebi.html>.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/-/1066/656822/-/4ln02t/-/index.html>.

<sup>74</sup> See also PEDRO report on African Union.

<sup>75</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201608200410.html>, <https://www.trademarka.com/news/rwanda-eyes-big-opportunities-from-central-african-bloc-miniser/>.

<sup>76</sup> [http://www.minicom.gov.rw/fileadmin/minicom\\_publications/Planning\\_documents/Domestic\\_Market\\_Recap\\_turing\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.minicom.gov.rw/fileadmin/minicom_publications/Planning_documents/Domestic_Market_Recap_turing_Strategy.pdf).

Central African States' (UEAC) as a rival to the UDEAC. Chad and the CAR had already left the UDEAC due to tensions between the landlocked and coastal states, Gabon and the Republic of Congo (Stevens, Hoebeke & Vlassenroot, 2008, p. 168). Though the UEAC had limited impact and CAR rejoined UDEAC Mobutu then fruitlessly tried to establish the 'economic community of the central African countries', which would have consisted of CEPGL and UDEAC member states, only to be confronted with Gabon's more successful attempts establishing the ECCAS a few years later (Stevens, Hoebeke & Vlassenroot, 2008). While CEPGL in itself was the result of Mobutu's political ambitions, DRC continues to carry weight in the CEMAC+ configuration, initially meant for EPA negotiation but now increasingly also cited, for example in the context of CICOS, the CEMAC institution specialised in managing the Congo, Ubangui and Sangha rivers.

### Summing up

Though impossible to cover all the different interest groups and influences across the two regional groupings of CEMAC and ECCAS, both the discussion of their political traction and Member State interests point to the close network of personalised relations and interests between Heads of State. In that respect, the regional fora appear to act as dialogue platforms but also as mechanisms for mutual support between ruling elites in a region not characterised by democratic processes.

## 4. On the areas with most traction for regional cooperation

Given the above understanding of CEMAC and ECCAS, the political traction and the political interests of their member states, by way of conclusion this section highlights areas within the regional agenda with most potential traction going forward.

As the preceding section suggests, the prognosis for regional integration in Central Africa is far from positive. This relates to the underlying structural conditions, and the related political dynamics within and between countries in the region. These do little to suggest there are strong underlying push factors towards greater economic integration, even if large volumes of cross-border trade take place at an informal level, particularly in agricultural goods. This suggests very little scope for progress, even with on-going efforts to harmonise CEMAC and ECCAS trade regimes and to promote greater national transposition of regional commitments. The aspirational agenda associated with future gains from improved market integration seems to face entrenched interests and political prioritisation focused elsewhere than seeking to maximise regional public goods, while economically, the reliance on oil revenues has so far minimised the 'push factors' towards more integration. With ECCAS deriving its legitimacy from the AU and CEMAC operating a monetary union, the right division of labour between the two organisations remains an open question

At the same time, the threat of overflows of violent conflict also show where national and elite interests align and where CEMAC and ECCAS can play a role. While CEMAC originally responded to the crisis in the CAR, ultimately it has led to considerable traction for ECCAS peace and security initiatives. The connections between violence and illicit financing from natural resource extraction also highlight the potential role of regional bodies looking at money-laundering (through the CEMAC related GABAC) and better coordination of natural resource management. Though the two areas begin to tip into the territory of aspirations and may undermine key interests in the region, they may also offer reasonably technical approaches to issues where at least sub-regional coalitions of interests can be found.

Looking beyond the regional institutions to more 'functional' forms of integration, Central Africa has several important petroleum producers and exporters. This means that landlocked Chad is obliged to

export its petroleum by pipeline to the Cameroonian port Kribi (Smith, 2015b): “More than 80% of their trade flows by volume transits through the port of Douala (Cameroon) from which CEMAC's main transit corridors also depart, namely: three routes to Chad and two to the Central African Republic” (WTO, 2015). Beyond infrastructures, the Chadian government has begun to develop oil production, eyeing medium-term opportunities to generate electricity from petroleum gas. It hopes to export power to Cameroon, especially during dry periods.”<sup>77</sup> The development of sub regional infrastructure linking Cameroon, Chad and Central African Republic through road and rail constructions have begun to be constructed (Nono, 2015). The CEMAC is also being supported by the EC to strengthen digital connections among member states. Though also potentially subject to different interests and power struggles, these physical connections may be the best entry point for promoting more regional integration and cooperation as a way to build momentum towards the currently stalled approaches.

Though both CEMAC and ECCAS build on historical linkages, have established quite complex institutional structures, and have agendas that appear to focus on precisely what the countries in the region need, underpinned by community contribution systems for their financing, the underlying narrative from Central Africa is that form by no means defines function. The general perception given by people working within and outside the organisations is of frustration - that though all these institutional and organisational feature are in place, there is extremely limited genuine political interest in promoting regional common interests. The challenge of promoting regional integration is not unique to Central Africa, but Central Africa nonetheless presents some unique challenges that require serious consideration of what regional ambitions are genuinely feasible.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://news.trust.org/item/20150217142952-xc6aq>.

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