

## **THE DIFFICULT PEACE IN THE REGION OF AFRICA'S GREAT LAKES**

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The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remained as restless as ever in 2008. In August, the CNDP militias resorted to violence again, driving innumerable people from their homes in the east of the country. Concerned, the international community made appeals and dispatched ministers on visits. However, it was only in November that an armistice was concluded between the CNDP and the government, and negotiations to revive the peace agreement were resumed early in December. At the same time, there were secret talks between the Congolese and the Rwandan leadership. The latter did decide to drop General Nkunda and his CNDP but demanded that, in return, the President of the DRC, Mr Kabila, should join in liquidating the remnants of the former Rwandan Habyarimana army, later known as the FDLR. Consequently, 7,000 Rwandan soldiers invaded the North Kivu province early in 2009.

The global community viewed this as an important step towards permanently pacifying the region, although it remains to be seen whether it will be successful. Even if the coordinated Congolese-Rwandan operation should achieve its purpose, questions will remain. Will Rwanda extradite Mr Nkunda to the DRC? Will the CNDP fighters allow themselves to be integrated in the FADRC without friction? What will become of the Tutsi in the eastern Congo? Will those who fled to Rwanda be able to return home? How will the Congolese react to Mr Kabila's decision to enter into a pact with the Rwandan army? To answer these questions, it is necessary to look back.

The conflict revolves mainly around the two Kivu provinces which, accounting for no more than five percent of the country's territory, are home to 15 percent of its population. Both are highly fertile and rich in commodities. As the government proved unable to re-establish the state's monopoly on the use of force after the end of the civil war, numerous militias great and small evolved which keep themselves alive by instrumentalizing the ethnic conflicts in the region. These conflicts are rooted in the Belgian colonial era, when one and the same administration was in charge of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Congo, and farmers migrated into the Congo from Rwanda, increasing the Kinyarwanda-speaking population. After 1960, displaced Tutsi as well as Hutu farmers arrived in their tens of thousands.

The Kinyarwanda speakers and especially the Tutsi incurred the hatred of the indigenous population. From 1990 to 1994, during the civil war, a severe conflict raged between the two parties in which many Tutsi lost all they had. This changed, however, when the Rwandan army invaded the region a little

later under the RCD-Goma in which native Tutsi held many leading positions. The Tutsi assumed control over commodity mining and trading, and relations between the two ethnic groups were poisoned further.

After the reunification of the DRC, the RCD-Goma lost its military support, and in the elections of 2006, it also lost its political power. Under Laurent Nkunda, parts of the ANC formed the CNDP militia which styled itself protector of the Tutsi and their business interests. In 2001, President Josef Kabila severed relations with the Rwandan mercenaries whom his father had recruited to fight the RCD-Goma, hustling them towards the east where they merged with the FDLR. Although the FDLR managed to bring certain parts of the Kivu provinces under its control, it presents hardly any danger these days. Further groups besides the FDLR include PARECO, which consists of local security units, the mai-mai militias, and others which cooperate in ever-changing alliances with the FADRC and the FDLR.

It is uncertain whether the FDLR and other militias will be demobilized by the united government armies. Another matter that needs to be settled is the control over commodities by which the militias acquire their funds. The future of the Tutsi minority is yet another unanswered question. Furthermore, the integration of the CNDP units in the regular army remains an explosive issue. And it will be a challenge to cope with the disastrous social and economic situation in the region and deal with the future of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Indeed, the project of disarming the militias affects the interests of many, so that new solidarities may be formed and resistance may arise afresh.

There are many uncertainty factors. First among these is the central government in Kinshasa. It is true that Josef Kabila, now 'democratically' legitimized, is in a highly powerful position, all the more so because his main domestic opponent, Jean-Pierre Bemba, has been put on the shelf. On the other hand, the federalization of the country has led to the formation of new centres of power. Moreover, it is not yet clear what the balance of power will be between the president, the prime minister, and the cabinet ministers, who all come from various political parties and regions.

It is Mr Kabila's task to re-establish the authority of the state. He himself, however, appears to be following the lead of Mr Mobutu and his father, Laurent D. Kabila, in interpreting this as a call to enhance his personal power. It is not yet clear what structures will form in the country. It is clear, however, that no pluralist system underpinned by suitable institutions will emerge. The donor community certainly made a mistake when it failed to secure for itself sufficient options to intervene when the country's security structure was set up. For Mr Kabila himself, the Rwandan army's invasion represents a considerable risk, particularly as it may trigger resistance

among the autochthone population and the Hutu minority. It would be fatal for Mr Kabila to agree to a secession of those parts of North Kivu that are mainly inhabited by Kinyarwanda speakers. The consequences of such a 'betrayal' of national interests might be immense.

Another significant figure is Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, whose RPA was supported during the civil war and after the Rwandan genocide by the USA as well as Great Britain and other European countries. Moreover, he benefited from the loss of respect suffered by the Mobutu regime as well as from the untrustworthiness of the opposition in Kinshasa. While the political realignment of the great lakes region favoured especially by Uganda's president, Mr Museveni, failed to make any progress, Rwanda still sought to secure its influence in the Kivu region. To be sure, Rwanda's cooperation with the RDC-Goma was partially rooted in solidarity with the Tutsi, yet the country mainly pursued its own political and economic schemes, particularly with regard to commodities. The agreements recently concluded between Mr Kagame and Mr Kabila show that Rwanda's interest in developments in the eastern Congo is far from dead.

So far, Rwanda's domestic policy has impressed the international community quite favourably. Taut leadership, a high level of public security, efficient administration, and the availability of basic health and education provisions all speak for Mr Kagame's policy. The president's most ambitious aim is to upgrade the country into a centre of service and commerce for all East Africa, supported by a qualified English-speaking elite. Critics argue that this strategy hardly benefits the lower classes outside the agricultural sector. At the same time, the population in the arable territories is exploding so swiftly that it will soon be impossible to feed it adequately. So far, the government appears to have matters firmly in hand, and the president's power is unchallenged. Yet there is unrest and criticism. Whereas the Hutu politicians have been marginalized and almost entirely deprived of any contact with the majority of the population, the discontent of those Tutsi who survived the genocide is a much graver matter. Especially the French-speaking Tutsi who have returned from the Congo and Burundi represent a potential risk, as do the Tutsi refugees who live in camps.

The preference of the West is for Rwanda to join the East African Community (EAC). It is hoped that such an accession will reorder the country's economy, assist private business in its quest for prosperity, and mitigate the conflict potential within the region. The last-named item is by no means insignificant. Thus, Uganda only recently withdrew from its prolonged entanglement in the region's disputes. Moreover, political and economic reforms are overdue in the country. The problem of poverty, inequality, and corruption remains unresolved. Similarly, political instability reigns in Kenya where the political parties appear permanently locked in a bitter power struggle. Burundi is

giving rise to concern because, like Rwanda, it suffers from the conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu. So far, the impoverished rural population which accounts for about 90 percent of the country's total has not benefited from the peace. On the other hand, Tanzania, where numerous ethnic groups live side by side almost without tension, appears to have no problems with its statehood and national identity. As the government's endeavours to mediate have been successful so far, we may certainly assume that the country is not posing an additional threat to the ever-fragile peace in the region. It should be noted that Kenya and Tanzania are the only countries where the military has hardly any influence on politics. All other countries in the region are dominated by military thinking, which overshadows the search for efficient conflict-solving models. In shaping the peace process, military leaders are exclusively concerned with preserving their own power. Neither in the DRC nor in Rwanda, Burundi, or Uganda is the military controlled by civilian institutions. Even the recent agreement between Rwanda and the DRC is part of a strategy pursued by the military.

If the pacification of the region is to succeed, the military must not have the last word. Rather, they should bow to civil institutions and the rules of democracy. The current fabric of power in the DRC and Rwanda is certainly not a suitable foundation for sustainable conflict solution. Even the agreement recently concluded will at best ring in a new round in a fight which cannot be won by any of the contestants. Hoping for a sustainable peace in the region is likely to remain wishful thinking.

IN: *Auslandsinformationen* 2/2009, ISSN 0177-7521, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Berlin, p.148-152