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# The Limits of the EU as a Peace and Security Actor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Meike Froitzheim, Fredrik Söderbaum and Ian Taylor

**Abstract:** The European Union (EU) is increasingly aspiring to be a global peace and security actor. Using the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as a test case to analyse such ambitions, this article reveals that the EU's attempts to build peace and security are severely compromised by its bureaucratic and organizational complexity as well as by its ineffective policies. In fact, the EU's state-centred approach in the DRC has resulted in the EU's inability to deal with 1) the realities of governance in the DRC and 2) the strong trans-border dimensions of the conflict. As a result, the EU continues to lack a coherent strategy for the DRC, despite a large budget. The analysis concludes that the EU is more concerned with establishing a symbolic presence and a form of representation than with achieving specific goals.

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**Keywords:** European Union, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Central Africa, Common Foreign and Security Policy (EU), regional international conflicts, peacekeeping through security policy

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Over the last decade or so there has been a substantial increase in the debate on the European Union's (EU's) role as a global actor (Hill 1993; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Smith 2003). Following the implementation of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003, the EU has expanded its pledged commitments in terms of peace and security policies, and these commitments have been undertaken with the ambition that "Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world" (European Commission 2003: 1).

One area where the EU has sought to ostensibly play a role in "building a better world" is in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite its absence from the Western public's consciousness, the conflict in the DRC has been the deadliest war since World War II. Leaving aside the millions of injured, raped and orphaned and the untold numbers forced into refugee status, more than 5 million people have lost their lives in the war since 1998 (Turner 2007). The conflict is in fact a tangled meeting point of various violent struggles at different levels – local, national and regional – and although centred mainly in the eastern half of the DRC, its manifestations and effects are global (Taylor 2003).

Briefly, the conflict(s) have their origins in the legacy of colonialism (with regards to citizenship, legal status and land tenure), questions of autochthony centred around Kinyarwanda-speaking communities, severe ruptures within the Congolese polity created by decades of criminal misrule by the Mobutu Sese Seko regime (1965–1997), and massive population displacements and the concomitant ethnic tensions caused by political violence in Burundi and Rwanda, culminating in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Chrétien and Benégas 2008; Reyntjens 2009; Lemarchand 2009). Dubbed "Africa's World War" (Prunier 2008), the role of the EU as an actor in this postcolonial space is thus of great interest, particularly in the context whereby Brussels is actively advocating its global ambitions.

In this regard, the EU has applied a wide range of policies in the DRC. These policies formally aim to alleviate the suffering caused by the conflicts and to help rebuild the country politically – that is, engage in state-building and peace-building. A significant amount of money has been disbursed by the European Union to implement extensive development and humanitarian activities. Indeed, between 2002 – when structural cooperation between the EU and the DRC resumed – and late 2010, Brussels mobilized 961 million EUR. This figure excludes humanitarian aid, which is defined as consisting of three main tools: emergency aid, food aid, and aid for refugees (European Commission 2010a). In addition to the Community's approach, five military and civil missions under the mandate of the Council of the European Union and within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy

(CSDP) have been deployed in the DRC since 2003. Furthermore, the EU has had a Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes region since 1996. Clearly, if measured in terms of finances spent and political commitment, the DRC is of great importance to the European Union.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this article<sup>1</sup> is to analyse whether and to what extent the EU can be considered a unified and coherent actor in the eastern DRC, given that there has been criticism that the EU acts in such situations only to project a particular image while not implementing any practical and consistent set of policies (Gegout 2009b). We conducted fieldwork and research in both Brussels and the Great Lakes region in 2010, and our analysis is based on the assumption that internal coherence determines and circumscribes the practical effectiveness of external policies (defined below). Thus we scrutinize and analyse the European Union's actor capability in the DRC through focusing on the coherence of the EU's policy formulation and its implementation on the ground in the eastern DRC. In doing so, this article aims to contribute to the debate on both the EU's coherence as an actor and the related discussions surrounding the nature and effectiveness of the EU's multilateral efforts. A specific aim of the ESS is "the development of a stronger international society, well-functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order" (Biscop and Drieskens 2005: 2). Investigating whether such assumptions are correct in the context of the EU's efforts in the DRC is a further fundamental aim of this article. Such an investigation is intrinsically linked to the question of coherence.

The article starts out by discussing previous research on the EU as a global actor in order to formulate a basic perspective on actorness and coherence, which guide the analysis. A general description of the EU's policies and efforts in the eastern DRC follows. We then analyse the institutional coherence of the EU, particularly the interplay between the European Commission and the Council. Shifting the focus towards the quality and relevance of the EU's efforts, we study how the EU is managing the regional dimension of the conflict as well as the regime in Kinshasa, which is characterized by dysfunctional bureaucracies and patronage policies. Against this backdrop, we then question the effectiveness of donor coordination in the DRC, the EU being a major donor. Finally, we draw some general conclusions regarding the EU as a peace and security actor in the DRC.

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## The EU as an International Actor

There is a rich literature on the EU's role in world politics. In a recent article, Ian Manners shows that this role has been described in a variety of ways over the past five decades, ranging from mythologies of the EU as a bull, a third force, a civilian power or a normative power, to a gendered construction of the EU's weakness, and, finally, to mythologies of the EU as a pole of power in a multipolar world (Manners 2010). Enquiries into the EU's global power and identity may of course be linked to coherence, but discussions about the latter also centre on the EU's capacity to act consistently. There has been an increasing number of studies on the EU as an international actor and on its coherence over the two last decades (Allen and Smith 1990; Hill 1993; Cameron 1998; Jupille and Caporaso 1998; Ginsberg 1999; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Orbie 2008; Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010); and the EU itself has increasingly become preoccupied with the coherence of its policy delivery. As Szymanski and Smith have pointed out, the EU's

increasing emphasis on coherence [...] represents a gradual transition from its original focus on negative integration (ensuring that member state foreign policies did not adversely affect the Community) to positive integration (equipping the EU with the means to act coherently in world politics) (Szymanski and Smith 2005: 176-177).

We might aver that EU foreign policy cohesion may be summarized as the espousal of common policies and the execution of these policies by EU member states and institutions.

Connected to this, Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 35) define an actor as “an entity that is capable of agency; of formulating and acting upon decisions”. It is clear that the EU can act as a collective actor in international affairs and be seen as “one” by both outsiders and its own citizens – for instance, when signing a trade agreement or disbursing aid. However, being an international and global actor demands that the European Commission do more than, for example, disburse aid. Similarly, highly stated ambitions and a normative agenda are not automatically translated into coherent policy implementation, which Christopher Hill elegantly showed in an influential study about the EU's “capabilities–expectations gap” (Hill 1993).

Presence needs to be distinguished from policy implementation. The EU's presence stems from its very existence; and due to its relative weight (demographically, economically, militarily and ideologically), the EU impacts the rest of the world. It is, for example, the largest development donor in the world, and the size of its economy is comparable to that of the United States. The EU has also been active in setting up a military capacity meant to be used outside the region. This has provoked reactions and also created

expectations from the outside. Obviously, presence is a complex and comprehensive material variable, depending on the size of the actor, the scope of its external activities, the relative importance of different issue areas, and the relative dependence of various regions upon the European market. A stronger presence means more repercussions and reactions and thereby an increasing pressure to act. In the absence of such action, presence itself will diminish. The crucial question is to what extent the EU's strong international presence is actually being used in a purposive capacity to shape the external environment by influencing world affairs.

A growing capacity to act and implement policy follows from the strengthened presence of the regional unit in different contexts. Literature on the EU's ability to project itself emphasizes that the EU's external policy is closely connected to endogenous and internal conditions (Hill and Smith 2005; Bretherton and Vogler 2006). This link between the internal and external is equally evident in the EU's official policy documents and treaties, which repeatedly stress that without a unified, coherent, consistent and coordinated external policy, the legitimacy of the EU as a global actor will be called into question. Indeed, recognizing this, the presidents of the EU Commission, Parliament and Council issued a statement on EU development policy in 2005 which sought to henceforth implement development policies coherently. The statement asserted that the EU was

fully committed to taking action to advance Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) in a number of areas [...] To make this commitment a reality, the EU will strengthen PCD procedures, instruments and mechanisms at all levels, and secure adequate resources and share best practice to further these aims (European Commission 2006).

Although PCD has been institutionalized, and various programmes and mechanisms have been established within EU structures, policy *incoherence* is still problematic. To make the concept of coherence applicable to the study, we propose a twofold categorization: First, institutional coherence relates to the EU's internal institutional machinery (e.g. Commission, Council, Parliament and Court) and implies the need for coherence within the EU's external relations. Yet institutional coherence presents major difficulties for the Union given that Brussels invariably handles single policy sectors in its external relations using two sets of actors (i.e. Commission and Council), each applying their own sets of procedures and priorities (Nuttall 2005). Second, vertical coherence indicates the degree of congruence between the external policies of EU member states and the EU's central institutions. This comes into play whenever one or several member states pursue national policies that are contrary (deliberately or otherwise) to policies agreed upon at the EU level.

The need for coherence is widely accepted, particularly as it relates to effectiveness. Effectiveness indicates the degree to which the EU has produced desired adjustments or changes in policy and practice in a particular targeted situation. The absence of such effectiveness and concomitant incoherence in policy formulation and implementation entails a higher risk of inefficient spending, duplication of activities, lower quality in output, and a reduced ability to provide service delivery. As a means to avoid such problems, the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) identified three key mechanisms by which policy coherence might be enhanced within the EU's institutional settings. First, explicit policy statements affirming coherence were deemed crucial. Second, inter-departmental coordination, including a specialized coherence unit, was seen as vital to accomplishing the policy commitments. Third, institutional capacity (and willingness) to incorporate – and then act upon – information and policy analysis was another important factor in promoting evidence-based methods to underpin policy formation (ECDPM and ICEI 2006: 17-18). The ECDPM's advice sounds like common sense, yet such policy rationality is often held hostage by national politics, priorities and sectional interests – as well as inter-EU rivalry – which may not necessarily prioritize such logic. Though all EU member states endorse the notion that the EU's foreign policy should be guided by multilateralism, in practice this doctrine is weakened by the agency and behaviour of the very same member states. This reality contradicts the simplistic idea advanced by Kagan (2003: 37-42) that Brussels promotes multilateralism only to “hide another truth” – that is, that there are no other options and that the EU's commitment to multilateralism has a “real practical payoff and little cost”. In fact,

the EU member states support specific forms of multilateral cooperation if and insofar as such cooperation allows them to sustain their comparative economic [and political] advantage,

and member states

are selective in their support, [...] favouring those that are likely to produce favourable policy streams over time in a given issue-area (Pollack 2006: 124).

## The EU in the Eastern DRC

The DRC is the twelfth-largest country in the world, covering over 2 million square kilometres. Despite its abundant resources, it is among the world's poorest countries and was ranked 168 out of 169 countries in the 2010 Human Development Index. Out of a total population of approximately 60 million, divided among 200 ethnic groups, 1.9 million people are internally displaced. Further, 458,000 Congolese refugees live in neighbouring Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, the Central African Republic, and Congo-Brazzaville (European Commission 2010c). This huge number of displaced people mirrors the long-lasting and complex conflict dynamics in the DRC and the wider Great Lakes region.

To tackle this set of regional crises, external actors mediated the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999, which requested the deployment of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) to monitor the peace process. The "Inter-Congolese Dialogue" was also initiated, ostensibly to facilitate a transition to democracy. In 2002, a national power-sharing agreement was implemented, and a year later, a transitional period leading to elections in 2006 began. Violence, however, continued to occur in the country, particularly in the eastern DRC, as various militias, warlords and external actors (notably Rwanda and Uganda) continued to engage in widespread skirmishes and military activities (Van Leeuwen 2008). In 2010 MONUC was transformed into the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Its current mandate lasts until 30 June 2012.

The regional nature of the conflict and its intensity, with the attendant catastrophic humanitarian situation, has led to the involvement of a wide array of African states as well as international actors. From the start, the EU has been involved in and has sought to be a main player in resolving the conflict, albeit with varying degrees of success. Indeed, "the DRC has become a laboratory for EU crisis management" (Knutsen 2009: 456). Here, it is of utmost importance to distinguish the policies and efforts of the European Commission, on one hand, and those of the Council, on the other.

Policies pursued by the European Commission mainly revolve around development and humanitarian assistance, managed by the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation (DEVCO), the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) as well as the Directorate-General for External Relations (RELEX). On the ground, in the Great Lakes region (GLR), the Commission is represented by its various Commission delegations in the capitals of Kinshasa (DRC), Kampala (Uganda), Kigali (Rwanda) and Bujumbura (Burundi). Furthermore, ECHO



operates two field offices in the eastern DRC: one in Goma (North Kivu) and one in Bukavu (South Kivu).

The overall objective of the Commission's efforts is to stabilize the DRC and to support the reconstruction of the country – in essence, peace-building and state-building. To achieve these goals, the Commission currently provides roughly 584 million EUR under the 10<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (EDF), covering the period from 2008 to 2013. According to the objectives outlined in the Country Strategy Paper for the DRC, 50 per cent of the money provided is targeted at infrastructure, 25 per cent at governance, and 10 per cent goes directly to the health sector. The remaining 15 per cent is to be spent on environmental aspects, the management of natural resources, and the support of regional economic development and integration (Government of the DRC and European Commission 2008). In addition, ECHO directly provides the DRC with humanitarian assistance, which in 2009 totalled 45 million EUR (European Commission 2010b).

Alongside the Commission's activities, the EU also acts through the Council of the European Union, whose activities in the DRC are guided by the CSDP under the umbrella of the Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP). Through this, the Council has deployed a total of five civil and military missions to the DRC out of which two are still on-going. In 2003, the EU launched its first military mission – codename: ARTEMIS – to contribute to the stabilization of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in the town of Bunia, eastern DRC (Council of the European Union 2003). From 2005 until 2007, the civil EU Police Mission EUPOL Kinshasa was deployed to help the Congolese national police keep order, particularly during the electoral period in 2006 (European Union 2005). To assist MONUC during the first democratic electoral process, a third mission – codename: EUFOR RD Congo – was also launched (Delestre 2006). In July 2007, EUPOL Kinshasa was replaced by EUPOL RD Congo and the scope of the mission was expanded from Kinshasa to areas all over the country, but especially to the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. Since then, the objective of EUPOL RD Congo has been to support the reform of the security sector related to the police and their interaction with the justice system (European Union 2010a). The EU has been relying since 2005 on another security mission, EU Security Sector Reform Mission (EUSEC RD Congo), which is supporting the Congolese authorities in the rebuilding of the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) (European Union 2010b).

The Commission and the Council's sharing of tasks has become increasingly complicated and has undermined EU cohesiveness in the DRC. This is especially clear in the area of external relations, where the two insti-

tutions have developed competitive approaches due to an overlap in responsibilities on both sides and due to a continuous expansion on the civilian side of the CSDP (Christiansen 2001). Thus, except for military crisis management, almost all EU efforts in the DRC in terms of civilian crisis management and security sector reform can be undertaken *either* by the CSDP *or* as part of development assistance programmes. Inter-agency rivalry is severe, and the lack of any significant agreement on a natural division of labour between the Commission and the Council is destabilizing the EU's efforts (Lurweg 2011). Indeed, the European Centre for Development Policy Management's stress on inter-departmental coordination as a prerequisite for coherence is significantly absent in the eastern DRC.

The overlapping of responsibilities and the rivalry are then compounded by coordination weaknesses springing from structural issues related to the nature of the various mandates and diverse instruments of Commission and Council entities. The Commission's remit in the DRC is largely long-term and aimed at broad development cooperation issues, which by their very nature are open-ended, whilst the Council's focus under the CSDP is largely short-term and constricted by a finite timeframe. The EU is not alone in finding that long-term development instruments are frequently difficult to adapt to short-term perspectives – and vice versa. Again, the ECDPM's prerequisites for coherence are undermined, this time by the fact that explicit sets of policy statements upholding coherence are absent in a milieu where different arms of the EU are operating using very different timeframes and mandates.

On top of this existential problem between EU arms, a specific role has been carved out for the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes region of Africa, which the EU defines as the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. Besides providing political guidance to the CSDP missions, the EUSR remit is to ensure coordination between these missions, as well as between the missions and the other various EU actors on the ground. The EUSR aims to cut across the institutional divide between CSDP and community instruments, which in itself is a tacit recognition of serious institutional problems in coordinating any EU policy coherence (Council of the European Union 2010).

Yet as we detail below, a combination of EU bureaucratic in-fighting, institutional incapacity, the nature of the DRC conflict and an inadequate response by the EU to this reality, and the wider context of a highly dysfunctional Congolese state all conspire to radically limit the effectiveness of the EU's efforts in the eastern DRC and undermine any attempts at policy coherence.

## The EU's Institutional (In)coherence

What is striking about the Union's activities in the eastern DRC is the high level of intra-EU tension, which has resulted in bureaucratic ineffectiveness at most levels of the organizational structures. The link between the Commission and the Council, as well as the relationship between EU institutions and actors in Brussels, Kinshasa and the eastern DRC all come together in this milieu. Inter-departmental coordination is very weak and sabotages the EU's status as a credible actor in the region.

Immediately striking in this regard is the amount of personal rivalry, mutual envy and open disrespect expressed by both Commission and Council actors in Brussels toward one another. While one Commission representative asserted, "We [the Commission] are not there [in the DRC] for the show but there to address the problem",<sup>2</sup> a representative of the Council Secretariat blamed the Commission for undermining projects and "being jealous" of civilian European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions, viewing them as properly within the Commission's remit: "Military [programmes] they can accept because it is military and they are not in charge. But civilian, they say [the Commission] can do it as well", stated one Council informant.<sup>3</sup> This tension between different actors has long characterized the EU's efforts regarding the eastern DRC. For instance, when debate was raging in Brussels in late 2008 as to whether the EU should take a proactive stance vis-à-vis violence in the region:

The EU appeared far from united. Kouchner was the first to call for EU military intervention in the DRC: The then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, quickly rejected the idea, the Belgians came out in support and the British sent mixed messages. Meanwhile, visits to the region by the EU special representative for the Great Lakes region, Roland van de Geer, EU Commissioner Louis Michel and Kouchner with the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband in early November left no impression of a unified front – Javier Solana was not even allowed to travel with Miliband and Kouchner on their plane (Vines 2010: 1101).

In interviews conducted in Brussels, it was evident that there is in fact a very high level of mistrust between the two EU institutions, caused by the aforementioned unclear distribution of roles and responsibilities. In practice,

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2 Interview with a representative of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium, 4 March 2010.

3 Interview with a representative of the Council Secretariat in Brussels, Belgium, 4 March 2010.

such confusion has led to inter-departmental rivalry between the two entities, which not only hampers coordination in Brussels but is then transferred to the ground in the DRC. As one Council informant noted,

People don't like each other. People don't understand each other and they don't want to understand each other. Personal agendas, personal opinions sometimes override the political guidance, the strategic directions they [EU actors in the DRC] get from here, from Brussels. If we don't really cooperate [in Brussels], how can they do a better job [in the DRC]? (ibid.).

This statement was reinforced by a representative of the Commission working in both Kinshasa and Goma, who described the EU delegations based in Brussels as quite territorial of their institutional turf, noting that there were various “races between people” – inter-personal rivalry – which resulted in “games played with Brussels”.<sup>4</sup> We detected institutional wrangling rather than coherence in the EU’s external activities in the eastern DRC throughout our research, and it was clear that this directly led to ineffective and inefficient approaches. This fact was acknowledged by some EU actors on the ground, who lamented,

We realize that everyone does the same thing, without any dialogue [...] What bothers me is that we can detect that there is a loss of energy and loss of money by acting so. Here, we do not know how to coordinate ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

For instance, there has long been a lack of common analysis at the EU level:

Both the Commission and the Council produce their analyses, based on different sources [...] The issue of a common “situational awareness” is of key importance for ensuring coherence across the policy domains, as is the need to functionally link the crisis management capacities of the second pillar with the longer-term competences of the Community, especially in post-conflict reconstruction (Hoebeke et al. 2007: 14).

To date, however, the Commission and the Council remain inadequately harmonized, which fundamentally undermines the ECDPM best practice recommendation that policy analysis serve and promote evidence-based solutions.

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4 Interview with a representative of the European Commission delegation to the DRC in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

5 Interview with a representative of EUPOL RD Congo in Bukavu, DRC, 8 April 2010.

Compounding this intra-EU disarray is the fact that the relationship between member states' representatives on the ground with Brussels was often described as complicated and full of tensions. One national ambassador of a member state asserted that "there is a total misunderstanding [between Brussels and the field]. It is very serious and we always have to justify what we're doing." The relationship was described as hierarchical and byzantine due to the multitude of actors, an overlapping of bilateral policies and those pursued under the EU umbrella, and a top-down approach from Brussels that often negated or sidelined policy advice emanating from the field in favour of prescriptions from Brussels-based bureaucrats who, although remote from what is actually happening in the DRC, believed their analysis was superior and – crucially – were strategically closer to decision-makers at EU headquarters.<sup>6</sup>

The weakness of the voice of in-field actors was compounded by the nature of recruitment for EU positions. This relates to the ECDPM's prerequisite that institutional capacity must be strong so as to effect policy coherence. In fact, due to the unattractive living conditions in the DRC, it was rare for experienced or senior staff to volunteer for positions or to remain in their posts for long. Indeed, many EU staffers based in the DRC were obviously young and inexperienced, often in their first post abroad. One EU employee confirmed that "in the EU delegation in Kinshasa, there are many young and inexperienced people working because of the working and living environment". A shortage of staff due to such factors then led to a constant switching of roles within the EU offices: "People in charge of infrastructure just change to governance" overnight.<sup>7</sup> Where expert knowledge was needed most, due to the difficult working environment of the DRC, the reality is that the EU has to predominantly rely on inexperienced junior employees whose knowledge of the situation in the DRC is, at best, scant and often disturbingly naïve.

This problem of competency was then compounded by the structural difficulties caused by EU employment practice, which further exacerbated problems in attaining any long-term coherent European approach. Differing contract periods meant that there was a continuous change in staffing. Institutional incapacity was the result. As one respondent noted,

The problem is that everyone arrives at a different time during the year, which means that there is always a renewal in staff, which is very

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6 Interview with an EU member state representative in Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2010.

7 Interview with a representative of the European Commission delegation to the DRC in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

complicated. If you are looking for a medium-term goal, it requires almost every time to rebuild contacts. It is quite difficult.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the nature of the bureaucratic machine of the European Union served to increase the significance of personalities and decrease institutional and vertical coherence in that experienced staff are outnumbered by junior colleagues who themselves are in a constant state of rotation and replacement. Obviously, none of this facilitates any notion of EU coherence. In fact, such incoherence plays out within the context of a regional conflict where the EU seems incapable of managing or implementing its goals in terms of its institutional responses.

## The EU's Response to the Regional Dimension of the Conflict

Despite the fact that most contemporary conflicts around the world are often defined as “domestic” or as “civil” wars, most conflicts in Africa are regionalized, and the war in the DRC is a primary example. Indeed, the conflict in the eastern DRC cannot be isolated from the regional neighbourhood, as strong cross-border dimensions defy borders and neat categorizations (Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010). As Gegout notes, an understanding of African regional politics is a prerequisite to effective engagement on the continent (Gegout 2009a). In this context, in evaluating the EU's efforts in the eastern DRC, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the EU actually conceives of the conflict as regionalized and manages to take the regional dimension of the conflict into account in its policies. As a UN official noted on the regional nature of the conflict, “It is a total mess until you tackle it [regionally].” Yet as this same informant admitted, multilateral bodies have been “frankly crap when dealing with cross-border issues” related to the DRC.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is apparent that though the DRC's conflicts are connected to regionalized conflict systems, EU policy and planning frameworks remain constrained by analysis on the single-country level.

It is evident that diverse forms of regional networking, based essentially on a form of kleptocratic political economy, characterize the conflicts in the eastern DRC. What scholars have observed in the wider region is what Shaw refers to as a “war economy”, one of five typologies of regionalization currently remaking Africa (Shaw 2000). What is intriguing about the type of shadow networks present in the Great Lakes region is that they are not re-

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8 Interview with a representative of EUPOL RD Congo in Bukavu, DRC, 8 April 2010.

9 Interview with a representative of MONUSCO in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

stricted by notions of state, but are instead regional, continental and global: The continent's boundaries are now truly transnational in scope, reflecting the intensification of the extraversion of the African state identified by Bayart (2000). In the context of the eastern DRC, the recognition that regionalisms in Central Africa are multi-layered and can and do involve transnational networks that may or may not be legal, or that reflect the "criminalization of the state" in Africa (Bayart et al. 1999), is fundamental. Indeed, as one Congolese informant put it, in the DRC "what is criminal is the state".<sup>10</sup>

Such regional dynamics involve the participation of a multitude of actors, both state and non-state players – although in the DRC, neopatrimonialism has blurred such distinctions. In a traditional Weberian patrimonial system, all ruling relationships are personal relationships, and the difference between the private and public sphere is non-existent. Under a neopatrimonial system, the separation of the public from the private is recognized (even if only on paper) and is certainly publicly displayed through outward manifestations of the rational-bureaucratic state. However, in practical terms, the private and public spheres are not detached from one another, and the outward manifestations of statehood are often facades hiding the real workings of the system (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Taylor 2005). In the DRC, official state bureaucracies inherited from the colonial period, however weak and ineffective, have become dysfunctional and severely constrained in their officially stated duties. The nature of the DRC conflicts reflect the fact that the social and economic interconnectedness exists at the nexus of formal/informal, legal/illegal, national/global, etc., constituting what has been called the "three economies of Africa" (Freeman 2000). In such a milieu, the informality of patronage networks and the regional dimension of the conflicts that spawn such links need to be recognized. The complexities and heterogeneity of the regional nature of the violence revolving around the eastern DRC thus provide a challenge for policy-makers.

The problem is that the EU has not dealt well with cross-border issues and the regional dimension of the conflict, primarily because the EU's approach in the DRC has been resolutely nation-based. Though the EU itself has increasingly acknowledged the regional dimension of the conflicts in some of its rhetoric, no practical mechanisms for dealing with this reality have satisfactorily evolved, which is due to the way the EU bilaterally works with governments through state-building and a national approach. Thus though the EU has a "Special Representative" for the wider Great Lakes region, for example, the security governance and institutional set-up inher-

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10 Interview with an associate of the POLE Institute in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

ent in the EU's structures reinforce a statist policy methodology, one largely incapable of a truly regional approach. As one EU member state ambassador puts it, "You have to have a regional approach. If you don't have a regional approach, you don't solve national problems."<sup>11</sup> Yet this is precisely what seems to be taking place with regard to the EU's efforts in the region.

The EU is organized and designed to deal with nation-states (however dysfunctional these may be) and not with regions (also see Schulz and Söderbaum 2010). The EU has found it very difficult to successfully engage in the context of a regional conflict where a credible regional counterpart is absent (any visit to the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, CEPGL, headquarters in Gisenyi, Rwanda, will confirm this analysis of the moribund state of that organization). Despite the condition of the CEPGL, the natural attraction of one regional organization (the EU) to another (the CEPGL) has led to Brussels exerting some effort in establishing links with the latter body, though the success has been negligible. One EU member state diplomat asserted that "the EU focuses on regional economic integration and puts weight on regional organizations". Thus, "the CEPGL can be seen as an umbrella for contacts". However, recognizing the somewhat derelict state of the Great Lakes organization, the diplomat added that "from a Brussels perspective, there is more weight on the CEPGL than it deserves".<sup>12</sup> An EU diplomat based in Goma was more forthright, stating that the CEPGL was in fact

a project of the donor countries in the Great Lakes region, but we don't know exactly what we're planning. I don't know where we will end. The CEPGL was dead but now there is a kind of rebirth. However, there are only directors sitting on the top floor and they have no staff to implement projects.<sup>13</sup>

This confirms the comments of another EU member state diplomat, who acknowledged that taking the regional aspects into account and working with bodies such as the CEPGL was "certainly a challenge".<sup>14</sup>

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11 Interview with an EU member state representative in Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2010.

12 Interview with an EU member state representative in Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2010.

13 Interview with an EU member state representative in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

14 Interview with an EU member state representative in Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2010.



## Building Peace with a Dysfunctional Government

As noted above, the EU has a statist approach and is heavily focused on building the formal structures of the DRC state. However, this is very problematic in a context where the ruling regime is part of the problem and a major cause of the humanitarian emergencies. Indeed, the DRC has long been characterized by disorder and state decay (Haskin 2005). This milieu is deliberate and affords a logical *modus operandi* for a variety of actors operating within areas where the formal state is in a process of eclipse. This scenario has long been developing within the DRC, where tendencies based on tribalism and ethnic polarization, stoked by ambitious local big men and tacitly tolerated by the political elite in Kinshasa, have been an historic means of providing a skeletal form of governance and control and have staked out postcolonial Congolese history, accelerated under Mobutu and continued under the Kabilas (see Callaghy 1984; Young and Turner 1985; Wrong 2000). These circumstances have in turn constructed a “shadow state” in the DRC (Reno 1998: 26), which, however dysfunctional, has retained enough substance to negotiate with and benefit from external actors’ willingness to conduct business. What exists in the DRC and has existed for many years is what the Congolese political scientist Ernest Wamba dia Wamba (2000) has dubbed *vagabondage politique*, a political culture

characterized by the following features: religious-like cult of the chief, intrigues, any means are all right to achieve power, commitment as a negative value (*vagabondage politique* or the constant search for the highest bidder), factionalism, etc.

What the Congolese state exhibits is “a generalized system of patrimonialism and an acute degree of apparent disorder [...] and a universal resort to personalized and vertical solutions to societal problems” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: xviii-xix). Disorder is not necessarily considered to be a state of dereliction or failure, but is rather a condition offering significant opportunities to those in the position to exploit such situations (Taylor and Williams 2001). Indeed, the conflicts in the DRC have generated their own instrumental logic of accumulation and have served to attract “businessmen”, or what Filip Reyntjens (2000: 25) has referred to as “entrepreneurs of insecurity”. In the DRC, all ruling relationships are personal relationships. Though the DRC is certainly publicly displayed through outward manifestations of the rational-bureaucratic state – a flag, borders, a government and bureaucracy, etc. – in practical terms, the private and public spheres are habitually not detached from one another, and the outward manifestations of DRC statehood are facades hiding the real workings of the system (see Nzongola-Ntalaja 2007). The official state bureaucracies in the DRC have become

dysfunctional and severely constrained in their officially stated duties. Post-colonial Congolese elites have relied on effected control and patronage (which they have gained by capturing power over the economy) rather than on the state in the form of a functioning administration. This swiftly degenerated into outright personal dictatorship under Mobutu and is something that continues to have a strong residual effect on today's DRC.

It is true that *some* EU observers acknowledge this reality. As one member state ambassador remarked, "The DRC is not a state but an entity. It is not controlling its territory, not its army and not the East. There is anarchy in the DRC and in the Great Lakes region."<sup>15</sup> However, a major problem for the EU in its engagement with the DRC is that of state sovereignty, meaning that the EU *must* work with representatives of the DRC "government" and treat such actors as if they truly represent an actual state and, just as fictitiously, represent the Congolese people. One political commentator from the DRC noted this contradiction:

In Kinshasa, there are [EU] ambassadors and they know what is going on but they don't want to say anything about it. So the question is: What kind of partners do you have in front of you? They are pretending that the DRC is a state and they are pretending that there is a political elite with a vision for the country. What is required is to get a minimum of a state. At the moment it seems as if a weak Congo suits everyone.<sup>16</sup>

This is a major conundrum for the EU and for all other international actors engaging in the eastern DRC. In short, everyone feels compelled to pretend that a Congolese state exists and that it is through this entity that cooperation and dialogue must be processed. As one UN informant phrased it, "The international community is obliged to deal with the Congolese government. The DRC is a sovereign country, but it is run by a criminal elite network."<sup>17</sup> This has serious ramifications for the EU, and EU officials stated that because there is no DRC state, "we don't have policies" to deal with it. Where this leaves the EU was made clear by an EU official in Goma who remarked that "the Congolese government knows how to play the game".<sup>18</sup> This disbursing of resources by the EU, ostensibly for the purpose of state-building in a space where there is no state to build is then compounded by a lack of donor coordination, again limiting the EU's coherence.

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15 Interview with an EU member state representative in Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2010.

16 Interview with an associate of the POLE Institute in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

17 Interview with a representative of MONUSCO in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

18 Interview with a representative of the European Commission delegation to the DRC in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

## The Failure of Donor Coordination

The EU's efforts in the DRC are compromised by two interrelated problems in the donor community: First, the dysfunctional and kleptocratic Congolese state elites adroitly manage to divide the donors – the EU, its member states and other countries such as the United States – according to the self-defined interests of those elites. Second, the various donors themselves focus predominantly on donor visibility through implementing highly noticeable projects that promise immediate results rather than following a comprehensive and coordinated – and thus necessarily joint and long-term – strategy.

In terms of the first aspect, one interviewee highlighted the fact that the EU is well aware of the problems in dealing with a government such as the DRC's. To manage these circumstances, the EU linked its financing to extensive conditionalities. However, according to one interviewee, Kinshasa is not overly concerned by donor threats and conditionalities as “they [the government in Kinshasa] know that in the end, we'll [the EU will] pay”. Speaking specifically of funding for supposed elections, the EU informant noted that “the money for the elections, for example, [was] taken from somewhere else”, rather than submitting to EU diktats around transparency. This meant that with its bargaining power emasculated by the Congolese state elites playing one donor off against another, the EU was left “an actor for financing, yes, but not an actor for policies”, a position that obviously radically undermines any notion of EU coherence (*ibid.*). Yet the EU has itself to blame for this outcome. An informant working with the UN in the eastern DRC stated that the EU missed the opportunity to bring all the donors together and thus avoid such spoiler tactics by Kinshasa: “An agreed[-upon] agenda would have been very helpful and if the EU as the political umbrella managed to bring the member states together, that would have been of great help.”<sup>19</sup>

The significance of multilateralism is acknowledged by the EU, and the Union has often been understood as an actor with the greatest capability of rendering multilateralism effective in the eastern DRC. One commentator asserted the following:

We [the international community] do not have a focus and we don't have a direction. I'm still convinced that the mission can do something for the DRC; however, what I fail to understand is why it is so difficult to define what we're doing. Why is it not possible to raise these issues under the EU umbrella at the UN level? The people here

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19 Interview with a representative of MONUSCO in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

on the ground see pretty clear what the major problems are, but why do the donors not get the UN to listen to them? (ibid.).

In such sentiments, the EU is seen as an actor that *could* contribute to effective multilateralism, but the current situation where there is a palpable lack of EU coherence vis-à-vis policy delivery means that there is a concomitant lack in any strategy by the EU in the eastern DRC that may lead to such an outcome.

This argumentation ties in further with the second aspect mentioned above, the accentuation of visibility from the donors' perspective. There is clearly a lack of coordination between the administrative EU centres in both Brussels and Kinshasa and the ground level in the eastern DRC, and this has led to a detachment of the two levels and to hindered coordination of the actors involved. One EU informant in Goma commented,

There is an overlap with other European countries. The training of police officers, for example, is done by EUPOL and other countries. We share information but we don't listen to each other. Our problem as donors is that we want to have an immediate result.<sup>20</sup>

Another interviewee was even more outspoken, stating that with regard to the wider international community, "I believe that there is a massive communication problem. Kinshasa sucks in all information, but nothing comes out of Kinshasa."<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, all donors focus on their specific projects and want to see immediate results as a means to justify the expenditure of resources to domestic constituencies. This is because in a complex humanitarian emergency such as the one in the DRC, long-term goals and achievements are incredibly complicated and unlikely to deliver results any time soon. Yet it is in such an environment where a comprehensive and long-term vision is most needed. In this regard, the EU lacks a clear strategy, and it seems obvious from research in the field that there is in fact no clearly defined strategy on how to build peace, security and development in the eastern DRC. What this has resulted in is an intangible consistency that is only exhibited through a public discourse, rather than something that might be called "real" and effective.

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20 Interview with a representative of the European Commission delegation to the DRC in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

21 Interview with a representative of MONUSCO in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

## Conclusion

In examining the role of the EU in the eastern DRC, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the key EU political goal is not necessarily to solve the myriad problems (if that is indeed possible) but rather simply to be present *and* build presence, which of course could be seen as an element of projection. As one EU informant candidly put it, the reason for any EU presence in the east of the DRC could be explained by relating it “purely to political will”. This same informant questioned if indeed the work of the EU which she herself was involved in had any effect.<sup>22</sup> Starved of resources and beset by institutional in-fighting, bureaucratic turf wars, and an inability to deal with the very nature of the entity that passes itself off as the Congolese state, almost without exception EU interviewees in the eastern DRC were dismissive of their own organization’s efforts in building peace and security. One Goma-based EU actor had no idea what either Brussels or the EU office in Kinshasa did with the information that she passed to them,<sup>23</sup> while another lamented, “I do not know what I am doing here” and went to say that “the EU’s involvement is purely political”.<sup>24</sup> The picture that emerges is one of an EU more concerned about visibility and its own image as a peace-builder rather than real achievements on the ground.

Participation in EUPOL and EUSEC was one way in which the EU gained visibility by a symbolic presence, but beyond such symbolism it was difficult to discern any real coherence vis-à-vis EU policy in the eastern DRC. High levels of intra-institutional tensions, personal rivalry, and overlapping responsibilities combined with high staff turnover (of mostly junior and inexperienced personnel) come together to foster bureaucratic ineffectiveness and a culture of institutional wrangling. This has rendered the EU’s policy initiatives in the eastern DRC largely ineffective and inefficient. Indeed, what was found in the eastern DRC was almost the exact opposite of what the ECDPM recommends as the fundamentals upon which any coherent EU set of policies may be built.

Much of this results from structural problems inherent in the EU’s organizational make-up. A multitude of actors, an overlap of bilateral and multilateral policies of both the EU and its member states, and a top-down approach from Brussels negating and sidelining evidence-based policy advice emanating from the field all serve to complicate the relationship be-

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22 Interview with a representative of EUPOL RD Congo in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

23 Interview with a representative of the European Commission delegation to the DRC in Goma, DRC, 19 October 2010.

24 Interview with an EU member state representative in Goma, DRC, 18 October 2010.

tween Brussels and EU actors in the DRC. Policy statements are confused and often contradictory, with inter-departmental synchronization lacking in most aspects and institutional incapacity characterizing many of the EU's day-to-day activities in the region.

From a strategic point of view, the effectiveness of the EU's goals in the DRC is then compromised by the EU's seeming inability to move beyond discrete national borders (in spite of the tacit recognition, through the creation of the EUSR, of the regional dimensions of the conflict).

As an organization of states, it is perhaps to be expected that the EU will feel most comfortable dealing with apparent peers. Yet the empirical absence of the DRC as a state in the sense known in Europe and the EU's collaboration with a highly dysfunctional and kleptocratic Congolese quasi-state pose a major problem for the EU. After all, the EU is focused on state-building in a context where there is no state to build, and the state apparatus has been hijacked by a political elite with highly questionable personal interests. This raises the interesting issue of whether *any* global actor is capable of helping solve the DRC's myriad problems.

If this is the case, the continued disbursement of EU resources to a neopatrimonial regime like the one in Kinshasa becomes highly problematic. Yet it seems that the Congolese elites, who cannot manage to build a Congolese state (or, alternatively, have no interest in doing so), are highly adept at successfully dividing donors according to their own interests. The donors' own strategies of favouring high visibility but short-term projects to ensure donor presence facilitates this set of dynamics – which has been (rightly) termed a “game” by one EU informant in the DRC. This then leads us to an important question: In terms of the EU's role in the eastern DRC, can it be concluded that Brussels' key political goal is not necessarily to tackle the multitude of tribulations in the DRC in the best way (whatever this may be and if that is indeed possible) but rather to be present, to be seen to be “doing something” and thus to build some sort of institutional presence? In other words, do the EU's activities in the eastern DRC fit Gegout's dismissive observation that the “EU missions were carried out first and foremost to promote the EU as a security actor, not to help civilians in conflicts” (Gegout 2009a: 411). While presence *is* obviously one aspect of the EU's diplomacy, observers should not be misled in terms of the various shortcomings in the EU's approach to practically foster peace, security and development in the DRC. Indeed, “the EU is not perceived as a credible actor in African conflict management” (Gegout 2009a: 403). In other words, when evaluating the EU's policy delivery in the eastern DRC, actual effectiveness is not necessarily as important as projecting a presence and being

identified as being there, even if being there does not help resolve the ongoing conflict situation.

Finally, the apparent lack of a clearly defined European strategy towards the DRC and the Great Lakes region along with the EU's subsequent marginal coherence lead to the assumption that there is no coherent EU strategy to render multilateralism effective, despite the EU's declared goal to do so. A lack of explicit statements insisting on policy coherence, a lack of inter-departmental coordination and cooperation, and notable levels of incapability all seem to point in this direction. This of course has implications for the EU's own ambitions as an influential global actor.

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## **Grenzen der EU bei der Schaffung von Frieden und Sicherheit in der Demokratischen Republik Kongo**

**Zusammenfassung:** Die Europäische Union (EU) bemüht sich zunehmend um eine anerkannte Rolle in der globalen Friedenssicherung. Die Autoren des vorliegenden Beitrags nehmen die Aktivitäten der EU in der Demokratischen Republik Kongo (DRC) als Testfall und zeigen auf, dass die Umsetzung ihrer Versuche, dort Frieden und Sicherheit zu schaffen, von einer bürokratischen Herangehensweise, den komplexen EU-Strukturen und einer ineffizienten politischen Zielsetzung stark behindert wird. Tatsächlich hat der staatszentrierte Ansatz der EU dazu geführt, dass sie weder mit den Realitäten des Regierens in der DRC, noch mit den entscheidenden grenzüberschreitenden Dimensionen des Konflikts umzugehen wusste. Im Ergebnis fehlt der EU weiterhin eine kohärente Strategie für die DRC – trotz eines beträchtlichen Budgets. Die Autoren kommen zu dem Schluss, dass es der EU mehr darum geht, eine symbolische Präsenz zu etablieren, als spezifische Ziele zu erreichen.

**Schlagwörter:** Europäische Union, Demokratische Republik Kongo, Zentralafrika, Gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (EU), Regionaler internationaler Konflikt, Sicherheitspolitische Friedenssicherung