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REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF WEAK STATES: ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHAD, CAMEROON AND GABON

This article analyzes regional integration and its impact on the security and stability of the economic and monetary community of Central African countries. In Central Africa there is a lot of old unresolved issues that significantly complicate the processes of regional integration.

Key words: regional integration, stability, Central Africa, security, Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, process, problem, ECCAS.

Central African countries are considered the most affected on the continent as a result of deep internal conflicts and crises. The genocidal wars in Rwanda and Burundi, the series of coups and conflict tensions in the Republic of the Congo-Brazzaville, and the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have developed over the years as a part of an international conflict, are irrefutable evidence of the instability problems that Central Africa has faced since the past decade.

Despite the obvious differences between Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad, the events of recent years may indicate a significant similarity in the causes of conflicts on their territories.

For decades after independence, Gabon and Cameroon were recognized as the most stable countries of the region and that stability was particularly affected by a series of military coups, crises and conflicts.

An important element that distinguishes the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from most of the wars that took place earlier, in the bipolar era, and that for this reason are often referred to as “the classic wars,” is that the intergovernmental aspect is becoming less obvious. Despite the classification of the conflict as an “African war” and the rather covert intervention of some neighboring states, a direct confrontation between Congo and other states never occurred; therefore, the country’s stability was not threatened as a result of an attack by a hostile government. On the contrary, the gradual destabilization of

the Democratic Republic of the Congo was much more related to the endogenous factors. In particular, it was the result of the war among civil groups that opposed the regime and sought to systematically undermine the internal order [2. P. 59].

In this regard, the war between enemy states seems to have been replaced by a conflict of non-government internal groups that opposed the state and its national army, or fought with each other, while at the same time widely directing violence against the civil population. Thus, in these circumstances, the weakness of the state was less obvious because of its inferiority in weapons, but much more in the form of its inability to perform its functions as a guarantor of internal order and security.

In this context, the resurgence of the Central African regionalism may seem to be a reaction to the fact that the state no longer seems to be an adequate player to resolve this problem.

The decision of the state and government heads to resume and intensify their regional activities reflect in these circumstances a certain awareness that, in the current circumstances, the strengthening of security should no longer pass through opposition and confrontation, but through international cooperation. Growing tension in the region including the conflict in the Great Lakes region has highlighted the transnational and regional side of security. Insecurity in any state can easily have harmful consequences at the regional level, it can hinder regional cooperation and development, as the example of ECCAS (the Economic Community of Central African countries) shows. In addition, it can affect and threaten neighboring countries, it does not necessarily require a military response, but require a certain approach that can exceed the potential and can be deployed by a single state.

In previous years, President Bongo has faced a growing number of challenges that threatened the maintenance of internal balance. The country lives through a significant drop in oil production, the continuing deterioration of living conditions and the destruction of the social structure, especially in the cities. There is an acute issue of the method of management by one figure with broad powers often called “monocentric presidency” that demonstrates its vulnerability for a long time and proves the necessity to strengthen the functioning of the Gabonese state and the public sector.

Because of its large oil fields, Gabon has been among the least poor African countries for most of its post-colonial history, its average gross domestic product per capita has been almost four times the average level in sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, Gabon was often called “African Switzerland” or “Emirate of Central Africa,” oil played a significant role in its social and political life.

After the current economic crisis, the country also has a high unemployment rate. Despite the fact that the state previously represented a large employer, the decline in income, the increasingly static and inefficient nature of the hypertrophied administrative apparatus, but above all, the implementation of the structural adjustment programs developed by the international financial institutions, forced

it to take significant restrictive and oppressive measures. Although in recent years the government has made efforts to implement emergency assistance programs, such as the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises, the measures proved to be very limited. Lack of information, poorly designed projects and administrative difficulties are reasons that delayed the take-off of the programs, not to mention the fact that thousands of young people continue to dream of working in the administration.

The economic life in Gabon is, in fact, largely characterized by the activities of immigrants, who occupy a central place in trade, transport and crafts, and in households.

Cameroon has been characterized since independence as a remarkably calm and stable country compared to most other countries around it. This stability may seem surprising given the large ethnic and cultural diversity that makes Cameroon “unquestionably the most ethnically diverse country in Africa [1].”

One of the factors put forward to explain why Cameroon, despite its considerable ethnic diversity, has been able to maintain a certain inter-ethnic balance and avoid serious gaps between the various groups that make it up, is the policy of redistribution originally established by the country’s first President Ahmadou Ahidjo.

According to the Swiss political scientist Jurg Martin Gabriel, this is the way to include minorities and Protestants in the political process and involve them in the distribution of important public posts, as well as in the distribution of national resources, which for a long time were the main advantage of the Cameroonian politics compared to other countries which eventually failed their regime [5].

It is possible to link the long period of stability in Cameroon with the implementation of this regional balanced policy. It must be recognized that the characteristics of Cameroon as a whole were very difficult for neo-patrimonialists, the democratic norms and values introduced in the country since the 1990s were not compatible with their ideas.

After the country’s transition to democracy, the preservation of the previous political system was largely put into question, however, the process of liberalization did not contribute to the emergence of a new system in Cameroon to replace the previous one.

Gero Erdmann observes in general that in Africa and in Cameroon democratization has led to the development of a “hybrid system” that has taken on democratic principles and implemented them, at least in part, for example, in the form of regular organization of elections or respect for multi-partisanship. At the same time, some of the old standards and practices are still preserved, and at the same time they have been modified to be more adapted to the new circumstances [3. P. 87-105].

After its independence in 1960, the Central African Republic partially remained in the French sphere of influence. France, assessing the geostrategic position of its former colony in the heart of the continent, believed it to be essential

to its interests in Africa and has indeed decided, despite the decolonization of the country, to leave some military forces in its territory. However, its influence was not limited to maintaining two military bases, one in Bangui and the other in Buar. Being aware that its position in Africa would depend to a large extent on the maintenance in that state of an order favorable to the French ambitions on the continent, the former colonial power continued to actively monitor the political situation in the country and without hesitation, more or less consistently, interfered in the national affairs of the country.

For the political elite of the CAR this strong intervention of the former colonial power in the internal affairs of the state for many years until the second half of the 90-ies was primarily a means of accessing emergency financial and military support. Thus, the financial contributions made by France were used not only to pay for the often excessively high standard of living of political figures, but also to create a broad client system that would maintain balance within the political class.

Within the framework of a weak and illegitimate system for its own citizens, the Francophile politics at the same time served the incumbent president as a guarantee that he would be supported and sufficiently protected from any attempts to overthrow him or in the event of a political crisis.

The Central African Republic has faced budgetary difficulties and in this connection with wage irregularities during the 1990s, the debt problem has increased significantly in recent years and especially since the beginning of 2016, the state is no longer able to regularly pay its 20,000 public officials. By the end of this year, most of them received only three months' wages. Despite promises made, for example, in negotiations with the trade unions in early November 2016 to pay no later than at the end of the month two months of late wages, the payments took very long time and the total debt already amounts to more than 200 billion CFA francs, or about 350,000 euros. Currently, the most affected areas are management and education, and problem of underpayment also appear more or less regularly in the military sector.

The Central African Republic is a country fairly rich in raw materials, such as wood, copper, but especially diamond and gold. However, insufficient infrastructure, only partial control over the territory, as well as its inability to control forces that independently exploit the available wealth, do not allow the country to fully use most of these resources. For example, the Ministry of mines of the Central African Republic estimates that at least half of the 400,000 to 500,000 carats of diamonds produced in the country annually are worth between US\$ 50 million and US\$ 75 million.

The current security and stability of the country and the risks associated with the difficulties in payment for the armed forces may eventually lead to a vicious circle. In this case, the recovery process after years of crises and instability that rocked the country at the beginning of the 21st century is called into question.

Indeed, the history of the Central African Republic, especially the 1996 riots and their aftermath, has shown that internal military movements and defiance of the armed forces in the form of uprisings, riots or looting may facilitate the departure of donors and foreign investors.

The Central African Republic, a country with diverse and rich natural resources, at the same time receives international and bilateral financial support. Because of the poor management and use of the resources, inefficient administrative structures and rather limited coverage of the public service, most of the population nevertheless lives in extreme poverty and precarious conditions.

The internal situation in Chad has been weakening over the past 15 years. The holding of the first free elections confirming President Idris Deby after several attempts to reconcile with the opposition and establish certain civil liberties could actually indicate a gradual turn in the country's history (1).

As to the question of assessing the current situation, it must be said, first of all, that the opinion of most observers, whether scientific or political, regarding the changes in its state of stability, they seem to be more than divided. The most optimistic predict that after the start of the process of democratization and the holding of the first elections in 2015-2016, as well as the discovery of oil and the creation of the oil industry, the state is moving the country in the right direction.

In their analysis of the impact of oil on the economic, political and social situation in Chad, Géraud Magrin and Geert Van Viret highlighted the example of the Chadian oil project accompanied by the creation of a mechanism of control over the use of unpublished revenues. For the first time in the history of the continent, black gold in Chad contributed to the strengthening of the state capacity and sustainable development. Oil production can allow the country to revive its economy and improve the state's budget position [3. P. 87-105].

However, despite the significant socio-political changes in Central Africa over the past decades, this region remains perhaps the most problematic region in the world. Numerous armed conflicts continue to rage here, resulting in the death of millions of people. The economic situation is very difficult and sometimes chronic. The real scourge of the region is poverty, and a large part of the population of African countries is literally on the verge of physical survival. The current rate of economic growth (with a few exceptions) does not allow us to expect that the gap in the level of development of Africa and the rest of the world will soon be bridged.

NOTES:

(1) African Union, Peace and Security Council. Brief on the security situation in Central African Republic (CAR) and the visit of an AU Mission to the Region.

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