

The EU and Central Africa: time for a reset?

Online evening conference 20 May 2021, 17:00 – 18:30

Ambassador Bernard QUINTIN, Deputy Managing Director Africa, European External Action Service
Mr Josaphat MUSAMBA, Researcher at the ISP Bukavu and PhD Candidate at Ghent University

Dear Madam, Sir,

We are pleased to invite you to an **online evening conference**, organised on **Thursday 20 May 2021** by the **Centre for Security and Defence Studies** of the Royal Higher Institute for Defence.

The latest electoral cycle in the Great Lakes region – and in particular in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda – stirred up new tensions between these countries and their former colonial power, Belgium, but also with the European Union at large in the period 2015-2018. The controversial third term of Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza, the repeated postponement of national elections in the DRC and, finally, the constitutional changes that paved the way for Rwandan President Paul Kagame's re-election in August 2017 were all met with scepticism and, at times, explicit criticisms in Europe, including in Belgium. In October 2015, the accreditation of the Belgian Ambassador in Bujumbura was suspended, thereby breaking *de facto* diplomatic ties between both countries for one year. Two years later, it was the turn of the Belgian Ambassador in the DRC to be recalled. As Burundi and the DRC progressively slid into cycles of protests and violence, the European Union, which firstly only voiced cautious concerns about the democratic backsliding in the region, ultimately adopted sanctions against those deemed responsible for acts of violence and human rights violations.

Yet, as these countries got past their political deadlocks, relations between Europe and Central African countries progressively normalised. In 2020, the DRC and Burundi both experienced a reconfiguration of government leadership. In this context, what is at stake in the relations between the European Union and Central Africa? How can Belgium and the European Union meaningfully engage in promoting stabilisation and peace in the region? What are the perspectives for regional cooperation, in particular with respect to cross-border security challenges in eastern DRC?

In order to assess the new political and security dynamics across the region and their implications for Europe, we will be pleased to welcome Ambassador Bernard Quintin, Deputy Managing Director of the Africa Department at the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Mr Josaphat Musamba, Researcher at the Group for Conflict and Human Security Studies (ISP Bukavu) and PhD Candidate at Ghent University.

This conference will take place on **Thursday 20 May 2021 at 17.00 hours** and will be given in **French**. We thank you in advance for registering via the following link: www.defence-institute.be. **Registration, subject to availability, is compulsory and must be received by Monday 17 May 2021 at the latest.** You will then receive the link to connect to the conference.

(Signed)

Filip BORREMANS, MSc Eng
Air Force Colonel GS
Director-general
Royal Higher Institute for Defence

Programme:

16.00 – 17.00: Registration – connection to online conference
17.00 – 18.30: Conference and Q & A