



EurAc is the European Network for Central Africa. The network brings together 46 organisations active in Central Africa working for development or providing humanitarian assistance. These organisations come from 12 different European countries ([see the list of members](#)).

Our [statutes](#) detail our mission statement, our way of functioning and the membership modalities.

The network has three main tasks:

- Advocacy
- Information
- Coordination and networking between members

A regional policy for the Great Lakes region is necessary because the causes of poverty and conflict in this region are strongly interlinked. Furthermore, a regional policy should be developed to avoid that intensive bilateral relations with some countries in the region and not others, results in unbalanced and incoherent actions.

EurAc has identified the following priority regional issues:

- 1) Peace and security
- 2) Democracy, Justice, governance and the rule of law
- 3) Economic governance

EurAc has formulated a set of recommendations on these issues, calling for greater efforts to: promote grassroots peace building; improve the DDRR process; introduce measures to tackle the arms trade in the region; strengthen UN peace missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi; promote democracy and the rule of law; fight impunity and promote the empowerment of non state actors and the building of a peace economy to replace the war economy.

Towards a regional policy

1. Regional reasons

After more than ten years of conflict, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi are among the least developed countries in the world.¹ EurAc firmly believes that it is time to urgently recognize the need for a strong, coherent and lasting commitment for a regional policy to help the Great Lakes region to build a better future. The regional approach is a necessary principle for effective policy.

EurAc believes that the development of a regional policy is crucial for the following reasons:

- Ethnic, linguistic and economic ties between the countries have deep roots in the region's history. The economic and social situation is similar across the three countries, and the causes of poverty and conflict are strongly interlinked. Instability easily spills over national boundaries. Consequently, efforts to solve the region's problems are bound to fail if they do not take into account such cross-border dynamics. The success of national efforts towards peace and reconciliation will depend heavily on progress made towards finding regional solutions.

¹ The three countries are listed as numbers 158, 167 and 169 on the Human Development Index of the UNDP (Human Development Report 2006) respectively.

- Some donor countries work in only one or two of the countries in the Great Lakes and have tended not to take into account the impact of the military, economic and diplomatic policies of the recipient countries on neighbouring states. Intensive bilateral relations with only some countries in the region have resulted in unbalanced and incoherent donor policy.
- EU policy for the Great Lakes is more than a sum of bilateral policies of its member states, which were not coherent and sometimes even contradictory. A regional policy for the Great Lakes on a European level should increase this coherence.

Recommendations:

- Address regional issues through regional funds, instruments and regional organizations. An example would be the Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) by the World Bank, covering the entire region surrounding the DRC
- Promote regional cooperation between the countries in the region, on the level of states but also civil societies. Examples could be regional economic integration, environmental projects in border areas, exchanges between universities, etc.

2. Benchmarking aid relations

Benchmarking is a process-based tool for evaluating development cooperation. Benchmarking places the focus on peace and security, democracy, justice, human rights and economic governance, as integral to development. Benchmarks offer a framework for political dialogue between donor and recipient countries on objectives agreed upon by both parties. Human rights and development are mutually reinforcing, as enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement. Benchmarking acknowledges these inter-linkages. If properly implemented benchmarking can be a simple way of making operational on-paper commitments to human rights and democratisation.

Specific and mutually agreed benchmarks, based on international standards and norms, would remove the subjectivity from judgments and negotiations in the aid partnership.

The negotiation and selection of benchmarks through an open dialogue process is a key to ensuring that these indicators are not one-directional, increasing their legitimacy and, as a consequence, their effectiveness. Such a process must include European and national authorities, national and European parliaments, as well as non state actors.

The mechanisms of setting up benchmarks should also take into account the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) works and especially the African Peer Review Mechanism's (APRM) indicators for cooperation.

To be effective such a mechanism should be accompanied by an increase of coordination among EU institutions and member states interventions as donors, the principles of the *Paris Declaration on Aid effectiveness*² must be applied. This political dialogue should be intensive, consistent and even-handed.

Recommendations:

- Harmonise donor demands to individual countries to become the norm in order to avoid an overload of different requirements with which recipient countries will have to comply. Apply the principles of the *Paris Declaration*
- Negotiate and adopt common benchmarks
- The European Union and its member states should study the possibility of formulating **regional benchmarks** to be applied in the aid relations with the different countries in the Great Lakes. These regional benchmarks should then of course be contextualised to the reality in these countries, and should be used as an instrument for creating an even-handed political dialogue. Such regional benchmarks can already be found, for example, in the NEPAD strategic

² The Paris Declaration, signed in March 2005, sets out international commitments to increase aid effectiveness through enhanced local ownership, improved alignment with recipient government aims and systems, harmonisation of donor approaches, improved management and mutual accountability.

framework, through which African states have committed themselves to a set of principles and goals, as well as in the Cotonou agreement. This approach can also be found in the Cotonou Agreement spirit

- An effective benchmarking system must include a transparent periodic monitoring mechanism, delegated to independent consultants, as well as mechanisms for non state actors input

Regional issues

Based on EurAc members' and their partners' experience in the region, EurAc has identified the following priority regional issues to be addressed in regional policy by the EU and its member states: 1) Peace and security, 2) Democracy, Justice, governance and the rule of law, 3) Economic governance.

1. Peace and security

1. *Peace processes*

Peace agreements have been signed in both Burundi and the DRC. The transitional period was formally concluded in 2003 in Rwanda, in 2005 in Burundi and is now ending in the DRC where the delayed local elections are considered as the last stone on this formal path. In December 2006, these three countries signed along with eight other ones, a Stability Pact. Such positive recent developments in the region indicate that there is reason for optimism that peace, stability and development can finally be achieved after years of chronic instability and insecurity. However, the peace process in each of the countries is fragile and has not yet been fully consolidated.

Arms proliferation continues to be a major threat to security in the region. The leaked confidential section of the UN Expert Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of October 2003 (hereafter, the UN Expert Panel report) made the link between arms proliferation and the illegal resource exploitation by elite networks with economic interests.

Recommendations:

- Support improvements of African Union peace keeping structures
- Promote grassroots peace building and reconciliation efforts involving non state actors
- Support Regional initiative to promote peace like the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and its follow-ups
- Support mechanisms to tackle arms trafficking issues

2. *UN missions*

The UN missions in the region MONUC (DRC) and BINUB (Burundi) proved their efficiency through the past years accompanying the DRC and Burundi in their transitional process. As the transitional process are long and the UN experience needed. These missions should be helped in their trials to reach their goals: bring stability and help the countries to move towards democracy, stability and prosperity.

Recommendations:

- Provide political, technical, and financial support to MONUC so that it can fulfil its current Chapter VII mandate, which requires MONUC to monitor the arms embargo and the ceasefire agreement and to protect civilians

3. Demobilization, Disarmament, Repatriation, Reintegration and Reinstallation (DDRRR)

The DDRRR process, implemented through the Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) of the World Bank, is crucial for the stability in the Great Lakes region.

EurAc welcomes the steps taken by the donor community to make significant amounts of funding available for DDRRR.³ However, EurAc is concerned that people at grassroots level feel that the current DDRRR process is rather top-down and does not sufficiently take into consideration the realities faced by local communities. The small arms disarmament should be better taken into account in the current DDRRR process.

Recommendations:

- Improve the support to the DDRRR process by a better participation of organisations from a grass-roots level
- Take into account a widespread civilian disarmament

2. Democracy, Justice, Governance and the Rule of Law

1. Democracy

To date, donor policies on democratization, the concept of democracy has been simplified to the holding of elections and the promotion of multiparty democracy. The process of preparing elections should be perceived in a wider democratic process and the importance of civic education.

The main focus of donor policy for democratization should be: to create free and open societies, which allow for debate, criticism and freedom of expression, where non state actors representatives, political opposition, religious representatives, media and ordinary people are free to challenge and hold to account their government without fear of oppression.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the independence of the media;
- Promote *trias politica*, by strengthening weak institutions, the judiciary and parliament, in order to create an effective system of checks and balances;
- Strengthen actions of independent electoral commissions and support their civic education actions
- Strengthen the rule of law and basic human rights in general.

2. Impunity and justice

Lacks of justice or selective impunity are potential factors contributing to current and future instability. A policy goal for a joint strategy should be to strive towards even-handed justice in the entire region. Impunity should not be taken for granted and donors should develop a strategy on how to bring to justice former armed groups and their internal and external accomplices accused of war crimes.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen an independent justice system in Rwanda, in the DRC and in Burundi and periodically evaluate the impact of these programs
- Support initiatives in the framework of truth and reconciliation processes

3. Empowerment of non state actors

The empowerment of non state actors is needed for development and peace in the Great Lakes. The phenomenon of dysfunctional states might be a central cause for poverty and conflict in the Great Lakes region. Non state actors should be strengthened in parallel to

³ For the period 2002-2007, 223 millions USD is available for the World Bank MDRP program.

the strengthening of state institutions, to enable non state actors to fulfil their role as countervailing powers, promoting a healthy system of checks and balances. Empowerment of non state actors should include, and go beyond, financial and institutional support to development NGOs and programs strengthening their administrative capacity.

Recommendations:

- Adopt the institutional strengthening of local structures as an integral strategy underpinning all humanitarian, rehabilitation and development projects and programs
- Monitor the freedom of expression and association of non state actors. The repression against these basic human rights must be condemned and denounced. Capacity building programs in the field of advocacy and lobbying should be supported
- Support to grassroots peace building, civic education and information dissemination initiatives for supporting national reconciliation and the transition to peace and democracy
- Support to the creation of an independent media sector
- Support to cross-border exchange and learning by non state actors, through the organization of regional seminars and exchange programs

3. Economic Governance

From War Economy to Peace Economy

Competition for control over natural resources has fuelled instability and violence and perpetuated conflict in the Great Lakes region, particularly in the DRC. The plundering of natural resources continues to date, particularly through the 'elite networks' mentioned above. Regulatory mechanisms, such as the Kimberly Process for the certification of diamonds or application of the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) exist. However, these will only be effective in curbing illegal resource exploitation.

The exploitation of natural resources is in itself not negative if the revenues from these activities are managed effectively in order to promote development and stability and to transform a war economy into a peace economy through taking steps to ensuring that:

- resource exploitation activities are sustainable and the revenues from these are used to benefit the development of local communities
- resource exploitation is transparent and regulated according to local legislation
- resource exploitation contributes to development and stability instead of violence and instability.

Recommendations:

- Support mechanisms forcing all parties involved in exploitation of natural resources to be transparent about the contracts they have and their resource exploitation activities
- Support mechanisms in favour of implementing the *Publish What You Pay* principle
- Promote a multi-stakeholder approach to the development of the exploitation of natural resources, including local communities, private sector, local and national governments and perhaps international financial institutions. This should include, for example, the promotion of community-based forestry management

- Promote a regional economic integration policy should be promoted, aimed at creating a common market for local products, intra regional trade and food security