

# Challenges to the Implementation of Regional Integration in ECCAS with Respect to the Free Movement of Persons and Goods.

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## ABSTRACT

As part of the community's goals to develop and promote the culture of human integration, the establishment of ECCAS in 1983 was accompanied by an enabling Protocol (Annex VII, ECCAS Treaty) on free movement of persons and goods within the Central African region, with the vision to fully integrate in years to come. The movement of persons and goods without restriction constitute a major lynchpin towards market integration most especially as People are carriers of goods, consumers' services, technologies, businesses and knowledge and can effectively tear down policy-induced barriers to trade carrying assets. Despite these benefits and mindful of the spirit enshrined in the aforementioned protocol, the mobility of persons and goods within ECCAS remains a challenging venture. This article, therefore, aims at exposing some fundamental challenges that impede the free circulation of goods and nationals of ECCAS's Member States within the region. Pooling data largely from secondary sources and through a descriptive approach of data analysis, this study argues that the ECCAS's protocol on free movement of persons and goods is not effectively implemented due to poor infrastructural and communication links within the region; ethnic divide; political instability; the rise of nationalism; hostile relations; rivalry/enmity between central African heads of state; and regular roadblocks within and across national borders. In this guise, it is categorically imperative for ECCAS's member states to recognize the fact that the above highlighted challenges constitute an indication to deal with them most especially as free movement of persons and goods represents major pillars upon which integration is based.

**Keywords:** Regional Integration; Free Movement of Persons and Goods; ECCAS; Region.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Regional Integration which describes the process by which states through legally binding agreements, decide to cooperate in order to achieve peace, stability and wealth through common institutions and rules (Ali, 2022), gained traction in Africa after most states gained political independence in the 1960s. Today, this process which is thought to have the potential of unlocking socio-economic and political challenges in developing countries as it provides a platform for the exchange of ideas, goods and service has become one of the major developments in international relations (Haas, 1971).

In central Africa, the quest for a wider economic community for the region triggered the establishment of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in October 18, 1983 by members of the Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC) (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon) and members of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL) (Burundi, Rwanda and the then Zaire) as well as Angola and Sao Tomé and Príncipe. Today, ECCAS represents the major Regional Economic Community in the Central African region (AEC, 1999) with the goal to develop capacities to maintain peace, security, and stability as essential prerequisites for economic and social development; develop physical, economic, and monetary integration; establish an autonomous financing mechanism and to develop a culture of human integration.

Since its creation, ECCAS began functioning in 1985. The community had experience a period of hibernation from 1992 to 1998 due to financial difficulties, conflict in the Great Lakes region, and other crises in member states most especially the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo that was particularly divisive as Rwanda and Angola fought on opposing sides (ECFR, 2022). The establishment of ECCAS was accompanied by an enabling Protocol on Freedom of Movement and Rights of Establishment of Nationals of Members States (Annex VII, ECCAS Treaty, 1983). This protocol legalizes in favor of all citizens of ECCAS's member states, the right to move freely within the community without restrictions and the right to take up and pursue activities as self-employed persons and to set up and manage undertakings, of a stable and continuous nature, under the same conditions as those laid down by the law of the member state concern regarding establishment for its own nationals. The potential trade benefits associated with unrestricted cross-border mobility of people makes it significant (AUC *et al*, 2016). Free movement of persons is a major lynchpin to market integration because People are carriers of goods, technologies, consumers' services, businesses and knowledge and can effectively tear down policy-induced barriers to trade carrying assets. The ability to travel and reside freely for work, tourism, or education constitutes a significant factor to boost economic growth and skill development. Moreover, successful cross-border investments largely depend on sufficient liberalization of travel restrictions (AfDB, 2013).

Despite these potential benefits associated with free movement of persons and goods, the implementation of the ECCAS's protocol relating thereto remains moribund and neglected (Wood, 2019). ECCAS's member countries have registered little progress in terms of achieving this dimension of regional integration. In reality, free movement of persons and goods is only effective in four CEMAC member States (Cameroon, Chad, Congo and Congo-Brazzaville, excluding Gabon and Equatorial Guinea). The rest of the member States require a visa for fellow ECCAS citizens (AfDB, 2007). This article therefore seeks to explore in a general manner, the fundamental challenges impeding the free mobility of Persons and rights of establishment of nationals of ECCAS's Member States within the region. It may be worthy to highlight that the implementation of the Protocol was scheduled within four and twelve years respectively after the establishment of the community coupled with the initiative to fast-track the process with the hope of becoming effective by March 2005 (IOM, 2007). Sadly, the initiative remains pending. Till date, businesses are unable to acquire, move, or retain professionals due to restrictive immigration laws that impede the mobility of professional services, causing limited regional skills pooling. Some member States underline security issues as the primary reason delaying the implementation of the protocol which make-up the fifth phase of the Abuja Treaty projected to be realized by 2023. However, these challenges go beyond and include *inter alia*:

### **Poor Infrastructural and Communication Links within the Region**

Infrastructures make up the 'life blood' that enables the free mobility of persons and goods in any regional integration agenda. In fact, it has been established by Edeme, R. et al (2020) that investment in various infrastructures potentially contributes to growth, productivity and employment. In this light, insufficient/inadequate infrastructures can inhibit a REC's performance by constraining the integration process most especially when the destination country is lagging in constant energy supply, ICTs and transport networks. Within ECCAS, countries are grappling with insufficient and inadequate infrastructures. The network of roads, railways, waterways, ports, airways, telecommunications, and electricity infrastructures are poorly maintained and many Countries, in the regional bloc, have failed to bring about substantial improvements to infrastructures inherited at independence and to this effect, the countries can barely stand to harness the benefits of regional cooperation most especially as the territories appear to be inaccessible and less attractive to potential investors and entrepreneurs coupled with a poor business environment plaguing the community and the growing inability to withstand competition.

Evidence from the briefings on the level of African integration base on each dimension and overall index (ARII, 2019), unveils ECCAS's lackluster performance in terms of infrastructural integration. The

community's average score under the dimension is 0.373. Gabon and Cameroon are considered the best infrastructurally integrated countries in the region with scores of 0.827 and 0.793 respectively. Gabon ranks first on the AfDB infrastructure development index and Cameroon has the best flight connections. Chad is the worst-performing country; it ranks last on both the AfDB infrastructure index and regional flight connectivity followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic with scores of 0.111 and 0.170 respectively.

Thus, the community's average score under the free movement of persons and goods dimension is 0.469. Rwanda is considered the most integrated country in this dimension with the highest score of 1. It is the only country in the regional bloc offering visa on arrival in the community. Central African Republic is the second-best integrated country with a much lower score of 0.619. The country has a relatively favourable visa policy. The least performing countries are Burundi and Cameroon with scores of 0.062 and 0.156 respectively (ARII, 2019). However, as Burundi and Cameroon joined the Kigali protocol on free movement of persons, and grant visa on arrival, this dimension is expected to improve markedly.

As already mentioned, regional infrastructures cut across different areas such as energy, transport, ICTs. In the energy sector, investment in rehabilitation and expansion of national and regional transmission network will allow power to flow within domestic and regional markets (Edeme, et al. op.cit.). However, within ECCAS, most countries continue to struggle with energy infrastructures and consequently, electricity poverty is thwarting the community's economic prospects. At the domestic level, a number of member countries are struggling to upgrade their energy infrastructures. Angola, for instance, has raised funds for investment in the 2,070 megawatt (MW) Lauca hydropower project, located on a section of the Kwanza River between the Cambambe and Campanda complexes and the Caculo Cabaca hydro facility. While at the regional level, some cross border energy projects include the Ruzizi III hydropower project in Burundi and Rwanda, the central African power interconnection; the second Democratic Republic of the Congo-Zambia interconnector.

African states in general have opted for energy hubs to combat inequalities in access to energy. These energy pools aim to establish regional energy markets and to harmonize energy policy by large areas. As of now, there are five regional pools in Africa, covering more or less the five sub-regions of the continent. I.e. the Central African Power Pool (CAPP), the Maghreb Electricity Committee (COMELEC), the West African Power Pool (WAPP), the East African Power Pool (EAPP), and the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP). CAPP was adopted in 2009 by ECCAS member states in order to promote the regional electricity market and develop the significant hydroelectric potential in the region. Through the establishment of this regional electricity market, the member states sets out the principles governing production, transmission, distribution, transit and cross-border exchanges in the ECCAS area. CAPP is a specialized ECCAS body responsible for implementing energy policy, monitoring studies, building community infrastructure, organizing trade in electrical energy and related services (ECCAS, 2023). It was created with Angola, D.R. Congo, Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Cameroon, Chad, Rwanda, and Burundi as member countries.

Despite these domestic and regional endeavors towards a sustainable energy supply, the region is still embroidered in some energy poverty which poses a major constraint to the twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. This challenge makes it difficult for landlocked countries to participate in regional, continental and global economies or markets.

In terms of transport infrastructures, investment in road networks, railways, ports, waterways etc. will generally aid intra-regional connectivity. Nevertheless, the central African community is marked by poor transport networks. For this reason, some countries in the Central African region are revamping transport networks including those with a regional dimension. For instance, Cameroon has raise funds for the Lena-Tibati Road segment of the Batchenga-Lena-Tibati-Ngaoundere Corridor (which will also make trade

between Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad easier) and the Sanaga Bridge. Similarly, Gabon is also rehabilitating the Transgabonais railway.

Also, investment in telecommunication infrastructures will enable intra-regional network connectivity for logistics, data transmission, service and trade. However, ECCAS is lagging in good communications systems and inadequate network infrastructures. It is against this backdrop that the assembly of heads of state approved the Central Africa Backbone (CAB) project in 2012 aimed at interconnecting member countries' fiber-optic infrastructure (Kassouwi, 2022). The interconnection is expected to lower telecom costs and improve access. To this end, Cameroon and Central African counterpart signed a memorandum of understanding that lays the cooperation framework that will guide the project. It covers the technical, economic, and legal aspects of the projects. The CAB project aims to interconnect ECCAS's member countries' broadband infrastructure. In the framework of the project, the Central African Republic is to interconnect with Cameroon and Congo while Cameroon is to interconnect with Congo, Gabon, Chad, and the Central African Republic. The project is expected to allow ECCAS countries to have an autonomous network. It will also help enhance digital inclusion in CAR and Cameroon, and reduce the digital divide in the two countries' border regions by allowing the population to access quality and affordable telecom services.

### **The Complexity of Cultural Divide**

In its highly complex and multiple layers, cultural identity is often defined by factors such as ethnicity, history, geography, race, religion, or language etc. In this light, the central African region is a hub of linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity that co-exist. Activities of colonial administrators divided the region into units with a leadership structure, a unique culture, and tradition for the different countries. Today, ECCAS membership includes Anglophone, Francophone, Arabophone, Lusophone, and Hispanophone countries with different official languages that are direct expression of their respective cultures. Although the ECCAS founding treaty grants citizens of member states the right to move freely within the region, it is equally important to highlight that when crossing state borders, citizens are also crossing linguistic, religious and cultural borders, which can thus become barriers to free movement of economically active citizens, such as workers, self-employed persons and service providers, and economically non-active citizens, such as students and pensioners (Goldner, 2009). The existence of increased linguistic, religious and cultural diversity and the proclaimed protection by member states can sometimes limit or impede market freedoms in the region. Oftentimes, the majority Francophone countries form a lingual bloc to gain specific advantages over the others. This linguistic heterogeneity fosters disunity and fragmentation among member states and all this highlights the need for a common identity, which seems to be weak if not completely deficient in the region. The absence of a common language among the states of the central African region constitutes a linguistic complexity and in some cases, the attitude of the people of this region to the linguistic differences has rather been counterproductive (Chelsea et al, 2018). Of even greater concern is the sharp divide along the colonial languages of English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese. The influences of these languages and the associated colonial masters have been that of competition as opposed to cooperation towards attaining economic and political emancipation of the community.

Cultural identity can inspire pride and hope and unite people in groups for effective political and social actions. However, the challenge in the central African region is to balance cultural diversity with equal access to political power, wealth, opportunity, and the resources of the nation. Many Central African states regard ethnicity in particular as the most important factor in politics, and they tend to view any disturbance as an ethnic conflict. The disparate ethnic groups tend to compete and strive to improve their positions and allow complex socioeconomic and political issues to be reduced to a simple case of "*us against them.*" For instance, tensions between Muslims and Christians have intensified violence in Central African Republic (CAR). It started as a mutiny led by the "Seleka", an alliance of armed Muslim rebels who took over CAR



in March 2013, after exploiting ethnic and regional tensions in the country as well as the high animosity of previous governments. Commanders of Seleka led attacks on Christian communities (Anti-Balaka) and in return, Christians have been retaliating. Similarly, in Rwanda, the dominant Hutu waged a gruesome genocidal campaign of violence against the minority Tutsi in the mid-1990s. These tragedies continue to be felt throughout the region and in many states; poverty and political disorder have been regarded as ethnic conflicts. These uprisings have led to bitter confrontations resulting to large scale violence that deteriorate member states security and relations, which in all, increase the risk of mass atrocities that hinder regional integration with respect to the free movement of persons and goods within the region.

### **The Challenge of Hostile Relations between Central African States**

ECCAS's regional integration is characterized by Xenophobia, mistrust, and hostility between neighboring governments (Alexandre, 2008). As a result, the good neighbor policy that should typically promote the region's interests by encouraging peace appears to be lacking in the regular exchanges between the various states. The root of current potential conflicts in the region has been fueled by the antagonistic relationships between the member states of the community. States are either at odds with one another or with criminal organizations that have support from multiple sources. A protracted conflict situation has intensified within the region due to a multitude of political and diplomatic actions and behaviors. For instance, the hostility orchestrated against Cameroonians residing in Equatorial Guinea is illustrative. Although it appears that Guinea has cordial relations with neighbouring Cameroon, there have been perceived mistreatment of Cameroonians working in Equatorial Guinea. In addition the two sovereignties have an unresolved maritime border dispute. In December 2008, it was alleged that, Equatorial Guinea security forces killed a Cameroonian fisherman and abducted two Cameroonian immigrants close to the border (Akiro, 2021). In this kind of unfriendly ties, neighboring states typically disregard one another's geographical integrity, infringe against one another's sovereignty, and engage in internal squabbles over matters that concern both of them and consequently conflicts appear to be fueled by the actions of regional state players.

Furthermore, the near-universal tendency of disputes over colonial frontiers and the immense greed to capture more land by most ECCAS's member countries which some states openly exhibit with the quest for territorial expansion may justify the disdain for states' disregards for the territorial integrity of others. For example, the breach of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) territorial integrity by Rwanda, Burundi, and Angola served as the catalyst for the great war of the Central African Region (the war of the Great Lakes region). All these states asserted that they were acting for security reasons, including to sever the links to their individual rebel organizations' origins in eastern DRC, an area of the country that had functioned as a haven and a political and military stronghold for a number of rebel groups (Pourtier, 1996). In addition, in what has been coined as *environmental war* to conquer resources, the violation of states' territorial integrity usually goes hand in hand with a desire to seize portions of land, particularly areas with tremendous mineral resource endowments along the borders. In this context, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea have been fighting over the Mbanie Island in the common territorial sea. Similarly, Nigeria waged a war against Cameroon to claim mineral and maritime resources in the Bakassi peninsula for itself. The hostile environments created by these scenarios and the unfriendly attitude towards one another have resulted in widespread violations of territorial integrity and national sovereignty, which have harmed political and diplomatic relations and raised the possibility of mass atrocities, which restricts the free mobility of persons and goods.

Also, rivalry and enmity between Central African Heads of State depicts the issue of hostile relations plaguing the region. Within the community, to state that the relationship among some Heads of State is unfriendly is an open secret. Regional collaboration in Central Africa is marked by the challenge of distaste and competition for power and resources amongst the community leaders. Besides being rivals, Heads of States are sometimes leaders driven by pride, greed, mutual mistrust, vested interests, power, and influence

(Ogaraku, C. et al, 2021). For instance, before his demise, Idriss Deby Itno of Chad engaged in media conflict with Ange-Felix Patassé of the Central African Republic (CAR) in which they both accused the other of attempting to topple their respective regimes. As a result of their shared animosity, Deby provided weapons to the military and political organizations that opposed Patassé and ultimately overthrow him in March 2003. Similarly, the animosity between Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbazogo of Equatorial Guinea and Omar Bongo of Gabon has had a significant impact on the bilateral ties between the two neighboring countries. Equatoguinean's pride and ungratefulness as well as the nation's growing condescension in the wake of the oil boom that has given the country significant wealth, are some of the contributing factors to the strong animosity between the two presidents. Furthermore, the Island of Mbanie, which is endowed with oil resources, has also been a point of conflict between the two parties. A stark example of this hate was demonstrated through Nguema's conspicuous absence from the celebration honoring Bongo's 40 years in power in Libreville, Gabon in 2007.

The rivalries between Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as those between Pascal Lisouba of the Congo and José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, are perilous dimensions that these leaders at some point reached. Some leaders within the region had charge that others harbor or support armed organizations or insurgents from other nations on their soil or dispatch their own armed forces to meddle in and take part in internal strife in other nations. Déby, for instance, had once claimed that the CAR's government had failed to control anti-Déby rebels in Chad who were operating around CAR's borders. Aside working with rebel groups to topple their rival's government by providing arms and munitions to the political and military groups, some leaders have stretch their hatred to the extent of the cynical practice of conflict exportation (Alexandre, op. cit). This is a horrible tactic that fosters widespread regional disruption and communal anarchy rather than neutrality in local conflicts.

Exporting conflict has also become a well-developed technique used by governments that feel threatened and want to use any means necessary to maintain their political dominance. For instance, Rwanda transported its civil conflict to eastern DRC in 1996. The new Rwandan leaders had to take precautions against the military and political reconstruction of the vanquished forces by waging a significant onslaught on the Kivu area after taking control of the capital city of Kigali and driving the loyal soldiers back to the borders with former Zaire. Officially, this action was taken to ensure the security of the nation but Rwanda also claimed that it was doing so in order to find the perpetrators of the shocking genocidal act who had taken refuge in the Kivu Mountains and exported their civil conflict to the eastern DRC. The result was that Angola, Congo Brazzaville, DRC, Rwanda, Burundi (the Great Lakes region) became a major conflict area.

These whole state of affairs has rendered regional progress in ECCAS ineffective especially as the intra-community rivalry continues to manifests in deep seated disagreements over political, economic and security issues in the region and consequently destabilizing, weakening and decimating the various countries. In effect, international relations in the region have become highly precarious coupled with the surge in banditry and other criminal acts that have also been the case of the conflict. Power rivalries have led to gangs roaming the streets of member states, vandalizing homes and businesses. This atmosphere of systematized ill-will represents a major challenge to the free circulation of persons or goods in foreign territories of the community. In all, these factors provoke collective chaos and widespread regional disorder, which manifest in deep-seated divisions that make regional progress a myth.

### **Political Instability and the Rise of Nationalism**

In Africa at large, the impacts of Political instability and the rise of nationalism greatly impedes the free movement, residence and establishment of citizens within the different regions of the continent. Since the independence of most African states, countries within the continent are regularly animated by crisis (Ndokang, E. et al, 2015) including political alternation, ethnic conflicts, tribalism, civil disorder,

catastrophic civil unrest, wars, coup d'états. Within ECCAS, not all countries enjoy an enduring political stability. Political instability that oftentimes poses stress and strains to a political system usually emerges from poor governance and institutional accountability, weak development of national unity and inequitable economic development. These potential causes of conflicts have plunged the region into diverse crisis plaguing the community with impacts that touch not only on the economic growth and the relative stability of neighboring countries, but also on the free circulation of citizens and residence in the member states of the community. Crisis affecting a political system have cross cutting effects *inter alia*; the destruction of infrastructures, extensive dislocation of economic activities (i.e. curtailed trade), material destruction, poor investment climate which are all factors that serve as enablers to the free movement of persons and goods. Regional integration in ECCAS has been severely disrupted as member states experience unending civil unrest and terrorist attacks. Political instability and insecurity within the region has diverted focus away from regional integration and consolidation to ending wars and preventing its widespread to adjacent countries. These scenarios represent major impediments to the community's aspirations and the resulting lackluster performance within the region.

Aside serving as a barrier to the free circulation of persons and goods, conflicts within ECCAS are major threats to socio-political and economic stability which are fundamental to efficient allocation of public resources, private sector investment and growth, capacity building and retention, sustained economic growth and poverty reduction (Sako, S. et al, 2002). These threats are fundamental challenges standing against the actualization of the objectives of Agenda 2063 (Ukaeje, O. 2022), which aims to accelerate economic progress in Africa. Except these challenges are mitigated, the Agenda will remain nothing but a document that cannot be actualized because the peace and security required to attend such an enviable feat is seriously in breach in a majority of the states.

Talking of the rise of Nationalism, ECCAS's member countries are not devoid of the strong belief that national interest surpasses international interest. Coupled with the concept of sovereignty which in statehood and international relations is sacrosanct, cardinal, crucial and critical, countries in the regional bloc seek to protect their politics, economies, resources, cultural ethno-national identities from non-nationals and consequently promoting the policy of isolationism. In the sense of national egoism, nationalism is not only the consciousness or a feeling of belonging to a certain nation, but also a desire to forward the strength, liberty, or prosperity of a nation, whether one's own or another (Kecmanovic, D. (1996). Cultural nationalism in an etiolated sense suggests the highest protection of ethno-national culture, such as language and tradition (Miscovic, N. 2001).

The growing animosity between central African heads of State coupled with unfriendly ties that mark international relations in the region (Alexandre, Akiro, op. cit), has resulted in the exclusion and subsequent expulsion of non-nationals from different territories of ECCAS's member states. Even though freedom of movement and establishment has been perceived as a human rights (Steinmann, G. 2006), nationalist still have an interest in controlling their resources and ethno-national cultures. In this guise, the inflow of immigration may have unwanted effects and immigration restrictions are seen as an important way in which citizens can control the development of their society (Miscovic, N. (2001). Some scholars like Dowley and Silver (2011) find the possibility of individuals showing strong national attachments while simultaneously supporting integration projects. However, national identity may go against regional integration and individuals who have strong attachments to their national identity might perceive the immigration of non-identical members as a threat to national identity because it blurs the distinctions between them. This phenomenon has been a subject of analysis by Duchesne and Frogner (1995) in their analysis of the waves of Eurobarometer surveys and the ISSP National Identity surveys where they seem to confirm that Europeans are still primarily attached to their national identity first than to the European identity. This growing nationalist belief of overriding national interest to international interest in central Africa has greatly discouraged the free movement of persons and their goods across national borders, within the community.

## Regular Roadblocks within and Across Borders in the Region

The logic of states is usually to control their borders. Hence, free movement of people impinges on sovereignty insofar as it rests on the predisposition of the state to control traffic through its borders (Taddele, M. 2019). Base on this forgoing logic, roadblocks have become rampant in the central African region and it is difficult to find a road without one. Roadblocks are a manifestation of control over trade routes, a formidable source of funding for parties to a conflict as well as a mechanism to govern and restrict movement (Schouten, 2022). Hence, conflict dynamics in resource-rich areas with roadblocks are alternative financing mechanisms for armed groups, although may also encapsulate a distinct and meaningful form of order-making. For instance, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are known to have more than a thousand roadblocks, demonstrating how locals, rebels, and state security forces develop resistance and authority over these constrained points of entry and consequently impeding community supply chains, the movement of international businesses and UN agencies, and most significantly, the freedom of people to travel around.

In fact, studies conducted by the International Peace Information Service (IPIS) and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) coupled with the report of Peer Schouten and Soleil-Parfait Kalessopo (2017) on the mapping of roadblocks in the central African region reveals that just in Central African Republic (CAR), there are a total of 284 roadblocks. Of these, 117 (or 41%) are operated by government forces, 149 (or 52 percent) by ex-Seleka groups, and 40 (or 14%) by anti-balaka groups. In some cases, two different armed actors share control over a single roadblock. In general, however, roadblocks operated by governmental structures (ranging from different administrative entities, to the police and the military) are largely concentrated in the south-western part of the country. These roadblocks operated by different armed groups are noted to have been concentrated around trade routes crossing the rest of the country. The Ex-Seleka groups control more roadblocks than government forces overall, but the gendarmerie is the largest individual operator of roadblocks, with a presence at 92 or 32% of all mapped roadblocks in the country. The gendarmerie is followed by the FPRC, present at 61 or 21% of roadblocks. Third place is shared by the UPC, the MPC and anti-balaka groups, each controlling around 40 or 14% of barriers.

Their report further identifies three main economic circuits on which roadblocks concentrate: the cattle circuit, with 62 barriers (22% of the total) where ex-Seleka groups impose taxes; the Sudanese circuit, dominated by former Seleka factions with 64 barriers (23%); and finally, the 'legal' circuit, with 26 barriers (9%) controlled by state services. The remainder of the CAR's roadblocks are scattered across its wider road network. The involvement of ex-Seleka groups in these economic circuits, however, goes beyond taxation at roadblocks. Customs or free passage taxes are levied on traders passing through areas under their control, and in some cases obligatory paid escorts are imposed. They estimated that ex-Seleka armed groups generate around EUR 6 million per year by imposing taxes on the main economic circuits in the area under their control. Of this, EUR 3.59 million per year derives from their interference with the cattle circuit, and 2.38 EUR million from the Sudanese circuit. This case study and many others clearly outline the intricate mechanics of cross-border extortion, which severely discourage people and goods to move freely.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Investment in the construction and rehabilitation of cross border infrastructures will enhance intra-regional connectivity. To this end, ECCAS's member states should commit greater budgetary resources to finance the development of infrastructures with a regional dimension that will enable migration and encourage foreign direct investment across borders within the region. Such finances should be destined to tackle the problem of Poor transport networks, energy infrastructures and



provide a possibility of a one network area for the region (regional digital connectivity) in terms of communication Infrastructures which are all drivers of migration in any integration process. This will enhance the enviable culture of human integration by facilitating the free movement of persons and goods within the community.

2. To have easier travel access within the community, the common practice to all ECCAS's member States should be that of offering visas on arrival to citizens of the community member states or better still, the adoption of a 'single ECCAS passport' in order to make free movement of people relatively fluid. This indicator calls for the political commitment of member states to back the adoption of the free movement protocol with a commensurate political will of implementation by encouraging positive reciprocity, applying the treatment they are receiving from more visa-open countries; and look at promoting a visa-on-arrival approach or the regional bloc visas. To this end, the Community leaders and policymakers need to work in synergy towards the goal of every citizen of a member state being able to scan a community passport at immigration controls community-wide. In this regard, improved infrastructure and transport facilities can ease the regional integration process and further stimulate cross-border mobility that will boost economic growth and development in the region.
3. To curb the challenge of language and cultural division (ethnic divide) within ECCAS, this study stresses the need for an ECCAS policy on a common official language especially as language policy requirement affects free movement of economically active citizens within the region. In terms of culture, it is imperative to adopt a policy with a bearing on positive reciprocity in the treatment of each member state's culture in a proportionate and non-discriminatory manner. In all, this indicator will find a fine balance between the preservation of a common community language as a bloc on the one hand, and the promotion of market freedoms, practices and usages on the other hand.
4. To deal with the problem of political instability within the region, good governance remains a major area of concern. Political instability within ECCAS is mostly sparked by poor governance and institutional accountability that is plaguing the political systems of most member states. To this effect, it is essential for the member states of the community to improve their democratic processes, good governance, and institutional accountability, promote human rights and respect of the rule of law, which are all necessary components for political stability. This calls for the entrenchment of democratic culture and constitutionalism as well as strengthening existing governance structures and processes that ensure transparency and equity in the access to, and in the allocation of public resources. These are key indicators towards achieving the desired peace and security that will encourage free movement and establishment within the region and also fostering the economic progress of the community.
5. As concerns the problem of hostile relations, enmity and power rivalry between central African heads of state, it is important for ECCAS's member countries to incorporate into their diplomatic relations, a culture of fraternity that circumscribe current international relations; and ensure respect in accordance to international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other in a reciprocal manner; and consider synergy in making greater concessions for the collective benefit of the community.
6. With regards to the challenge of numerous roadblocks plaguing the community, although some blocks are controlled by state services, the majority of illegal checkpoints within the region are controlled by rebel groups scattered across transport networks especially in resource-rich border areas as indicated in this study. With this in mind, it is important for member states to understand the conflict dynamics within the region and adopt appropriate (diplomatic) mechanisms of resolution and also strengthen security in the identified areas controlled by rebels. This is essential for the eradication of illegal roadblocks and the protection of cross border migrants.
7. Finally, ECCAS's member states should create within the community, suitable institutional structures with strengthened capacities and offer adequate resources to these structures to enable them efficiently monitor the implementation of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods at the national level by all stakeholders. This is crucial because of the pervasive weakness of local governments' structures that have proven to lack capacity and resources to carry out this function.

## CONCLUSION

This article shows how the present status of ECCAS and current events are rendering complex the phenomenon of free movement of persons and goods within the region. The negative impacts associated with Poor infrastructural and communication links across the region, ethnic divergence, political instability, inter-state conflict and tension, power rivalry and the problem of regular roadblocks are great impediments constraining the realization of the objective set-out in Annex VII of the ECCAS's founding treaty that legalizes the right of nationals of member states to move freely within the community without restrictions. However, ECCAS's member countries have registered little progress under this dimension. As of now, persons who are carriers of goods, services, technologies etc. are confronted with the above highlighted challenges and businesses are unable to acquire, move, or retain professionals due to restricted migration. These are no small challenges to which the community must deal with so as to give relevance to its integration agenda. Free movement of persons and goods today is a crucial factor in any integration process and a major lynchpin that serve as a conduit towards market integration. For this reason, it is imperative for member states of the community to recognize the fact that the above exposed challenges constitute an indication to deal with them in order to rescue the community from its lackluster performance.

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