

An aerial photograph of a city in the Congo, showing a dense urban area with a large cathedral in the center. In the background, there are green fields and distant hills. A thick plume of white smoke or steam rises from the horizon, suggesting a conflict or industrial activity. The image is framed by a dark teal bar at the top and a dark grey bar at the bottom.

“Tintin is no longer in the Congo”

A TRANSFORMATIVE ANALYSIS OF BELGIAN DEFENCE
POLICIES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

DR. NINA WILEN

ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY



Title: Tintin is no longer in the Congo – A Transformative Analysis of Belgian Defence Policies in Central Africa

Author: Dr. Nina Wilén

World Politics Department, Royal Military Academy, Brussels, Belgium.

Front page picture: View over Bujumbura, Burundi.

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Tintin is no longer in the Congo –
A Transformative Analysis of
Belgian Defence Policies in Central Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines Belgium's involvement in Central Africa over the last two decades, with a particular focus on the role of the Belgian Defence. The objective is twofold: on the one hand to analyse Belgium's changing policies towards its former colonies during the last twenty years, and on the other hand to take an in-depth look at the military collaborations on the ground and establish an empirical and practical take on what role they fill, how they function and what aims they achieve through interviews and field observations. The analysis is made through the adoption of a transformative approach which includes evolutionary explanation factors, such as national political-administrative history, culture, and style of governance and static factors like national polity features, visible in constitutional and structural factors.

The author argues that the divided nature of Belgian internal politics, which is noted both in its polity features and its political-administrative history, influences its foreign policy towards Central Africa in an inconsistent manner. This is exemplified in the absence of a long-term strategy for the region. Yet, Belgium shows a strong desire to remain involved in the region, which, in the absence of a comprehensive and coherent strategy, results for the most part in a variety of one-dimensional short-term projects. It is recommended that Belgium, as one of the most trusted partners in the region, exploit its expertise in a more efficient manner and develop long-term three-dimensional projects, involving the three D's (Defence, Diplomacy and Development), which would both benefit the reform processes under way in the partner countries, and Belgium's visibility in the latter.

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CHAPTER I

ANALYSING BELGIUM'S ROLE IN CENTRAL AFRICA:

A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

Belgium and the three countries of Central Africa: Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo share a common history which began when King Leopold decided to make Congo his own personal stronghold in 1885¹. In 1916, Belgium occupied German East Africa, which included the territory called Ruanda-Urundi and a few years later, in 1922, Belgium received a League of Nations mandate to administer the territories, practically incorporating them as colonies². From 1908, Congo was also under Belgium's rule as a colony; from King Leopold's 'Independent State of Congo', it

¹ Gérard-Libois, J., "Du domaine de Léopold II à l'entreprise", in Versaille, A. (ed.), *Congo 1960: Echech d'une décolonisation*, GRIP, Brussels, 2010, p.21.

² From now on in the chapter, they will from time to time be grouped under the heading 'colonies' although they never legally were colonies. This is to facilitate the text. Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le rôle de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", in Remacle, E., Vinand, P. (eds.), *L'Amerique, L'Europe, l'Afrique: 1945-1973*, PIE Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2009, pp. 285-307.

became ‘Belgian Congo’ after long negotiations³. The history of the relationship between the Belgian state and the three African states starts here, and from this moment on Belgium developed an interest in keeping its influence in the region alive.

Much can and has been said about Belgium’s role in Central Africa over the years. This study does not have the space, nor does it aim to provide a detailed account of the different events, crises and collaborations that have coloured and formed this relationship, making it what it is today. However, it will attempt to draw the contours of what has constituted Belgium’s policy towards Central Africa over the last twenty years, with a special focus on the defence issues.

The aim is to analyse how Belgium’s policies towards the Central African countries have evolved and developed over the years, through the adoption of a transformative approach, outlined below. Naturally, what comes out of such an analysis is an ever-changing relationship where no point in time can be considered as fixed or ‘status-quo’ although certain trends can be identified. In any case, this is not the objective. Instead, the aim is twofold: on the one hand to analyse Belgium’s changing policies towards its former colonies during the last two decades, and thereby be able to explain as well as to evaluate certain actions or non-actions, and on the other hand to take an in-depth look at the military collaborations on the ground and attempt to establish both an empirical and practical take on what role they fill, how they function and what aims they achieve through interviews and field observations with military personnel involved in these projects. An additional objective is to give broader recommendations on how Belgian authorities and the Defence in particular could improve their relationships and collaborations with their partners in Central Africa.

³ Gérard-Libois, J., “Du domaine de Léopold II à l’entreprise”, *op.cit.*, p.29.

Identifying trends, patterns and irregularities is usually an important part of the analysis of a state's foreign policy. In the case of Belgium and Central Africa, this remains a difficult exercise, as the relationship and the foreign policies that have formed it, are characterised by a certain incoherency. Three preliminary explanations for this will be put forward here and examined throughout the report: firstly, the instability which characterizes the region of Central Africa, makes continuity and foresightedness rare and difficult to attain. Secondly, the divided nature of Belgian internal politics influences its foreign policy towards Africa in an inconsistent manner and finally, the answer to the question of what vital interests Belgium still has in Central Africa is fragmented.

The study will come back to these issues throughout the analysis, which is made through a version of Christensen and Laegrid's transformative approach, outlined in detail in the next section.

A. A Transformative Approach

The transformative approach adopted by Christensen and Laegrid, was used to analyze differences between countries implementing New Public Management reforms. The main contents of the approach include environmental characteristics, polity features and historical-institutional contexts⁴. The transformative perspective emerges when

⁴ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., "Introduction – Theoretical Approach and Research Questions", in Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., *Transcending New Public Management*, Aldershot, Burlington, Ashgate, 2007, p.8.

there is a combination of internal and environmental features to explain why a certain reform may have different content, effects and implications in different countries. The present study does not analyze the introduction of a reform per se, but rather, a country's foreign policies and defense collaborations in a particular region. Yet, the transformative perspective, which combines domestic and contextual features to explain various phenomena, may also be adapted to the analysis of a state's external policies. Laegrid and Christensen suggest that introduced reforms are filtered and modified by two national processes, 1, the national political-administrative history, culture, traditions and style of governance, which have developed in an evolutionary manner, and 2, the national polity features visible in constitutional and structural factors⁵, the more static features. This reasoning can also be used to analyze the emergence and evolution of a state's foreign policies. The two national processes described above, place constraints on and create opportunities for purposeful choice, deliberate instrumental actions and intentional efforts undertaken by political and administrative leaders. A variant of this is to see a state's policies as complex interaction between different features and examine how they are transformed when they encounter cultural constraints and external pressure⁶. Thus, the transformative approach denies both the position that willful political reform actors have full, comprehensive insight into, and power over policy processes, and the fatalistic position that they have no possibility of influencing reforms at all⁷. This is a

⁵ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., "Models of governance and a transformative perspective on administrative reforms", in Christensen, T., Laegrid, P. (eds.), *New Public Management: The Transformation of Ideas and Practice*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, p.12.

⁶ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., "Introduction – Theoretical Approach and Research Questions", *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

particularly important aspect to take into account for the case of Belgium, as the coalition system decreases the chances of radical changes in direction, but allows a central place for parties and party leaders in the development of foreign policies⁸.

B. A Note on Methodology

The study is based on secondary material such as previous research but mostly on primary sources, such as interviews, reports and internal documents from the military sector. In total, forty-seven interviews were conducted with Belgian military personnel and diplomats who are or have been involved in Central Africa in some way, and with local, African military personnel, primarily from Burundi.

As most methodological books confirm, interviews are not an uncomplicated method for gathering information although they are highly useful when trying to complement written material⁹. There is often a veil of secrecy over some of the information in international relations and interviews can assist in overcoming this barrier to understand complex processes, especially through interviews off the record¹⁰. Most interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured, in the sense that a number of

⁸ De Winter, L., Dumont, P., “Do Belgian Parties undermine the Chain of Democratic Delegation?”, *West European Politics*, vol.29, n°5, 2006, p. 958.

⁹ Björkdahl A., *From Idea to Norm: Promoting Conflict Prevention*, Lund, Lund Political Studies 125, 2002, p.36.

¹⁰ *Ibid*; Although this study does not interview political leaders per se, the idea is the same as: “On s’adresse aux leaders parce qu’ils sont les seuls à avoir eu connaissance de certains faits, et eux seuls peuvent donner des renseignements sur ces faits”, in Duverger M., *Méthodes de la Science Politique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1959, p.141

broad questions or themes were posed to all interviewees initially. However, follow-up questions depended on the answer and the experience of each interviewee¹¹. This meant that while some interviews only took 30 minutes, others took over two hours. The large majority of interviews took about 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted to enrich the understanding of the processes and the events studied as well as contributing to and completing their construction and interpretation¹². In addition the interviews aimed at understanding how people comprehend their own world¹³; for example how the Belgian officer understands his or her everyday duties. The method used to access the interviewees depended principally on the mobilization of a network¹⁴. To get in touch with a first interviewee, I found contacts, who, in turn, directed me towards other contacts etc. The risk with limiting the interviews to mainly one category of people (in this case Belgian military staff) is that the result can be biased, yet, for this study, the aim was precisely to examine this particular group of people, and not to provide a comparison with other groups, which would have demanded more of two scarce resources, time and financing.

The large majority of the interviews have not been recorded as most of those interviewed preferred regular transcription. However, a few interviews were recorded and some follow-up interviews were conducted by phone or by email. All

¹¹ This can be compared to “les entretiens guidés”, in Duverger M., *Méthodes de la Science Politique*, *op.cit.*, p.146.

¹² Devin F., “Qualitative Methods”, in D. Marsh, G. Stoker (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (2nd ed.), Hampshire, New York, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2002, pp.197-216, p.199; ; Blanchet A., Gotman A., *L'enquête et ses méthodes: L'entretien*, Armand Colin, 2007, p.43.

¹³ Esaiisson P., Gilljam M., Oscarsson H., Wängnerud L., *Metodpraktikan*, Stockholm, Norstedts Juridik, 2003, p. 285.

¹⁴ Blanchet A., Gotman A., *op.cit.*, p.54.

interviewees remained anonymous, as both the questions and the nature of the interviewees' positions demanded secrecy. The promise of anonymity was a choice made in the knowledge that the inquiry could be seen as less credible without named sources¹⁵. In this study I found that there was no alternative if I wanted to find out about highly institutional behaviours and get credible answers to my questions. I estimate that staff members in high positions would have been highly unlikely to express overtly negative views of the functioning of the system, had anonymity not been a prerequisite for the interview. This means that the reader will have to have more confidence in the researcher's analysis and transcriptions, but also that the access to usually highly personal opinions and/or narratives is open to the reader's interpretation. The persons interviewed are divided into 'High officer', which includes Majors and above and Junior Officers which are those below Major grade. The interviewees have also been given fake names in the references to facilitate the differentiation between them.

All interviews were conducted in settings chosen by the interviewee, sometimes in their work place, sometimes in my office, at times in the field. This was done to make the interviewee as comfortable as possible in order to facilitate the conversation¹⁶.

Finally, there is always a risk of interviewees who tend to forget or rationalize actions or events with hindsight¹⁷, sometimes with a view to presenting themselves in a more favourable light¹⁸. As some of the events happened a few years ago, there is a risk that

¹⁵ Esaisson P., et al., *op.cit.*, p.290.

¹⁶ Kaufmann J-C., *L'Entretien Compréhensif*, Armand Colin, 2004, pp.47-53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.63-69.

¹⁸ "Whether of interest or not, the respondent is still concerned to bring the occasion off in a way that demonstrates his or her competence", see Dingwall R., "Accounts,

the interviewees have forgotten parts or made the reality ‘more interesting’ than it actually was. To limit the misinformation, I have therefore tried to compare the interviews both with each other and with other documentation.

Further Research

This study concentrates on Belgium’s role in Central Africa, with a particular focus on the Belgian Defence’s policies and collaborations. In addition to this analysis, research has been made on security sector reform in Central Africa. The articles “A Hybrid Peace in Rwanda through Locally Owned and Externally Financed Security Sector”, in *Third World Quarterly* and “Identifying the Spoilers in the Security Sector Reform – Disarmement, Demobilisation and Reintegration Process in the Congo”, published in *Journal of Defence and Security Analysis* as well as “Resisting Ownership: The Paralysis of EU Peacebuilding in the Congo”, co-written with Antoine Rayroux and forthcoming in *African Security*, are therefore recommended complementary readings to this study. A monograph on Security Sector Reform in Central Africa is also under way for publication in 2014 as well as an article about Burundi’s implication in peacekeeping in Somalia. These articles have also provided important background information for this study.

Interviews and Observations”, in G. Miller, R. Dingwall (eds.), *Context and Method in Qualitative Research*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage, 1997, p.59

C. Outline of the Study

The study is structured chronologically, starting with a brief historical flashback of the post-colonial period and the nature of the relationship during the years up to the 1990's, where a more detailed analysis is provided. Chapter three and four examine the new start to relations at the beginning of the 2000's with an in-depth analysis of the military collaborations that ensued. A sociological snapshot of the officers participating in these newer missions is found in chapter five, with the aim of providing a more empirical vision of the Belgian presence in the region. Finally in chapter six, Belgium's interest, strategy and future involvement in Central Africa is explored before chapter seven concludes the study with some broader recommendations.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

At the moment when the three African states became independent through different, more or less difficult processes, a new era started in the Belgo- African relationship. The post-colonial period began, and with it, the relationship between the former colonial power and colonies changed radically. Belgium's colonial history was, as is the case for most other colonial powers, not one of its proudest moments. Yet, contrary to other colonial powers, Belgium acquired its only colony (Congo) in 1908 through heritage from King Leopold, while Rwanda and Burundi became Belgian possessions as the result of a deal between the winners of the First World War through a League of Nations mandate in 1922¹⁹. According to some historians, this unusual colonial history implied that Belgium and its citizens were never a 'colonizing'

¹⁹ Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le role de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", op.cit., p.286; Bouvier, P., "La Belgique et l'Afrique centrale", in Remacle, E., Vinand, P. (eds.), *L'Amerique, L'Europe, l'Afrique: 1945-1973*, PIE Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2009, p.271.

people, or interested in a colonial empire as such²⁰. This did not, however, prevent the colonial period from containing several events and attitudes coloured with racism, paternalism and imperialism²¹. Belgian influence in the three African states was also evident in an impressive development of law and order, a network of primary schools and clinics, and a blossoming infrastructure (in particular in the Congo) all financed and maintained by the exploitation of natural resources found in Congo. These developments, succeeded in making the large state the second most industrialized country in Africa at its independence²². In Burundi and Rwanda, Belgian influence has in hindsight often been reduced to its implication in the deepened cleavage between two of the three ethnicities: Hutus and Tutsis. Belgium's tendency to take sides with one or other of the two ethnicities when it was considered advantageous for its own rule²³ and later, its clear support of the Tutsis²⁴ (and later in Rwanda: Hutus), which

²⁰ Braeckman, C., "Introduction – Congo-Belgique: vera-t-on jamais rejaillir le feu de l'ancien volcan?", in Versaille, A. (ed.), *Congo 1960: Echech d'une décolonisation*, GRIP, Brussels, 2010, p. 8; Bouvier, P., "La Belgique et l'Afrique centrale", *op.cit.*, pp.271-272; Gérard-Libois, J., "Du domaine de Léopold II à l'entreprise", *op.cit.*, p.29; Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. Governing a Divided Society*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, London, New York, 2012, p.229.

²¹ See for example : Meredith, M., *The State of Africa : A History of the Continent since Independence*, Free Press, London, New York, 2005, pp. 93-101; Braeckman, C., "Introduction – Congo-Belgique", *op.cit.*

²² Trefon, T., *Congo Masquerade*, Zed Books, London, New York, 2011, p. 40; Meredith, M., *The State of Africa*, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

²³ Lemarchand R., *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, Cambridge, Woodrow Wilson Press Centre, 1994, pp.47-50; Martinelli M., *The Relationship Between Track I and Track II Mediation. A Critical*

Re-examination with Special Reference to the Cases of Burundi and Sri Lanka, PhD Thesis, University of Bradford, Department of Peace Studies, 2004, unpublished;

²⁴ Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le role de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", *op.cit.*, p.297.

reinforced the division between the two ethnicities has been a bitter heritage from this period, in particular considering the events that arrived in the post-colonial era.

The relationships between the three African states and Belgium continued nevertheless after more or less short ruptures, into the post-colonial era²⁵.

A TRANSFORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE BELGIAN SITUATION

Immediately after the independence of its former colonies, Belgium as a state found itself in a new position. In terms of environmental characteristics - one of the factors explored in the transformative perspective - Belgium had lost an important symbol of power and influence with the decolonization. Unlike, however, some other former colonial powers, Belgium had avoided involvement in any large scale independence war²⁶. The external environment at the time of the African decolonization movements was marked by Cold War strategies and Belgium, like most other Western countries, had an interest in keeping its former African colonies on the 'right' side of the bipolar conflict²⁷. In addition, Belgium's need to 'keep a foot in Africa' to maintain the

²⁵ For the problematic independence process with the Congo, See for example: Van Reybrouck, D., *Congo – A History*, De Bezige Bij, 2010; Meredith, M., *The State of Africa*, *op.cit.*; Versaille, A. (ed.), *Congo 1960: Echech d'une décolonisation*, GRIP, Brussels, 2010.

²⁶ Here I do not count the troubles surrounding the Congolese independence as a major independence war, but this could of course be discussed.

²⁷ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

expertise acquired during its years as a colonial power, started the moment the decolonization process was over²⁸.

At the same time as the independence movements and decolonization processes took place, the development of the European Economic Community (EEC) acquired an important place in Belgian politics and Belgium became deeply intertwined with the EEC²⁹. This relationship between Belgium and the European Community has become one of the most influential in Belgian political history and has had a major impact on its foreign policies towards Central Africa, especially in later years. In the 1960's, however, it had not developed sufficiently to have a direct influence on Belgium's bilateral relations abroad.

In terms of polity features³⁰, Belgium was still a centralized unitary state in the 1960's and 1970's when the first post-colonial collaborations started, although tensions between the communities existed and continued to increase. Belgium had already been accustomed to consociational practices as a result of the tensions, yet had managed to develop a solid welfare state with a generous social security system. As a consequence of the tensions, the first steps towards the deep transformation of the Belgian state structure were taken in this period³¹, but the polity features had not yet been altered, and despite some confusion with regards to the role of the Ministry of Foreign

²⁸ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine pour la Belgique?", *Studia Diplomatica*, vol.55, n°5-6, 2002, pp.199-221; Zeebroek, X., "Le paradoxe de l'expertise belge sur le Congo", *Note d'Analyse du GRIP*, 29 September 2009, Brussels, p. 3.

²⁹ Coolsaet, R., Voet, A-S., "Belgium", in Hocking, B., Spence, D., *Foreign Ministries in the European Union. Integrating Diplomats*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 62.

³⁰ Coolsaet, R., Voet, A-S., "Belgium", *op.cit.*, p. 63.

³¹ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit* p.39.

Affairs³², Belgium maintained a rather straight-forward decision process with regards to its African policies. The constitutional and structural factors did therefore not present any particular obstacle to initiating lasting collaborations with the former colonies in Africa.

Historically and institutionally, in the 1960's, Belgium had an interest in maintaining links with Central Africa and sustaining knowledge, contacts and relationships already initiated during the colonial period³³. Culture-wise, Belgium also had a great understanding of how 'it works' in Africa including a common language in French. Belgium was therefore a privileged partner already from the outset.

A. The Beginning of the Post-colonial Relationships

From the Belgian point of view, the continuation of the relationships appeared to be the most natural solution to the new situation that the independence movements had brought with them. However, depending on the relationship with the country in question, the new rules of collaboration took different lengths of time to be elaborated.

In Rwanda, the negotiations for future collaborations started immediately after independence on the 30th of June 1962. By the 13th of October the same year, a General Convention of Cooperation and Technical Assistance was signed between the two countries. The Burundian collaboration took a year to negotiate before the

³² Coolsaet, R., Voet, A-S., "Belgium", *op.cit.*, p. 63.

³³ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC: Causes and Consequences of the Reorientation, 1999-2006", *Les Cahiers du RMES*, vol.4, n°2, 2007-2008, p.59.

Convention on General Technical Cooperation was signed in July 1963³⁴. In both countries, the total sum of aid almost doubled between 1965 and 1970, showing the importance of the new relationship³⁵.

The political collaboration was complemented by similar military agreements. In October 1962 Belgium and Rwanda signed the Coopération Technique Militaire (CTM) and different sorts of missions filled this collaboration, including military officer training, medical service, military construction and commando training³⁶. Rwanda also received 174 grants for military training between 1961 and 1970, while Burundi received just a quarter of these grants during the same period, showing a clear preference for military aid to Rwanda over Burundi. The aid to Burundi is concentrated in less politically sensitive sectors, such as education, health and agriculture³⁷. One of the main reasons for this differentiation is the relationship enjoyed between Belgium and the President of Rwanda at the time, Kayibanda. Kayibanda was clearly a Belgian friend, to the extent where he put Belgian military in charge of the army at the beginning of the collaboration³⁸. In contrast, the relationship with Burundi was cold and tainted with tensions, a result of the quite radical leaders succeeding each other in Burundi³⁹. Evidence of Rwanda's 'special treatment' can be

³⁴ Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le role de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", op.cit., p.304.

³⁵ This was 5220 millions for Rwanda and 429 millions for Burundi, see Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le role de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", *Ibid.*, p.305

³⁶ Presentation of "Security Issues in Central Africa", Presentation given by High Officer, Summer University, Royal Military Academy, 4 September 2013.

³⁷ Parque, V., Reyntjens, F., "Le role de la Belgique au Rwanda et au Burundi", op.cit., p.305.

³⁸ Interview with High Officer 'Glenn', Brussels, Belgium, 23 October 2013.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

found throughout the relationship with Belgium, up until the genocide in 1994 and it earned Rwanda the nickname 'l'enfant chérie' from some observers⁴⁰.

The decolonization process in the Congo was considerably longer and was more problematic than in Rwanda and Burundi due to a number of different factors, including the assassination of Lumumba and the secession of Katanga⁴¹ which delayed collaboration considerably. Yet, in 1962, Belgium created a specific organ to channel the assistance and collaboration: L'Office de Coopération au Développement (Office of Cooperation and Development OCD). However, it did not become operational until 1963⁴², at the same time as a first military collaboration scheme was put in place under the acronym ATMB (Assistance Technique Militaire Belge). As its name reveals, this collaboration was rather one-sided, with approximately 150 military advisors completely integrated into the Congolese army (Armée Nationale Congolaise, ANC), to assist its development and functioning⁴³. In 1964, due to the Simba rebellion⁴⁴, the number of Belgians increased to 390 but only for a limited time, as new difficulties lay ahead in 1965 when Mobutu came to power through a coup⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ See for example : Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, De Boeck & Larcier, 2002, p.284.

⁴¹ See: Versaille, A. (ed.), *Congo 1960: Echech d'une décolonisation*, GRIP, Brussels, 2010.

⁴² Aristide, M., "50Ans de Coopération Belgo-Congolaise", in *Dimension*, Le journal de la Coopération Belge, May-June, n°3, 2010, p.15.

⁴³ Presentation of "Security Issues in Central Africa", Presentation given by High Officer at the Summer University, Royal Military Academy, 4 September 2013.

⁴⁴ Holm, R., L., "A Close Call in Africa", CIA Library, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art2.html>, accessed 13 November 2013.

⁴⁵ Meredith, M., *The State of Africa*, op.cit., p.294.

Pierre Harmel, Prime Minister and later Foreign Minister, attempted to ‘normalize’⁴⁶ the relations between Congo and Belgium in 1966 by initiating a cooperation policy aimed directly at the population and thereby distancing the pressure from private groups and in particular from the Mobutu regime. This strategy failed, on the one hand, because the US pushed for a close relationship with Mobutu to prevent Congo from falling to the communists, on the other hand because of the importance of the Belgian company Société Générale in both Belgium and the Congo⁴⁷.

After some turbulent years, a new military collaboration was developed in 1968 with the emphasis on collaboration rather than assistance. Now the Belgian officers were working in a separate corps, thereby putting a stop to the integration of Belgian advisors into the ANC. The new collaboration consisted mainly of training military officers in the country and military education in Belgium for Congolese soldiers⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ This idea of normalising the relationship comes up in different books and articles about Congo and Belgium and refers to a will to get out of the ‘passionate’ relationship, the former colony-colonial power link. See for example : Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., “Une ‘nouvelle’ politique Africaine”, *op.cit.*, p.202; Mughendi, N.N., “La Belgique et l’ancienne ‘Afrique belge’ : Une vision congolaise du rôle de la Belgique dans les Grands Lacs “, in Coolsaet, R., Wilde d’Estmael, T. (eds.), “La Belgique et politique étrangère”, *Studia Diplomatica* Vol.62, 2009, p.110.

⁴⁷ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, pp. 273-274 ; see also : Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*. *op.cit.*, p.230.

⁴⁸ Presentation of “Security Issues in Central Africa”, Presentation given by High Officer at the Summer University, Royal Military Academy, 4 September 2013.

B. *A Bumpy Road to the 1990's*

The following years were, with the exception of Rwanda, characterized by a series of events challenging the relationships between the former colonial power and the ex-colonies. In 1972, after the first genocide recorded in the region took place in Burundi⁴⁹ and between 100,000-200,000 Hutus were killed in a few months⁵⁰, the military cooperation with Burundi ended and did not resume until the mid-2000⁵¹. In the Congo, the crises came and went with a worrying speed. Mobutu's nationalisation efforts in 1973⁵² put a strain on the now Belgo-Zairean relations, but were back on track again before the Shaba crises in 1977-1978. The Belgians played a relatively big role, both under and after the crisis as military officers from the CTM supported the Zairean army by providing limited logistical aid to the latter. After the crisis, Belgium was called on to coordinate a recovery plan; modestly called 'Plan Mobutu', and several Belgians were again integrated into key positions in different departments and enterprises, this time however, not in the army⁵³. In 1979, the military collaboration expanded after demand from Mobutu to prevent another Shaba crisis and to secure Europeans in the country⁵⁴. Yet, after another decade and an increasingly difficult economic situation for Zaire, the next crisis emerged in 1989 with regards to a possible debt relief. This crisis was relatively quickly resolved in July the same year

⁴⁹ Lemarchand R., "Burundi at a Crossroads", in G.M. Khadiagala (ed.), *Security Dynamics in Africa's Great Lakes Region*, Colorado, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006, pp.41-58.

⁵⁰ see Lemarchand R., *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, op.cit., p.97.

⁵¹ Internal Document "Coopération Mil avec le Burundi", consulted 14 November 2013.

⁵² Meredith, M., *The State of Africa*, op.cit., pp.297-298.

⁵³ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, op.cit.,p.275.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.276.

through the signature of the Rabat accords, but the major crisis was only a few months away⁵⁵.

The road to a new and sustainable relationship was thus bumpy to say the least, and in 1990 it came to a clear stop when, in Lubumbashi, Zairean presidential troops intervened during a student demonstration, killing at least one person⁵⁶. Due to a human rights clause in the newly signed accords, Belgium was particularly firm with regards to the events in Lubumbashi and demanded an international inquiry while suspending the collaborations and freezing the loans to Zaire. As a response, Mobutu put an end to all cooperation and development activities with Belgium including the military collaboration⁵⁷.

THE 1990S: A DARK DECADE FOR BELGIUM AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Belgium in 1990 was in a very different situation from that of just 30 years earlier. Starting with the environmental characteristics, the end of the Cold War had accelerated the movements for human rights and democratisation. In the early 1990's this became apparent in Western states' foreign policies, to which Belgium was no

⁵⁵ Roosens, C., "Crises de Regime au Zaire et au Rwanda", in Franck, C., Roosens, C., de Wilde d'Estmael, T., *Aux Tournants de l'Histoire*, De Boeck-Wesmael, Brussels, 1993, p.67.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁵⁷ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, De Boeck & Larcier, 2002, p.278; Roosens, C., "Crises de Regime au Zaire et au Rwanda", *op.cit.*, p.72.

exception⁵⁸. Closely linked with these values, the new concept ‘good governance’⁵⁹ became popular in different sorts of agreement between donors and receiving states, in particular the southern African states which up till this moment had been mainly used as tools by the major powers in the bipolar Cold War without any regard for their internal situations⁶⁰.

Belgium’s insistence on the human rights clause in the Belgo-Zairean accords fits thus perfectly into the international context at the time, although the firmness with which it was maintained appeared atypical for Belgium. This decisiveness may however be traced back to the political-administrative constellations which changed Belgium’s internal landscape quite radically.

A major transformation had taken place in Belgium with regards to its polity features and was about to be made concrete with a state reform. After years of tensions and consociational practices, Belgium was now on the verge of becoming a federal state. Unlike to many other federal states where the federal unit is a way of bringing together existing entities, in Belgium it had been a devolution process resulting in a federal option to try to hold together the state. The basic practices of this federal state are power sharing between the elites of the segments and segmental autonomy⁶¹. As a consociational democracy which has gradually transformed into a ‘depoliticized’

⁵⁸ See for example : Willame, J-C., “La Politique étrangère de la Belgique”, in Delwitt, P., De Waele, J-M., Magnette, P., Gouverner la Belgique, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1999, p.266 ;

⁵⁹ World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa. From crisis to sustainable development. A long term perspective*, Washington, D.C. 1989.

⁶⁰ Bayart, J-F, ”Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion”, *African Affairs*, 2000, vol.99, n°395 p.228

⁶¹ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, pp.6,11.

democracy with a blatant lack of alternation in power⁶² Belgian politics is of a highly complex nature, with a myriad of different parties divided, not only by the left-right scale, but also by the language issue.

The language divide is obviously also linked to cultural traditions and style of governance and with regards to Belgium's policies in Africa this becomes another factor of division⁶³. Traditionally, while the Flemish speaking part is reluctant to maintaining an active relationship with the former colonies, the French speaking part is more interventionist with a desire to sustain Belgian influence in the African region⁶⁴. The division is also visible on the right-left scale, here with the socialist adopting a stance of non-intervention while the liberals are more proactive and interventionists. To caricaturize the divisions' one might say that the politicians most likely to push for an active engagement in the former colonies are the French-speaking liberals, while the most reluctant to maintain an interventionist policy are the Flemish-speaking socialists⁶⁵. This simplification should of course be understood as just that – a simplification - which means that exceptions do exist.

⁶² Ibid., p.10.

⁶³ See for example : Willame, J-C., “La Politique étrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*, p.270.

⁶⁴ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., “Une ‘nouvelle’ politique Africaine”, *op.cit.*, p.201; See also the different individual positions from politicians across the language divide in Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. LXII, special number, 2009, pp.133-155.

⁶⁵ Kelly, C., “Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC”, *op.cit.*, p.72; see also: Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., “Une ‘nouvelle’ politique Africaine” *op.cit.*, and Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*

In 1991 the Flemish Socialists came to power and the focus was clearly put on human rights and democracy in Africa, in line with international trends at the time⁶⁶. The policies conducted in the region also reflected the increasing distance between Belgium and Congo, as Belgium only worked through NGOs without any direct bilateral cooperation⁶⁷. The distance went on to increase even more only a few years later, at the occurrence of a tragic event, which had major implications for international relations in general and Central Africa in particular.

A. *The Rwandan Failure*

The attack from the Rwandan Patriotic Front on Rwanda in October 1990 was the result of years of exclusion and opposition of Tutsis. Belgium, which up until that moment had an excellent relationship with the Hutu president Habyarimana was now faced with whether it should continue to support the regime or not. The Belgian response was divided. On the one hand, the prime minister decided to send two diplomatic missions to the region, trying to prompt a political dialogue between the rebels and the government⁶⁸, a suggestion which showed that Belgium was no longer an unconditional supporter of the Habyarimana regime. On the other hand, Belgium also accelerated the delivery of ammunition to the government, a sign in the opposite direction⁶⁹. A small humanitarian military mission was also sent to evacuate Belgians. Yet, the regional meetings initiated by Belgium among others, and which finally

⁶⁶ Willame, J-C., “La Politique étrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*, p.266.

⁶⁷ Aristide, M., “50Ans de Coopération Belgo-Congolaise”, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.285.

⁶⁹ Roosens, C., “Crises de Regime au Zaïre et au Rwanda”, *op.cit.*, p.80.

resulted in the Arusha agreements in 1993, were not enough to prevent the genocide in 1994⁷⁰.

The decisions taken by the Belgian government in the following events, from the deployment of only 370 military troops with a maximum of 450 after a UN demand for 800 troops to the UN mission MINUAR⁷¹, to the withdrawal of all military personnel after the murder of ten of the Belgian paracommandos, were a display of the hesitant position Belgium occupied with regards to Central Africa. It was also an almost scholarly example of how political and military objectives sometimes clash, with, in this case, a particularly tragic outcome.

At the demand of the UN which was reinforced by both Rwandan parties to the crisis, Belgium was asked to provide 800 military troops and thereby constitute the backbone of the new UN force in Rwanda. Belgium, which, on the one hand felt a responsibility for the situation, given its colonial past in the country and therefore wanted to provide aid and expertise, was on the other hand reluctant to provide that many troops as it did not want to come across as too interventionist in a former colony. The result was to send just over half of the demanded troop contribution⁷². The events which followed are well-known and better explained elsewhere⁷³; suffice to say that ten Belgian paracommandos were killed on the 7th of April by Rwandan soldiers⁷⁴. Internally, Belgium

⁷⁰ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.285.

⁷¹ See Commission d'enquête parlementaire concernant les événements du Rwanda, paragraphe 3.2.1, 1-611/7, December 7, 1997.

⁷² Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*. *op.cit.*, p.231.

⁷³ See for example the very detailed rapport by the Commission of inquiry: Commission d'enquête parlementaire concernant les événements du Rwanda, 1-611/7, December 7, 1997.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

was in a chaotic situation where political reasoning came into confrontation with military objectives. The political decision to withdraw the whole Belgian contingent in the aftermath of the commandos' deaths and the pressure which was put on other contributing states to do the same⁷⁵ was one of those decisions which was bound to be criticized not just internally but internationally. The reason for this was evident. In the wake of the withdrawal of the Belgian troops, MINUAR was reduced to only 5 % of its original size and was thus completely powerless in face of the massacres that took place. Later reports have also pointed out that it would have been enough with only 400 troops to stop the genocide⁷⁶, putting an extra weight on what has been called the "path of shame", for Belgium, notwithstanding the internal criticism for the death of the ten Belgian officers⁷⁷.

B. *Africa for Africans*

The result of the Rwanda fiasco was a deeper and wider distance between Belgium and Central Africa. For obvious reasons, all military cooperation with Rwanda ended in 1994. In addition, a Senate investigation in 1997 decided that Belgium should no longer participate militarily in peacekeeping or peace-enforcement missions in the former colonies⁷⁸, adding another factor of distance between the countries. Due to the events in Zaire and Rwanda, Belgium was now forced to re-examine its Africa policies to decide which direction it should take.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Willame, J-C., "La Politique étrangère de la Belgique", *op.cit.*, p.268.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.287.

⁷⁸ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*, *op.cit.*, p.232 ; Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine", *op.cit.*, p.219.

Firstly, it became clear that Belgium now favoured a multilateral approach, by trying to mobilize the international community behind the initiative to a regional refugee conference, held in Bujumbura. Secondly, the first detailed note on Africa from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1983 came out in 1995⁷⁹ and was quickly renamed “l’Afrique aux Africains”, after the popular international slogan at the time: African solutions to African problems, giving an indication of the decreasing interest for the region of Central Africa⁸⁰. It should also be noted that it was during this time that the European Union started advocating the concept of African Ownership, a regionalized version of the increasingly popular notion of local ownership⁸¹, which fits well into the Belgian internal politics at the time. In addition, in 1997, much of Belgium’s interest for Central Africa was concentrated on the Senate commission’s inquiry into the events in Rwanda three years earlier which left Belgium’s Africa policies stuck in the past.

The change came in 1999 with a new government who was keen to put the past behind and more importantly, regain Belgium’s place on the international arena as the expert of Central Africa.

⁷⁹ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.289.

⁸⁰ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., “Une ‘nouvelle’ politique Africaine“, *op.cit.*, p. 203.

⁸¹ See for example : Rayroux, A., Wilén, A., "Resisting Ownership: The Paralysis of EU Peacebuilding in the DR Congo", *African Security*, forthcoming, 2014.

CHAPTER III

YOU CAN CHECK OUT ANY TIME YOU LIKE BUT YOU CAN NEVER LEAVE:

A NEW START IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Most books about Belgian politics in Africa talk about Louis Michel's arrival on the political arena and his passionate and personal interest for Central Africa as a reignition for Belgium's relationship with the former colonies. The arrival in the government of the 'rainbow coalition' implied that liberals were now in charge of the important posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the Defence Ministry was headed by the socialist Flahaut⁸². From a political-administrative perspective, the timing was thus right to switch to a more interventionist policy, given that a completely new coalition formula was tried out between liberals, socialists and greens⁸³. The socialist Defence Minister was in addition an exception to the general divisions between the parties, and was in favour of an active presence in Africa⁸⁴. In 1999 Belgium as a polity, was still enjoying increased governmental stability after the

⁸² Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.73.

⁸³ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*. *op.cit.*, p.14.

⁸⁴ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.81.

reform in 1993, although this was a short-lived phenomenon: in 2004 tensions across the language divide were already starting to build up again⁸⁵. However, in 1999 this was still an unknown development and the new governing coalition aimed to formulate a long-term, coherent foreign policy for Africa. Belgium also introduced federal administration reforms, gathered under the name “Copernicus”⁸⁶, which mainly were influenced by the New Public Management philosophy, inspired by economic thinking in the shape of managerial reasoning and market mentality⁸⁷.

On an international level, the EU gained an enormous importance in general and in particular for Belgium, which was one of the strongest driving forces for a united Europe. The EU became therefore a crucial means of influence for Belgium, especially during the second half of 2001 when Belgium held the presidency of the EU Council⁸⁸. The disappearance of two of the most important characters of the past relationship, King Baudouin and President Mobutu was also a prerequisite for the new start⁸⁹. The political-administrative history and the national polity features created

⁸⁵ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, pp.1,15.

⁸⁶ Joris, G., De Visscher, C., Montuelle, C., “Federal Public Administration Reform in Belgium: New Public Management under Deconstruction”, Paper presented at the AFSP Congrès, 2009, p.1,3.

⁸⁷ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., “Models of governance and a transformative perspective on administrative reforms”, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁸ Kelly, C., “Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC”, *op.cit.*; Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.78.

⁸⁹ Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*, p.138.

therefore opportunities and space for Belgian political leaders to influence the direction of the foreign policy in the late 1990's⁹⁰.

There were several indications that the Belgo-African relationship was beginning a new era. Firstly Louis Michel made a number of speeches where he literally expressed his wish for Belgium to “reprenne pied en Afrique centrale”⁹¹ and where the aim of an active presence in Central Africa was made explicit⁹². Secondly, Belgium began developing the relationship through both bilateral and multilateral channels. The “troika”, comprising the US, France and Belgium in the beginning of the 1990's was already a sign of this⁹³. From 1999 onwards, it was however the EU, which was to be the foremost multilateral outlet, used by Belgium to promote its African relationships. This was already evident in 2001 when the EU Council asked Belgium, president at the time, to develop a European policy for Central Africa⁹⁴. In addition, Belgium ensured that greater involvement of the EU in the Great Lakes area was included as one of the sixteen priorities before its EU Council presidency in 2001⁹⁵. Thirdly, the Belgian government adopted a new, moral attitude, where recognition of past failures

⁹⁰ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., “Introduction – Theoretical Approach and Research Questions”, *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁹¹ Quoted in Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., “Une ‘nouvelle’ politique Africaine”, *op.cit.*, p.204, translation by author: *regain a foothold in Central Africa*.

⁹² The direction is however characterized by some critics as ‘untimely interventionism’, see for example: Bucyalimwe, M., “Le ‘Noko’ vu par son ‘neveu’. Une vue Congolaise sur les relations Belgo-Congolaises. Commentaires sur l’article de Jean-Claude Willame”, in Marysse, S., Reyntjens, F., Vandeginste, S., (eds.) *L’Afrique des Grands Lac, Annuaire 2008-2009*, L’Harmattan, Paris, p.359.

⁹³ Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, pp.283,293.

⁹⁴ Kelly, C., “Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC” *op.cit.*; Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.292.

⁹⁵ De Winter, L., Türsan, “Belgian Presidency 2001”, *Notre Europe*, Research and Policy Paper n°13, June 2001, p.9

and symbolic excuses were part of the fresh start with the African countries⁹⁶. Prime Minister Verhofstadt's speech in Kigali in 2000, where he publicly asked for forgiveness for the withdrawal of the Belgian paracommandos during the genocide⁹⁷, was a crucial step in this new direction, and in line with the international norms that were gaining weight at the time⁹⁸. Fourthly, in 1999, a new note on Belgium's Foreign Policy was published, and this time, Belgium's Africa policies represented one of five chapters, marking the importance given to the reintroduction of Africa to Belgian politics⁹⁹.

A. A Transitional Period: Belgium as a Peace-Maker

The period between 1999 and 2002 was a transitional period in Belgium foreign policy but also in Congo's conflict. The two were deeply intertwined as Belgium attempted to get its foot back into Africa. It was by shouldering the role as a discreet peace-maker that Belgium slowly stepped back into Central Africa. Belgium was involved in the three cease-fire and peace accords in Congo: the Lusaka Accords in 1999, the Pretoria Agreement in 2002 and the Sun-City Agreement/The Global and All Inclusive Agreement in 2003¹⁰⁰. In addition, a Special Envoy, Reginald Moreels, was nominated for Humanitarian Affairs and indirectly supposed to push the peace process in the

⁹⁶ Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., "Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique", *op.cit.*.

⁹⁷ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine" *op.cit.*, p.216.

⁹⁸ Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., "Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique", *op.cit.*, p.133.

⁹⁹ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine", *op.cit.*, p.205.

¹⁰⁰ See for example: Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p. 77; Coolsaet, R., *La Politique Extérieure de la Belgique*, *op.cit.*, p.295.

Congo in the right direction¹⁰¹. Belgium also made use of its membership in the EU and the UN to put pressure on the parties in the conflict. Accompanying its efforts in the peace process, a number of high profile visits to the region displayed the new governing coalition's will to reinvest in its relationship with Central Africa. Yet, despite official excuses and a Belgian neutral stance, Rwanda's role in the Congolese conflict(s), complicated the Belgo-Rwandan relationship¹⁰². This situation continues to perturb the relations between the two countries at the time of writing (2013).

The road to a new relationship with the African region, was therefore not as smooth as Louis Michel might have wanted, not least because individuals, such as himself, played major roles in the development of this relationship. One of the first diplomatic bumps on the road to reengagement was for example caused by remarks by the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel de Gucht when, in 2004, he criticized the corruption of the Congolese leaders in the transitional government and threatened to disengage¹⁰³. This incident, although quickly brushed aside, gives an indication of the degree to which individual Ministers influence the relationships with Central Africa.

Meanwhile in Burundi, Belgium had during the last half of the 1990's, already been involved in the regional peace talks leading up to the Arusha Accords in 2000. Belgium was at first been critical of the regional sanctions against the Buyoya regime, which had taken the governmental seat after the coup d'état in 1996. Yet, Louis

¹⁰¹ Braeckman, C., Kiesel, V., "Reginald est de retour:rencontre avec le nouveau special du ministre des Affaires étrangères", *Le Soir*, 27 December, 2000.

¹⁰² Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine pour la Belgique?", *op.cit.*, p.219; For a different view on the neutrality of Belgium, see also Bucyalimwe, M., "Le 'Noko' vu par son 'neveu'. Une vue Congolaise", *op.cit.*, p.360.

¹⁰³ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.75.

Michel was in place for the negotiations leading up to the Arusha Accords in 2000, in line with the new, visible African policy of Belgium as a peace-maker¹⁰⁴.

Belgium's new activism and apparent efforts to renew the relations with Central Africa were thus evident in a number of ways. The new foreign policy, however, appeared to lack coherency and cohesion, not only because of a lack of a clear strategy, but also because of the different Ministers' desire to put their own 'mark' on the African Foreign Policy¹⁰⁵.

Defence Minister André Flahaut was one of the Ministers who openly favoured Belgium's re-involvement in Africa, although preferably under a European, multilateral structure rather than a purely national one¹⁰⁶. However, after more than a decade of no military collaboration, in 2003, Belgium signed a new, bilateral framework of cooperation: PPM (Programme de Partenariat Militaire) with the transitional government in the Congo¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ Wolpe, H., "Making Peace after Genocide: The Anatomy of the Burundian Peace Process", *United States Institute of Peace*, 2011; IRIN, "Burundi: Anti-Arusha protesters reportedly arrested", available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/13506/burundi-anti-arusha-protestors-reportedly-arrested>, accessed 09 November 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Bucyalimwe, M., "Le 'Noko' vu par son 'neveu'. Une vue Congolaise", *op.cit.*, p.362; Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., "Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique", *op.cit.*; Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine", *op.cit.*, pp.206-209.

¹⁰⁶ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.81.

¹⁰⁷ Belgian Senate, session 2008-2009, Question écrite n°4-2207 de Alain Destexhe (MR) au ministre de la Défense, *Congo-Coopération militaire-Bilan depuis 2003*, 9 January 2009.

B. An Open Window-Policy to Military Collaboration

In 2003, the Belgian political leaders consequently acquired a new instrument in the shape of a military partnership to advance its different policies in Africa. At this time it was however only in Congo that the military collaboration re-started and it took another couple of years before Belgium and Rwanda followed suit. The new military partnership (PPM) was based on the aim to support the security sector reform in each of the partner countries, as well as the development of a professional, national army which would serve the population and respects human rights. The long-term goals of the collaboration were to reinforce stability, peace and security as well as reconstruction. These objectives are considered as essential for the development and the well-being of the population¹⁰⁸. The principles guiding PPM accentuated the new, moral relationship by reinforcing the idea of a transparent partnership, based on equality. As such, it was bilaterally defined by both the partner countries and Belgium's Ministries of Defence. One of the underlying principles, following this reasoning, was therefore that support should be gradually decreased as the African partner countries integrated the trainings and educations received by their Belgian counterparts. Training and education are hence the two most important components of this new collaboration, often executed in a "Train-the-Trainers" (TTT) format, whereby Belgium trains a selected number of local trainers who subsequently train others¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁸ Internal power point presentation: 'PPM Burundi', 19 June 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Internal Document, "Engagements de la Défense au Burundi", consulted 12 November 2013; Internal power point presentation: 'PPM Burundi', 19 June 2012 ; Interview with High Military Officer 'Timmy', 25 October 2010.

The decision to re-open the door to the military collaborations in Central Africa with the signing of PPM had several motivations. Firstly, Belgium had previous experience and expertise from military collaboration with the three countries, and with the Congolese army in particular, which in part, had changed little since 1990¹¹⁰. Secondly, Belgium clearly wanted to step away from any neo-colonial connotation which might have coloured previous collaborations¹¹¹ and was therefore prone to favour non-political, technical ways of renewing the relationship in a bid to avoid striking any sensitive chords. Thirdly, Congo in 2003 was in dire need of security to stabilize the country after two wars which had created an internal chaos: and security sector reform was one of the first priorities on the peacebuilding agenda¹¹².

The first few years of this new collaboration was characterized by ad hoc projects and opportunities which some of the interviewed officers appropriately have called the ‘open window-policy’. Belgium was keen to be seen in the region and particularly in the Congo where it had already played a significant role in the negotiations of the peace accords. From 2003 onwards the military collaboration was supposed to back up and support this first re-engagement with a visible presence. During the first year, a multiple number of short-term ad hoc projects were therefore initiated under the banner of PPM, including citizenship education, AIDS prevention, and support to the

¹¹⁰ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹¹¹ See for example: Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

¹¹² Unfortunately, this is still the case, ten years later, see for example: “The Democratic Republic of Congo: Taking a Stand on Security Sector Reform”, Report by 13 NGOs, April, 2012, available at: <http://www.soros.org/sites/default/files/drc-ssr-report-20120416-1.pdf>

former Force Publique combatants¹¹³. The choice of such diverse and traditionally non-military projects was, according to the Defence Minister at the time, André Flahaut, deliberate: “I gave priority to humanitarian missions/.../to make the army a democratic, transparent and open instrument, always useful for the population”¹¹⁴.

Yet, the open-window formula: “more is more”, together with the fact that the Belgian government, not wishing to appear too intrusive, was reluctant to rigorously follow-up projects, was an unfortunate combination as the Defence Ministry was about to learn the hard way.

C. Learning the Lessons the Hard Way: Brigade Training in the Congo

The training of the first integrated brigade was one of the first projects to take place under the newly installed military collaboration¹¹⁵. After the joint development between Belgian and Congolese staff of a strategic plan for the FARDC (Armed Forces of the DRC) at the end of 2003 and a series of workshops sponsored by Belgium, the training by the Belgians started in February 2004 in Kisangani¹¹⁶. The tactical training took place between February and June, while an operational

¹¹³ Laureys, P., “PPM: l’aventure belgo-congolaise”, *Revue Militaire Belge*, n°4, 2012, p.74

¹¹⁴ Flahaut, A., “Question de Choix”, 17 April 2008, André Flahaut’s blog, available at : www.blogflahaut.com, accessed 5 November 2013.

¹¹⁵ ICG, “Security Sector Reform in the Congo”, *Africa Report* n°104, 13 February 2006, p.17.

¹¹⁶ Internal Document, Ministry of Defense, consulted 5 November 2013 ; ICG, “Security Sector Reform in the Congo”, *op.cit.*, pp.16-17.

evaluation was scheduled in November and December in Bunia the same year¹¹⁷. The project, though one of the largest Belgian military efforts developed in Central Africa after independence, was deliberately held out of the media's spotlight for two reasons: Firstly the battalion deployed to the Congo was the same battalion that had lost the 10 paracommandos in Rwanda only ten years earlier and this was still a politically sensitive subject. Secondly it was not a mission for which the Belgian military was trained, as one military officer stated: "We are trained to go to war, not to train other brigades"¹¹⁸.

Yet, the training of the brigade, operation "Avenir"¹¹⁹ was a large enterprise for the Belgian defence. Not only were some 200 troops deployed to Congo¹²⁰, but Belgium also agreed to give or lend out logistics, material and equipment for the training making it such an expensive project that it was impossible to repeat¹²¹. This was, according to the officers taking part of the operation, almost a necessity, as the Congolese authorities faced both financial and infrastructural problems in furnishing logistics. They face these problems even today (2013), as Belgian officers point out:

¹¹⁷ Internal Document, "PPM-RDC", Ministry of Defense, consulted 5 November 2013.

¹¹⁸ Interview with High Officer 'Eden', Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹¹⁹ 'Avenir' translates to 'Future' in French.

¹²⁰ Interview with High Officer 'Eden', Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹²¹ Convention entre le Royaume de Belgique et La Republique Democratique du Congo Relative au soutien logistique et technique Belge fourni dans le cadre des activités de formation au profit de la nouvelle armée intégrée et restructurée de la Republique du Congo (from here on called PPM Convention), 8 February 2004, Annex A ; Belga Press Review, "Les nombreux efforts belges en faveur de l'armée congolaise", 28 November 2013.

“the big problem for the Congolese Army is that they are not well fed, nor well paid¹²²”.

The actual training in the field for “Avenir” went well, although the officers recall that they had to be the “institutional motor for everything”¹²³, and that “they [the Congolese soldiers] ask to have someone to direct them, otherwise they don’t do anything”¹²⁴. These were common remarks among Belgian military staff who nevertheless recognized that overall, Congolese soldiers had enormous will-power and courage continuing to work hard in spite of the fact they had not been fed or paid for weeks. In addition to this, most Congolese soldiers were accompanied by their families - a habit which is common in the Congo - meaning that they had to take care of their private life at the same time as their professional training took place which added another level of difficulty to their training¹²⁵. Cultural differences were also noted in how the Congolese disciplined their soldiers with physical punishment. “I saw beatings with a baton that I would not have survived, that was difficult./.../ but I prefer sanctions with the baton rather than rapes and pillages, if I can say it like that”¹²⁶.

Yet, the Belgian officers did not think that this cultural difference was a major problem: “In six weeks, we can’t transform everything/.../we try to show a certain

¹²² Interview with High Officer ‘Kevin’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²³ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²⁴ Interview with High Officer ‘Kevin’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²⁵ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²⁶ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

behaviour, but we don't come with the American approach with a manual that everyone has to follow, it has no bearing afterwards”¹²⁷.

Most of the Belgian military officers who went back to Belgium at the end of the ‘Avenir’ project also said they were satisfied with the result and politically, the importance of having trained the very first integrated brigade was symbolic.

A Short-lived Success

However, the success was to be short-lived, as only a few months later when some of the Belgian Military staff went back for an evaluation in Bunia, the brigade was dissolved and the situation was chaotic:

“It was worse than a refugee camp. One battalion was ok, but the other two were a catastrophe”¹²⁸.

The vehicle colon that had left Kisangani four months earlier had not yet arrived, and the Belgians had to use their C-130 to transport all the material from Kisangani¹²⁹. In addition, the first brigade were rumoured to have raped and pillaged villages on the way: “they had raped, stolen etc. and we were not very proud, obviously”¹³⁰. The same

¹²⁷ Interview with High Officer ‘Kevin’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²⁸ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹²⁹ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹³⁰ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011 ; For human rights violations by the 1st integrated brigade, see also: Wikileaks, cable id :07KINSHASA452 “Congolese Military Proposes Redeployment, Renaming Of Integrated Brigades”, available at:

brigade was also later, in 2005, involved in a massacre south of Bunia, as another officer recalls: “I discovered a mass grave/.../ and it is [sic] proven that soldiers from the first brigade are involved in the massacre”¹³¹.

A Congolese officer who has been trained by the Belgians comment on the events:

“You must not think that the brigades are disciplined just because they have been educated by the Belgians. No Belgian soldier comes with us in operation. None. In Congo, you often say that the defeat is orphan but the victory has many fathers...”¹³².

This lack of coaching during operations and follow-up in general is also identified by the officers interviewed as the reason for the failure:

“You know, if a football team is not successful in a match, it is not the players who will be exposed in the media, it is the trainer. We knew that we had to follow-up on the mission to see what happened”¹³³.

The Belgian military staff points to the unwillingness of the Minister of Defence to follow-up the brigade training for fear of appearing too intrusive: “the minister at the

<http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=07KINSHASA452>, accessed 10 October 2013.

¹³¹ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹³² Interview with High Congolese Officer, Brussels, Belgium, 25 February 2011.

¹³³ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

time wanted to do it slowly; it had been ages since Belgian military had put a foot in the Congo”¹³⁴.

Meanwhile the military collaboration was also extended to Belgium, where a “train-the-trainers” (TTT) project was set up in Elsenborn whereby 250 Congolese soldiers were to be trained in the fall of 2004¹³⁵. The project resulted in 16 Congolese instructors deserting and disappearing in Belgium before the end of the course, putting an abrupt end to TTT in Belgium¹³⁶.

In spite of these two, less successful projects, the Ministry of Defence continued with the plan for the next mission without significantly changing the framework and the follow-up structures. What did change was the number of troops deployed for the next project: training the third integrated brigade in Kamina together with the South Africans in 2005¹³⁷. Instead of having 70 instructors per battalion as was the case for the first integrated brigade training, this time, there was only one instructor per battalion because of budget restraints¹³⁸. Collaboration with the South Africans was not optimal either, as an officer stated:

¹³⁴ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

¹³⁵ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013.

¹³⁶ Digitalcongo, “André Flahaut, ministre belge de la Défense porteur d’un plan pour l’intégration de l’armée”, 29 November 2004, available at: <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/22618>, accessed 8 November 2013; Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹³⁷ Internal Document, “PPM-RDC”, Ministry of Defense, consulted 5 November 2013; ICG, “Security Sector Reform in the Congo”, *op.cit.*, p.17; Belga Press Review, “L’Afrique du sud demanderesse d’un accord trilatéral sur l’armée congolaise”, 3 November, 2010.

¹³⁸ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

“The cooperation with South Africa was not ideal. The South African instructors waited too long before starting – you can’t wait until everything is perfect and all the conditions are there before starting”¹³⁹.

The outcome of this project was yet again a disappointment as the brigade dissolved rapidly after the Belgian and South African troops left¹⁴⁰.

Although the lack of follow-up initiatives and coaching surely played a major role in the negative outcomes of the brigade training, the larger international context should not be left out of the explanation. In 2004 and 2005, the Congo had just come out of a seven-year regional war that had torn the country apart. In addition, the former Congolese army had been neglected by the previous President Mobutu for more than 30 years, and was therefore highly dysfunctional at the end of the war¹⁴¹. Marrying the leftovers of this army with the new rebels was consequently not an easy task, in particular as the transitional government in place had problems of their own and was unwilling to play the coordinating role it was supposed to.

After these first negative experiences, the Belgian Minister of Defence decided to put a halt to the larger missions in order to conduct an evaluation before sending in more troops, but also because training the first brigade had cost over seven millions euros,

¹³⁹ Interview with High Officer ‘Jan’, Kinshasa, DRC, 24 June 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Interview by Email with High Officer ‘Jelle’, Brussels, Belgium 10 November 2011.

¹⁴¹ Clément, C., “Security Sector Reform in the DRC: Forward to the Past”, in H. Born and B. Schnabel (eds.), *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments* (pp. 89-117), 2009 Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

which meant that a repetition of the same was financially impossible¹⁴². Interestingly, when a question about the results of the military collaboration in the Congo was posed in the Belgian Senate, the response made no mention of the dissolution of the trained brigades or of the cost of the training¹⁴³. Meanwhile, however, military collaboration with Burundi started to gain grounds, a subject explored in the next chapter.

¹⁴² Belga Press Review, “Les nombreux efforts belges en faveur de l’armée congolaise“, 28 November 2013; Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

¹⁴³ Senat Question n°4-2207, “Congo-Coopération militaire – Bilan depuis 2003”, 8 January 2009.

CHAPTER IV

MILITARY COLLABORATION IN CENTRAL AFRICA ON NEW TERMS

Belgium started to revise its ‘open-window policy’ in order to become more streamlined and coherent following the earlier and less successful experiences of military collaboration in the Congo in 2004-2005. On a political administrative level, the leading Belgian players had changed, and the new Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht was clearly did not share his predecessor’s commitment to the African region¹⁴⁴. Yet, both Flahaut who remained Minister of Defence and the new Minister of Cooperation and Development: Armand de Decker, counterbalanced De Gucht’s influence, and Central Africa remained high on the Belgian Foreign Policy agenda despite an openly tense relationship between the Ministers¹⁴⁵. In terms of political

¹⁴⁴ See for example, Belga Press Review, “La Belgique et la RDC relancent leur coopération militaire”, 16 June 2009.

¹⁴⁵ See for example, Flahaut’s comments about De Gucht in Colette Braeckman’s interview : “Flahaut défend son engagement au Congo”, *Le Carnet de Colette Braeckman*, 29 October 2007, available at: <http://blog.lesoir.be/colette-braeckman/2007/10/29/flahaut-defend-son-engagement-au-congo/>, accessed 12 November 2013; Armand De Decker’s interview after De Gucht’s less diplomatic comments about the Congolese government in: “Congo: Les Angoisses d’Armand De Decker”, *Le Carnet de Colette Braeckman*, 29 October 2008, available at:

entity, Belgium was now enjoying the calm before the storm that broke out in 2007, but so far Foreign Policy continued to focus on Central Africa¹⁴⁶. In Burundi, Belgium had, just as it had in the Congo, been keen to play a role in the peace process, demonstrating its new commitment to the region. For different reasons that the next section will examine more closely, the start of the new military collaboration in Burundi was smoother than in the Congo.

BACK TO BURUNDI - FOCUS ON TRAINING

In March 2005, just after the population in Burundi had approved a new constitution and a few months before the first democratic elections after the conflict, the first official sign of a future military collaboration between Burundi and Belgium was seen in a declaration of intentions between the two Ministries of Defence¹⁴⁷. Nine months later, the actual PPM framework agreement was born and Belgian military was officially back in Burundi. The framework included three components: training/education, exchange of expertise and common training activities, although focus was clearly set on first component: training and education¹⁴⁸. It is also within this component that the first major project took place: the harmonization of military staff. The project consisted of getting all soldiers, independently of their background

<http://blog.lesoir.be/colette-braeckman/2008/10/29/congo-les-angoisses-darmand-de-decker/>, accessed 12 November 2013; Bucyalimwe, M., “Le ‘Noko’ vu par son ‘neveu’. Une vue Congolaise”, *op.cit.*, p.362.

¹⁴⁶ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.43.

¹⁴⁷ Internal Document “Activités PPM Burundi-Historique”, consulted 13 November 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Internal Document “Coopération Mil avec le Burundi”, consulted 14 November 2013.

(former rebels, or government forces), to the same basic level, thereby streamlining the competences within the army. At first, the Belgians only trained former rebels who integrated into the army, but with time, the training expanded to include officers from the regular army. This means that former combatants from the CNDD-FDD (the now ruling party), the regular army (ex-Forces Armées Burundais), and more recently, the combatants pertaining to the FNL (National Forces of Liberation), have all been trained in tactics and technique by Belgian instructors¹⁴⁹.

After the success of the first year of collaboration, in 2007 the agreement was expanded to include a number of smaller projects such as an audit of the general staff of the Burundian Defence (FDN: Forces Défense National), and a resource-demanding construction of a centre for mothers and children in the East of the country in Ruyigi. The Royal Military Academy in Belgium also welcomed Burundian trainees to take part in different sorts of training cycles, just as they did with the Congolese trainees¹⁵⁰. This broadened collaboration might also be the reason why the 2007 budget was almost six times higher than that of 2006, totalling 1,173,000 euros compared with 202.000 euros in 2006¹⁵¹. It should however be seen together with the complete lack of budget in 2008 as the PPM was paused because of the fighting that erupted between

¹⁴⁹ Internal Document, “Engagements de la Défense au Burundi”, consulted 13 November 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Internal Document “Activités PPM Burundi-Historique”, consulted 13 November 2013; Internal Document, “Engagements de la Défense au Burundi”, consulted 13 November 2013.

¹⁵¹ Internal Document “Historique des activités PPM BDI”, consulted 14 November 2013.

the rebel group FNL and the government. The collaboration resumed in 2009 when the security situation had stabilized¹⁵².

The start of the new military collaboration in Burundi went, in comparison with the Congo, relatively smoothly and was considered to be a success by both local and Belgian observers. In an interview with the Burundian Minister of Defence, he described the harmonization of the staff as the soldiers 'living in symbiosis' after the Belgian training¹⁵³.

A. Why it worked in Burundi...

There are both contextual and individual reasons for this efficient start. Firstly, Burundi is a landlocked country that is about ninety times smaller than the Congo with almost no natural resources. This lack of natural richness also means that Burundi attracts far fewer international actors and donors than the Congo. Although the lack of success in the Congo was not directly a consequence of the many different bilateral partners, it is clear that the fact that the Congolese government could pick and choose among a number of donors had implications in its handling of the trained brigades. If a brigade dissolved, a new brigade could be trained by another donor, and so on¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵² Interview via Email with Junior Officer 'Axel,' 14 November 2013.

¹⁵³ *Interview with the Burundian Minister of Defence, Pontien Gaciyubwenge, Bujumbura, Burundi, 8 March 2013.

¹⁵⁴ See for example, on how the Congolese government has duplicated donor efforts : "it is easier for them [Congolese authorities] to obtain the same thing thirty-six times if there is no coordination, Interview with High Officer 'Thomas', EUSEC, Kinshasa, DRC, 20 June 2011 ; Rayroux, A., Wilén, N., "Resisting Ownership", *op.cit.*.

A second reason relates to the type and size of the project undertaken. While in the Congo, Belgium aimed, training the very first integrated brigade, which represented an important investment in terms of logistics, budget and personnel; in Burundi, the main project of harmonizing the staff only demanded seven Belgian instructors in place with no logistics costs paid for the Burundian staff¹⁵⁵. The chances of success were obviously higher with a smaller project where the need for follow-up checks or evaluations was less crucial.

From a larger perspective, the entrance of a new political player in Burundi after the elections was also a contributing factor to the success of the collaboration. In 2006, when the first PPM agreement was signed, there had not yet been elections in Burundi. However, only half a year later the new government, headed by the CNDD-FDD, won a landslide election and was keen to reassert its sovereignty and independence by ousting the UN mission in the country, ONUB¹⁵⁶. The new government had thus made clear that it preferred bilateral relations with countries that were ready to treat it like a sovereign partner, a description which fitted Belgium's new military collaboration well. The fact that Belgium had historical experience and shared the French language made it a privileged partner for Burundi at the time.

Collaboration in Burundi also had the advantage of a three decade-long break before the new start, which meant that the two countries did not share a tumultuous history of previous cooperation which had characterized the relations between the Congo and

¹⁵⁵ Internal Document "Historique des activités PPM BDI", consulted 14 November 2013.

¹⁵⁶ See for example, Wilén, N., *Justifying Interventions in Africa : (De)Stabilizing Sovereignty in Liberia, Burundi, and the Congo*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, New York, 2012.

Belgium¹⁵⁷. This made the new Belgo-Burundian relationship more of a ‘fresh start’. The relationship was slightly less fragile than its Belgo-Congolese equivalent.

B. *Missing an Opportunity?*

Yet, despite the early success, the Burundian PPM has remained more or less the same size to this day with an average of three to four projects per year, centred on Train-the-Trainers or the follow-up programme Coach-the-Trainers (CTT). The training has evolved over the years to cover not only technique and tactics but also management and peace support operations courses. The latter is a step towards preparing the Burundian troops for their deployment to AMISOM, the African Union Mission in Somalia, where the Burundian troops constitute the lion’s share of the personnel¹⁵⁸.

Reasons for Belgium’s limited investment in Burundi can be found, as discussed earlier, in the size of the country and the fact that the security situation has greatly improved over the last few years (in particular in comparison with the Congo).

However, this has not prevented other donor countries from investing heavily in Burundi. The Netherlands, a country, which has no prior history with Burundi, concluded an 8-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Security Sector reform in 2009¹⁵⁹. The Dutch have thus taken on a large and very visible role with

¹⁵⁷ See for example, Roosens, C., “Crises de Regime au Zaire et au Rwanda”, *op.cit.*

¹⁵⁸ Internal Document “Coopération Mil avec le Burundi”, consulted 14 November 2013; BBC News, “Burundi joins Somalia peace force”, 1 February 2007, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6319937.stm>, accessed 30 July, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Official Document, “Mémorandum d’entente entre le gouvernement de la République du Burundi et les Ministres des Affaires Etrangères, de la Coopération au

their comprehensive Security Sector Development plan. Officially, this has not impeded any bilateral military collaboration for Belgium, but no synchronized efforts between the two neighbouring countries have been seen either¹⁶⁰, which surely could have optimized the different projects. Instead, a drawn-out turf battle between the two bilateral partners appears to have resulted in separate, independent projects, where Belgium has clearly drawn the shorter straw¹⁶¹.

In Burundi, Belgium has also limited its cooperation to bilateral channels and sector specific projects, meaning that there are no 3D (Diplomacy, Defence and Development) plans under way, as has been the case in the Congo. This more narrow strategy implies that focus is and remains on Belgian TTT and CTT programs, at least up until 2014, which limits Belgian visibility. The Belgo-Burundian current collaboration could also benefit from a closer dialogue with the Burundian authorities regarding the importance of the different training offered, by for example encouraging the Burundian authorities to not give double workloads to the officers participating as instructors in the courses, as well as offering small remunerations for their work¹⁶². In fact, interviews made by other researchers with officers from the Burundian army show that few are even aware of Belgium and Burundi's military collaboration today (2013).

Développement et de la Défense des Pays-Bas sur le Développement du Secteur de la Sécurité", 10 April 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Dutch Diplomat and Dutch SSR Official, Bujumbura, Burundi, 6 March 2013.

¹⁶¹ Confidential report by High Military Officer, "Etude NL du SSR au Burundi", 18 January 2010.

¹⁶² Interviews with Burundian Offices, Bujumbura, Burundi, March 2013.

An additional reason to the limited investment in the Burundian PPM is the underlying philosophy of the Belgian Defence Ministry's strategy of ownership— where the aim is to phase out collaboration until the host country has integrated the training and is able to ensure its continuation alone. This is for example the case of the management and PSO courses, which will be held for the last time in 2014¹⁶³.

In Burundi, the continuation of different short-term trainings appears to function as expected although it seems to be a missed opportunity for Belgium that no larger, structural collaboration, like that of the Dutch, has been put in place. Belgium has, as a historical partner, both the expertise and the contacts to expand its collaboration although this has not been sufficiently explored. In addition, the possibilities of expanding the one-dimensional projects to include the other two D's (Diplomacy and Development) or create new projects based on the comprehensive 3D approach would enhance Belgium's visibility, which remains rather limited due on the one hand to its credo of being a discreet and efficient partner and on the other hand to its focused investment in short-term trainings. More visibility and publicity for the training given may also improve the status of the Belgian military and consequently earn more attention from the Burundian authorities for these sorts of projects. As the last PSO and Management courses are given in 2014, it remains uncertain what the future will bring for the collaboration although Belgium is looking at a redirection towards operations and tactics¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶³ Interview by Email with High Officer 'Olivier', Bujumbura, Burundi, 5 April 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Interview via Email with High Officer 'Xavier', Bujumbura, Burundi 9 December 2013.

In the Congo, a new project formula, which rapidly gained both international visibility and praise, was launched with the first Rapid Reaction battalion training in 2008¹⁶⁵.

THIRD TIME IS THE CHARM: RAPID REACTION TRAINING IN THE CONGO

The political landscapes changed radically both in Belgium and the Congo between the end of the first major military collaboration project in 2005 and the start of the second in 2008. In the Congo, the first democratic elections since the end of the conflict took place in mid 2006 and as a result the military collaboration between the two countries became based on the Congolese Ministry of Defence plan from 2007¹⁶⁶. The Congo, at least politically, acquired more stability during this time while Belgian politics were on wobbly grounds as the longest coalition formation process ever took place¹⁶⁷. An interim government lead by the former Prime Minister Verhofstadt, and consequently called Verhofstadt III, was inaugurated in December 2007 and with that, two of the most important players for the Central African collaboration changed; Minister Flahaut was replaced by the Christian Democrat, Pieter de Crème as the head of the Ministry of Defence, while the son of Louis Michel, Charles Michel, took over the seat as Minister of Cooperation and Development. Karel De Gucht remained Minister of Foreign Affairs, a position which would be marginalized in the Central

¹⁶⁵ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, Ministry of Defence, consulted 14 November 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Internal Document, “PPM-RDC”, Ministry of Defence, consulted 5 November 2013 ; Autesserre, S., *The Trouble with the Congo, Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Obviously, the negotiations during 2010 and 2011 were longer, but in 2007, this was the longest coalition process ever, see Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.43.

African relations after yet another diplomatic incident, in April 2008¹⁶⁸. However, while Belgium was shaking internally, externally it became one of the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council in 2007-2008 and its potential to exert an influence on international politics in general and on Central African politics in particular increased radically¹⁶⁹.

Yet it was not clear exactly what sort of influence Belgium wanted to exert, as the new Defence Minister showed clear signs of redirecting focus to other regions and away than Central Africa, and the Foreign Minister remained sceptical to active involvement in the region¹⁷⁰. De Gucht's reluctance was voiced publicly during a visit by the troika of Ministers, Michel (Cooperation and Development), de Crème, (Defence), to Kinshasa in April 2008. In a characteristically un-diplomatic speech, the Foreign Minister denounced the corruption in the Congolese government and the collaboration with China in front of President Kabila. Kabila's reaction was swift and a new diplomatic crisis ensued. After months of tensions, however, it was finally temporized by Charles Michel and the new Prime Minister Leterme¹⁷¹.

In spite of internal political turmoil and diplomatic tensions, the military collaboration continued and Belgium and Congo followed the plan of the PPM accord signed in

¹⁶⁸ Franck, C., "Plus de présence, moins d'influence", *Studia Diplomatica*, vol. LXII, special number, 2009, p.17.

¹⁶⁹ Wouters, J., Driesekens, E., Biscop, S., (eds.), *Belgium in the UN Security Council: Reflections on the 2007-2008 Membership*, Intersentia, Antwerpen, Oxford, Portland, 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Franck, C., "Plus de présence, moins d'influence", *op.cit.*, pp.15-17; Belga Press Review, "La Belgique et la RDC relancent leur coopération militaire", 16 June 2009; Interview with High Officer 'Timmy', Brussels, Belgium, 30 November 2010.

¹⁷¹ Mughendi, N.N., "La Belgique et l'ancienne 'Afrique belge' : Une vision congolaise", *op.cit.*, p.109.

2007, which involved the start of the training of the Rapid Reaction battalion 321 in September 2008¹⁷².

A. Lessons Learned

The new training project was clearly a result of the lessons learned from the brigade training. Instead of giving and lending material and logistics, which had previously implied long-term commitment in terms of instructions on maintenance of the material and even lost material¹⁷³, this time Belgium only came with its know-how¹⁷⁴. In addition, a coaching team made up of 6 persons was put in place after the training was finished to keep up with the battalion and provide engineering assistance for the construction of housing for the families¹⁷⁵. Despite that the Belgians did not provide the logistics and material for the new project the training was a major investment, both in terms of personnel deployed and budget-wise. In 2008, when the training started, the PPM budget mounted to 13,413 000 Euros, to be compared with 5,908 000 Euros the year before and 4, 441 000 Euros the year after. However, this was still a minor budget in comparison with the election year 2006, when the PPM budget skyrocketed

¹⁷² Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, Ministry of Defence, consulted 14 November 2014.

¹⁷³ Interview with High Officer ‘Zakaria’ and Junior Officer ‘Axel’, Brussels, Belgium, 18 September 2012. Another Belgian officer recalls this lending of material and comments on it like this :”He [Flahaut]gave material to the Congolese without any monitoring and now there is nothing left, but we could have said that from the beginning... “, Interview with High Officer EUSEC, ‘Thomas’, 20 June 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Interview with Junior Officer B, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013.

at an impressive 18,740,000 Euros because of different technical trainings including the use of a C-130 during a whole year with 18 military staff to facilitate logistics¹⁷⁶.

The structure and the coaching team were not the only things new for the rapid reaction training, the attitude and the terminology were also supposed to have changed:

“We learned quickly that now we talked about a partnership and not cooperation. The word cooperation was forbidden. It implied that there was subordination – that they were in demand and that we provided aid”¹⁷⁷.

However, in practice, problems still persisted, in particular with regards to the provision of logistics:

“There were people who had not been paid during seven months and who were without their families and sometimes without any means of communication. Then they did not have anything to eat during several weeks. We had to insist ourselves to feed them. And all of a sudden, when we had insisted a bit, we received 110,000\$”¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁶ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013 ; Interview via Email with Junior Officer ‘Axel’, Brussels, Belgium, 29 November 2013.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2013.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite the logistical problems, the formation of the 321st battalion was quickly considered a success, not only because it remained intact this time, but also because President Kabila decided to deploy it to Kinshasa¹⁷⁹, using it more as his personal guard to halt a presumed coup than the Rapid Reaction function it was supposed to fill. Kabila's use of the unit was seen as a sign of confidence as well as proof of the excellence of the battalion, which pleased both Belgian and Congolese parties¹⁸⁰. It was also the perfect remedy to the hangover that De Gucht's harsh comments had caused between the two countries and the planning for the training of a second Rapid Reaction unit was soon put in place.

The fact that the Congolese authorities deployed the new battalion to quash rebels in Equator in the West of the country straight after the formation, going against Belgium's advice to wait with a deployment¹⁸¹, was rapidly shadowed by the pride of the successful training, and in any case: "Congo is sovereign, so they are the ones deciding. The battalions that we are forming are their responsibility"¹⁸².

¹⁷⁹ Internal Document "Engagements de la Défense en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC), Bilan et Perspectives", Ministry of Defense, consulted 17 November 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Belgian Diplomat, Kinshasa, DRC, 23 June 2011; Belga Press Review, "L'armée belge entame la formation d'un second bataillon de l'armée congolaise", 30 October 2011; Belga Press Review, "Le chef de la Défense en visite en RDC où il croisera le ministre de la Coopération", 5 July, 2013.

¹⁸¹ Interview with High Officer 'Eden', Brussels, Belgium, 11 May, 2011; Belga- Le Brukmer, "Le second bataillon formé par la Belgique déployé au Nord-Kivu, 31 May, 2012, available at: <http://www.brukmer.be/2012/05/31/le-second-bataillon-forme-par-la-belgique-deploye-au-nord-kivu/>, accessed 14 November 2013.

¹⁸² Interview with High Officer, 'Jan', Kinshasa, DRC, 24 June 2011.

B. *A First 3D Experiment*

In association with the training of the first RR battalion in 2008-2009, one of the first 3D projects was put in place, addressing the reoccurring problem with accompanying families. This became a nuisance for the training of battalion 321 as well:

“All of a sudden there is a child who is sick or a wife who is not well and they are gone. The families cannot follow the battalions, you will screw up a whole generation since the kids can’t go to school”¹⁸³.

The solution was as simple as smart and found in a unique project of collaboration between the Ministries of Defence and Cooperation and Development. For the first time, as all interviewees are keen to emphasize, the famous 3D concept actually came into practice in the project of constructing housing for the families of the soldiers. The project FAMIKI (FA for families MI for Militaries and KI for Kindu, the location) started in 2010 and continued in 2013, with a small detachment in place to assist the construction and the maintenance of the buildings¹⁸⁴. Financed by the Cooperation and Development, and directed by its ‘operational arm’: Coopération Technique Belge, military engineers from the Congolese army did the construction of the housing with a coaching by five foremen from Belgian military engineers. The project married four different partners:

¹⁸³ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’, Brussels, Belgium 11 May 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013.

“I think we have had the beginners’ luck, because all of these projects have really worked. They are projects with four partners, the Belgian Cooperation, the administration, the Belgian and Congolese military and the Congolese Cooperation, so it has never been done before”¹⁸⁵.

Although the training of the Rapid Reaction Battalion clearly has been the Belgian Defence’s flagship during the last few years, the FAMIKI project appears to be the ‘apple of the eye’ of many interviewed: The success of FAMIKI is noticeable, not only because it has proven difficult to reproduce the same conditions to continue with the new project, FAMILO (in Lokandu where the second battalion is quartered), but also because the limited structured collaboration registered between the Ministries in Brussels was overcome in these projects¹⁸⁶. The 3D-LO (Defense, Diplomacy, Development – Law and Order), approach, which Belgium during a longer time had claimed to use without any practical result, had finally given a tangible product which gained both national and international visibility¹⁸⁷.

C. Never Change a Winning Concept

In 2008 when the first training of the RR battalion started, Belgium had already gotten a taste of what its shaky political-administrative composition could cause, and after the

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Cooperation Attaché, Kinshasa, DRC, 23 June 2011.

¹⁸⁶ Interviews with key persons in Brussels, Bujumbura, Kinshasa, 2010-2013.

¹⁸⁷ Internal Document “Engagements de la Défense en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC), Bilan et Perspectives”, consulted 17 November 2013.

elections in 2010 it became obvious that Belgium as a polity had problems keeping together its federal unit. With a world-record breaking 451 days to form a new federal government and to agree on a sixth state reform with even further devolution of powers¹⁸⁸, Belgium was forced to try to keep a united external front, primary through its foreign policies. It was therefore no surprise that a second combat unit training started in Kindu between October 2011 and March/April 2012. This unit was, just as the first one, rapidly deployed. The 322^d battalion was sent to the East of Congo to fight rebel groups, primary the M23. A third battalion was consequently trained in the summer and fall of 2013 with an ending ceremony at the end of November for the new, 323rd elite battalion¹⁸⁹.

The training of the battalions has also become the hub around which many other smaller projects are built. FAMIKI and FAMILO remain the prime examples (although the FAMILO project appeared to be uncertain for a longer period), but the renovation of military camps used for training has also been part of latter efforts, just as the training of military engineers in different locations, which later are sent to the FAMIKI site to assist the construction of the latter¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁸ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.43.

¹⁸⁹ Belga Press Review, “M. De Crem remet à son homologue congolais une bataillon d'élite formé par les Belges (2)”, 28 November 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013.

Outside of the RR training, Belgium got involved in the plans to re-open the Military Academy in Kananga, which had been on hold since the Belgians left in 1990¹⁹¹. The importance of this project was not understated:

“This is a project that cannot fail/.../the education pillar is by far the most important/.../we are convinced that the education is the key to success. The military officers who are educated abroad will not go back to the Congo; they need to be trained in the Congo”¹⁹².

Apart from a number of TTT and CTT formations offered during key periods to the advantage of the Military Academy (ACAMIL), the main contribution of the Belgian Defence has been to ‘lend’ a high military officer and a junior officer as advisors to the commandment of the Military Academy¹⁹³. This has involved collaborating with EUSEC, the European advisory and assistance mission for security reform, who is financing the project, a mission in which Belgium has been strongly represented: in 2012, four members of the 51-strong mission came from the Belgian Defence, and three from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, giving an indication of how Belgium uses the multilateral channel to achieve influence in the Congo. A Belgian

¹⁹¹ La Libre Belgique, “La Belgique et la RDC relancent leur coopération militaire”, 16 June, 2009.

¹⁹² Interview with High Officer ‘Zakaria’ and Junior Officer ‘Axel’, Brussels, Belgium, 18 September 2012.

¹⁹³ Interview via Email with High Officer, ‘Jelle’, Brussels, Belgium, 27 August 2012 ; Internal Document, “Activités PPM en RDC – Historique”, consulted 15 October 2013 ; Interview with High Officer ‘Jan’, Kinshasa, DRC, 24 June, 2011.

member of EUSEC resumes it like this: “If Belgium is not part of the EUSEC, there is no EUSEC”¹⁹⁴.

Belgium and the EUSEC took therefore part of the success linked to the re-opening of the Military Academy in 2011, a significant point in the ongoing security sector reform, as it enabled a structured, basic education to take place in an appropriate location. However, the difference in approach was noted between the bilateral Belgian mission and EUSEC, despite the high number of Belgian nationals in the mission. An officer recalled how EUSEC came with unrealistic solutions, not adapted to the local environment, and gives the example of when EUSEC decided to install a modern, electronic kitchen, including an enormous fryer in the new Military Academy, despite the fact that electricity was scarce and unreliable and that most Congolese women were used to cooking in traditional ways, resulting in a non-functioning and moreover, unused kitchen. As a counter example, the officer explained how the Belgians simply constructed the FAMIKI housing with stone floor and strategic openings to let out the smoke from the cooking fires and thereby enable the Congolese women to maintain their habitual cooking skills,¹⁹⁵ giving an indication of how practical solutions can come out of the Belgian historical experience.

The collaboration with the EU did not only provide a more discreet channel of influence, but was also an important financial asset which enabled Belgium to take part of larger projects, such as the re-opening of the Military Academy in Kananga. Belgium has therefore also been keen to maintain its influence in the EU’s missions to the Congo, despite the Rwanda Commission’s ban to send in military troops to former

¹⁹⁴ Interview with EUSEC Officer ‘Thomas’, Kinshasa, DRC, 20 June, 2011.

¹⁹⁵ “Belgian Military in Central Africa – A Historical Approach”, Presentation given by High Officer at the Royal Military Academy, 29 October, 2013.

colonies. Belgium contributed with some form of personnel, equipment or support to each mission, for example: providing air transport for Operation Artemis (2003), and air support to EUFOR (2006)¹⁹⁶. The collaboration with the EU remains an important means of influence for Belgium in the Congo, especially, as its presence in the UN mission (MONUSCO), is very limited, with only three Belgian officers¹⁹⁷. However, indirectly, Belgium has managed to support the UN mission in the DRC by bilaterally helping to prepare 650 Beninese troops for MONUC in 2003¹⁹⁸.

Belgium's military collaboration with the Congo is its most important bilateral defence project and consequently, focus is given to its success. In addition, the size of the Congo and the nature of its relations with its neighbours imply that a successful security sector reform is vital to achieve stability in the region. Congo's complicated and often hostile relationship with Rwanda has therefore also implications for Belgium's role in the region, and in particular for its collaborations with Rwanda.

RETURNING TO RWANDA

Belgium's involvement in Rwanda after the genocide has been limited for two reasons, firstly because the Rwandan government has been reluctant to collaborate with the Belgian authorities after the withdrawal of the troops in 1994¹⁹⁹, and secondly because Rwanda's role in the Congo wars and its subsequent position in supporting

¹⁹⁶ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.69.

¹⁹⁷ Internal Document "Engagements de la Défense en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC), Bilan et Perspectives", consulted 17 November 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Kelly, C., "Belgian Intervention Policy in the DRC", *op.cit.*, p.69.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with High Officer 'Timmy', Brussels, Belgium, 25 November, 2010.

various rebel groups in the East of Congo²⁰⁰ has complicated the Belgian-Rwandan relationship.

After an initial period with very limited collaboration between 2004 and 2009, due to Rwanda's role in the Congo conflicts, PPM with Belgium started officially in 2010²⁰¹. Contrary to the collaborations with Burundi and the Congo, most of the activities have taken place in Belgium focusing on different sorts of longer educations and trainings, including initial training at the RMA and Air Traffic Control training²⁰². In Rwanda, a project aiming at supporting tropical medicine training to the Military hospital in Kigali took place between May and June 2012²⁰³, just before the PPM got suspended again, due to Rwanda's support to the M23 rebels in the Congo. The nature of the projects show that focus for the collaboration has not been on the military as such - but more on maintaining the collaboration in itself. The Rwandan army is already considered as one of the best disciplined and trained armies of Africa, much thanks to the support given by its Anglophone partners. In addition, a comprehensive security sector reform has not been on the agenda, partly because the Rwandan Patriotic Front

²⁰⁰ See for example Wilén, N., "Identifying the Spoilers in the Security Sector Reform – Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Process in the Congo", *Defense and Security Analysis*, vol.13, n°2, 2013, pp.117-127.

²⁰¹ Internal Document, "Proposition PPM Rwanda 2010", Ministry of Defence, 25 March 2010, consulted 18 November 2013; Interview with High Officer 'Timmy', Brussels, Belgium, 25 November, 2010.

²⁰² Internal Document, "Proposition PPM Rwanda 2010", Ministry of Defence, 25 March 2010, consulted 18 November 2013.

²⁰³ Internal Document, "PPM RWANDA – Appui en formation médecine tropicale au profit de l'Hôpital Militaire de KANONMBE (KIGALI)", Ministry of Defense, 15 March 2012, consulted 18 November 2013.

(RPF), came out as clear winners and partly because the government in place is reluctant to introduce democratic changes in the security sector²⁰⁴.

The PPM in Rwanda has been different in many ways from its counterparts in Burundi and the Congo. Firstly because of its limited nature, secondly because of the Rwandan authorities' strong ownership, which has been manifested in different ways, for example their insistence on writing their own meeting reports, or the tough negotiations to arrive at consensus on the terms and activities that should be undertaken²⁰⁵.

Yet, from Belgium's point of view, the PPM has been a small, but vital part of the objective to arrive at a stable situation in the region of Central Africa²⁰⁶, and an exclusion of Rwanda has been considered as a bigger risk than being involved. There have however not been any illusions when it comes to the lack of democratic evolution in the country, nor its implication in the neighbouring countries, which made an officer resume the collaboration like this: "In Rwanda, we walk on egg shells"²⁰⁷.

This became apparent in 2012 after several international reports indicated that Rwanda played an important role in the emerging conflict in the East of the Congo, by supporting the rebel group M23²⁰⁸. In a parliamentary question, addressing the

²⁰⁴ Wilén, N., "A Hybrid Peace through Locally Owned and Externally Financed SSR-DDR in Rwanda", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 33, n°7, pp.1323-1336.

²⁰⁵ Interview with High Officer 'Sebastien', Brussels, Belgium, 20 October 2011.

²⁰⁶ Internal Document, "Proposition PPM Rwanda 2010", Ministry of Defence, 25 March 2010, consulted 18 November 2013.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Junior Officer 'Axel', Brussels, Belgium 20 October 2011.

²⁰⁸ See for example : UNSC, "Demanding End to Outside Support for M23 Rebels, Security Council Adopts Resolution Renewing Democratic Republic of Congo Sanctions Regime", SC/10836, 28 November, 2012.

suspension of US military collaboration to Rwanda following the reports, a member was asking the Belgian Defence for its position and whether the collaboration with Rwanda would continue. The answer was ambiguous without a clear yes or no, instead, the Minister of Defence referred to the different forms of collaboration in the cases of the US and Belgium and put the emphasis on the long-term trainings that formed the basis of the Belgo-Rwandan PPM, which were already well under way²⁰⁹.

The lack of a clear position continued in August 2012, when the Foreign Minister, Didier Reynders, tried to balance the thin line between defending the integrity of Congolese territory without openly accusing Rwanda for supporting the M23 during a week-long visit to the region²¹⁰. Only a few weeks later, the Minister publicly declared his conviction that Rwanda supported the rebels in one way or the other, but no sanctions were taken at the time²¹¹. Instead, Belgium marked its disapproval by abstaining its vote for Rwanda's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in October, a signal which was badly taken by Rwanda²¹².

However, an unexpected incident occurred: the Rwandan delegation was too late for applying for the visas and thereby missed the flight to sign the new PPM collaboration

²⁰⁹ Parliamentary Question, "Réponse à la question parlementaire n° 5-6798 de madame Nele Lijnen datée du 26 juillet 2012", accessed 18 September 2012.

²¹⁰ Belga Press Review, "RDC: M. Reynders appelle Kinshasa à instaurer un État de droit et à réformer son armée", 22 August, 2012.

²¹¹ Belga Press Review, "RDC-Rwanda: M. Reynders "convaincu" d'une implication rwandaise dans l'est de la RDC", 12 September 2012; Dusabemungu Ange, "Belgium Refuses to Take Sanctions Against Rwanda", IGIHE, 22 November 2012, available at: <http://en.igihe.com/news/belgium-refuses-to-take-sanctions-against-rwanda.html>, accessed 18 November 2013.

²¹² Belga Press Review, "La Belgique concrétise une partie de sa coopération avec Kigali, réchauffement bilatéral", 12 June 2013.

in Belgium in June 2012. The decision was then taken to postpone the Joint Military Commission. This suited Belgium, as it bought it more time to align its position with other actors. However, before the next Joint Military Commission the government had decided to suspend all military partnership activities²¹³.

Not until November 2012, did the Belgian Foreign Minister officially announce the suspension of the military collaboration (via Twitter), after a UN Experts report detailed the Rwandan support to the M23 and the EU had imposed sanctions on Rwanda²¹⁴.

This intricate situation between Belgium, the Congo and Rwanda exemplifies Belgium's difficult role in the region. On the one hand Belgium tries to take the lead in the diplomatic moves to stop violence and regain stability in the region, on the other hand, Belgium remains very reluctant to intervene too actively and thereby offend any of the three countries' leaders²¹⁵. The result is often an ambiguous, hesitant and delayed reaction, which is dependent on how the international organizations react in order to not stand out from the crowd. Nevertheless, within the protective institutional shell of larger international and regional organisations, like the UN and the EU, Belgium remains the actor pushing the hardest to keep Central Africa on the agenda. This was exemplified during Belgium's time in the Security Council 2007-2008, when

²¹³ Interview with High Officer 'Zakaria', and Junior Officer 'Axel', Brussels, Belgium, 18 September 2012.

²¹⁴ AFP, "Belgium halts military partnership with Rwanda", 11 November 2012, available at : <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jzbwE7Mb8tZ3NWuuOfSctCpQ7eYA?docId=CNG.c8e8b8cb2da5c5f607310ba1a5a6e17b.f1>, accessed 18 November 2013.

²¹⁵ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.231.

Belgium insisted on renewing the mandate of MONUC, against the general will of the Security Council, who at the time thought that the situation would stabilize quickly²¹⁶. Belgium's strong involvement is also reflected in its heavy representation in the EU's mission to the Congo, in particular EUSEC, showing the importance of combining bilateral and multilateral channels of influence for, in particular, a small country like Belgium.

Political, strategic decisions on a high level, demand personnel on the ground who executes pieces of the larger puzzle. The next section attempts to discover the motivations and the experiences of the military officers deployed to Central African missions through a small, sociological snapshot.

²¹⁶ Zeebroek, X, "Le Paradoxe de l'Expertise Belge sur le Congo", *op.cit.*, p. 4.

CHAPTER V

PERCEPTIONS FROM THE GROUND: A SOCIOLOGICAL SNAPSHOT OF THE BELGIAN MILITARY EXPERIENCES FROM CENTRAL AFRICA

During the years 2010 to 2013, forty-seven interviews were conducted with mainly Belgian military officers, program officers and diplomats who in some way were involved in Central Africa. This section attempts to discern the motivations and ambitions of those Belgian military officers who are or have been deployed to Central Africa and their understanding and appreciation of the mission they are/have been taking part of as well as the collaboration with their counterparts in Burundi and Congo²¹⁷.

The section is divided into three parts, each exploring one particular issue, starting with their motivations for leaving, previous experiences and possible adapted training beforehand under the heading: ‘Breaking the Routine’. In the section part, entitled: “Cultural Encounters and Local Ownership”, the relations between the Burundian and/or the Congolese counterparts are examined from the Belgian military

²¹⁷ Rwanda is excluded from this section as there are no military missions on the ground.

staff point of view regarding how and if the local colleagues appear to integrate and ‘own’ the training given. Questions detailing how the collaborations work or have been working are the basis for this part. In the third section called “A Piece of the Puzzle”, the military officers have answered questions related to the utility of their mission and their feelings regarding their work in the country as well as ideas for improvements.

A. Breaking the Routine

In a series of interviews one of the questions asked to the officers was to explain their motivation for applying for a mission to Africa. The responses varied from more altruistic replies like: “I wanted to do something for the Congo”²¹⁸, to purely personal motivations such as: “I wanted to get out of the Belgian gloom and get me a tank of oxygen”²¹⁹. Yet, what most of the interviewees had in common was the feeling of living an adventure when on a mission abroad, with the aim of breaking everyday routines and getting more professional liberty.

Many of the interviewees were also interested in getting to know the African culture, as one of the persons stated: “I guess it is a bit like Asterix, I want to see the country, see the culture, other values and how it works, etc.”²²⁰, which was echoed by other officers.

²¹⁸ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

²¹⁹ Interview with Junior Officer, ‘Kim’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 4 March 2013.

²²⁰ Interview with Junior Officer, “Anders”, Bujumbura, Burundi, 4 Mars, 2013.

Most of the officers had also participated in several missions to Africa, or had previous knowledge of the region of Central Africa through personal experiences.

Somewhat surprisingly, only three of the interviewees cited professional reasons in addition to their personal motivation, such as: “I wanted to avoid all the reproaches from my colleagues about never having left [been deployed]”²²¹ and on a more positive note: “to marry the military world with the diplomatic world, that was fascinating”²²².

This has perhaps its explanation in the fact that none of the interviewed envisioned a different (higher) position or a promotion in relation to their deployment abroad. One of the officers put it like this: “I’m already at the top of my grade and the relations with my boss stays the same whether I leave or not. Here, I’m 200% free; I can do what I want”²²³.

An officer working in the Department of the Human Resources of the Defence partly confirm this picture:

“The participation of a deployment is a positive element for progressing, but the large majority of military staff has already participated in several deployments. Let’s say that between three or four deployments, there is no longer any difference, however if someone has not participated in any mission, he/she leaves with a

²²¹ Interview with High Officer, ‘Olivier’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 8 March 2013.

²²² Interview with High Officer, ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

²²³ Interview with Junior Officer, ‘Kim’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 4 Mars, 2013.

handicap in comparison with the vast majority of his/her colleagues. Note also that a prior deployment to Africa is an advantage in new applications to leave to the same continent”²²⁴.

This explains both why one of the interviewed felt a pressure by his colleagues to leave, as he previously had explained he preferred to stay in Belgium, and why those who had been deployed several times did not see any professional advantage in terms of career advancement for leaving.

Preparation before Deployment

In spite of the fact that for most officers, the missions in Central Africa are completely different from their posts in Belgium, few had received any tailored preparation before leaving, except a few briefings for some of the officers. Yet this did not seem to pose any major problem for the interviewees in general who claimed to know what to expect from colleagues:

“I had not received a special education for this mission/.../but one learns quickly. I had already African colleagues and then I had heard my Belgians colleagues talk about Africa during the coffee breaks etc.”²²⁵.

²²⁴ Interview via Email with Human Resources High Officer ‘Roger’, Brussels, Belgium, 21 November 2013.

²²⁵ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

Nevertheless, some of the officers who gave courses felt that they did not have enough instructions nor time before leaving in order to prepare the courses:

“I think we need more time to prepare on the spot/.../it does not work to come one or two days before [the start of the course]. We knew about the mission two months ahead, but our bosses at home [Belgium] did not let us prepare this in advance, we had to do our regular work”²²⁶.

A few of the officers who are deployed abroad also explain that they need to work in the evening to help out their replacements in Belgium, which both seemed to please and irritate them, as they felt irreplaceable yet at the same time an extra chore was added to their every day workload.

B. Cultural Encounters and Local Ownership

The Defence Ministry's involvement in Central Africa has explicitly been resting on a philosophy of local ownership²²⁷ since the failure with the first brigade training, in the sense that the educations and formations given are supposedly phased out as they are

²²⁶ Interview with High Officer ‘Olivier’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 8 March 2013.

²²⁷ For a deeper analysis of local ownership see : Wilén, N., “Capacity-building or Capacity-taking? Legitimizing Concepts in Peace and Development Operations”, *International Peacekeeping*, vol.16, n°3, 2009, pp. 337-351.

integrated by the local counterparts²²⁸. The two concepts of Train The Trainers (TTT) and Coach The Trainers (CTT) are examples of how the philosophy is translated into practice. In the interviews, the officers were therefore asked how they perceived of the local integration of the trainings and educations, and to give some examples of how or where the result or lack of result could be seen.

What was interesting with the question of local ownership was the fact that only two of the officers deployed to the Congo were familiar with the concept, whereas all officers in Burundi had heard it before. Yet, when explained the meaning of the concept, all officers had a previous understanding of the idea.

Overall, the responses were rather negative in the sense that out of all the interviewees less than a handful of respondents thought that there had been a successful integration of the education and none thought that the training or lessons would be sustained without some sort of coaching or follow-up at the end of the course. Many of the officers mentioned the African counterparts' lack of initiatives as a difficult threshold to integration and sustainability. Belgian officers considered this as a cultural difference, but also advanced the explanation that they (the Congolese/the Burundians) were expecting a lot from the Belgians and therefore did not take the lead in anything. This explanation was leaning more towards a lack of will, rather than capacity²²⁹. In

²²⁸ As there exist no formal note on the Defense Strategy in Central Africa see for example: Internal power point presentation: PPM Burundi, 19 June 2012 ; Internal Document, "Coopération Mil avec le Burundi", consulted 14 November 2013; Internal Document "Engagements de la Défense en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC), Bilan et Perspectives", consulted 17 November 2013; .

²²⁹ For lack of will see also: "The Democratic Republic of Congo: Taking a Stand on Security Sector Reform", Report by 13 NGOs, April, 2012, available at: <http://www.soros.org/sites/default/files/drc-ssr-report-20120416-1.pdf>.

particular what appears to be a problem is the lack of support from the higher authorities, such as providing the logistics for the training (in the Congo), or planning ahead for the courses given (in Burundi). An officer stationed in the Congo explains:

“There is a lack of Congolese will. They do not provide anything to their men. They don’t have food, ammunition or medicine. I went to see the training and there are ten to eleven soldiers who have died of hunger, or because they have not received medicine, or because there is no drinking water, so they drink from the river and get lots of diseases”²³⁰.

This declaration is supported by reports by NGO’s and a statement by Thierry Vircoulon, the Central Africa director of International Crisis group:

“The state of the army in itself is a disaster, so you train people and you send them back to a dysfunctional army/.../You are trained, but you still have a very low wage, no logistics, a very poor command system and no sense of belonging and cohesion because the Congolese army is still a patchwork of very different groups. Even if you’re trained, at the end of the day, you’re still a hungry and unpaid soldier”²³¹.

²³⁰ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

²³¹ Quoted in Security Assistance Monitor, “Security Sector Reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, 13 August 2013, available at:

This ambiguity between lack of capacity and will was also found in the Burundian trainings:

“Local ownership is a ‘tricky question’. In terms of the instructors’ capacity, they are a large enough number who are capable of giving the course. The problem is that the Military Authorities [l’Etat-Major], do not organize anything. It is not the capacity that is lacking, it is the will”²³².

This perceived lack of will from the higher staff in both countries to maintain and integrate the trainings has led many of the Belgian officers to suggest that the courses should start on a higher level, from the top to the bottom:

“I am convinced that we must begin on top. To educate the leaders. If we don’t it is impossible to tell people not to do that or that”²³³.

Yet, in Burundi, officers have noted a resistance of the higher staff to take courses together with Junior officers:

“I gave the course myself to Burundian officers; there were all grades, even Generals. They [the Generals] only did three days with us and then, when they noticed that they had to work in groups they did not want to stay

<http://securityassistancemonitor.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/security-sector-reform-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/>, accessed 21 November 2013.

²³² Interview with High Officer ‘Ruben’, Bujumbura, Burundi 10 March 2013.

²³³ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

because they had to work with Captains and other Junior Officers”²³⁴.

This also becomes a problem as the older generations often are reluctant to adapt the new techniques and lessons that the new generation brings along. The officer explains that: “A former student of ours has confirmed the difficulties he encounters with the higher Burundian authorities when he tries to convince them to apply management principles”²³⁵. Similar findings have been spotted in the Congo by researcher Maria Baaz Eriksson who writes: “since high ranking officers often perceive themselves to be ‘too senior for training’, many have received very little or no training following integration”²³⁶.

A Belgian Cooperation Attaché in Kinshasa, involved in some of the 3D projects with the military is adding another franc opinion to the discussion on ownership:

“There is absolutely no local ownership/.../The DRC was the only country to still have an accord where you only needed our signature. It is exclusive for the DRC.

²³⁴ Interview with High Officer ‘Olivier’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 8 Mars 2013.

²³⁵ Interview via Email with High Officer ‘Olivier’, Bujumbura, Burundi 28 mars 2013.

²³⁶ Eriksson Baaz, M., “The Price for Peace? Military Integration and Continued Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo”, *Africa Programme Report*, February n°2, 2011, Swedish Defence College, p.13.

Other places it is slow, but here, we had not even started to think about joint management, it was just too slow²³⁷”.

Yet, while the attaché is simultaneously complaining about the lack of efficient administration in the DRC, he/she is also deploring Belgium’s attitude towards the Congo: “In the Congo, we practice demagoguery, paternalism and we don’t help the Congolese to take their responsibility”²³⁸.

While the discourse initially may appear contradictory, as the attaché is both condemning the Congolese incapacity and Belgium’s paternalism towards this incapacity, it makes sense when putting the discourse into the context whereby Belgium maintains and sustains this incapacity in certain domains, such as the Cooperation and Development, by providing logistics and/or expertise and thereby doing this ‘for them’ instead of ‘with them’²³⁹, which on the one hand speeds up the process, but on the other hand does not facilitate the capacity-building.

²³⁷ Later he explains that there now is a joint management accord after Congolese demands, Interview with Cooperation Attaché, Kinshasa, DRC, 23 June 2011; see also, OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2005, p. 73: “The principle of co-management has been adopted by the Belgian cooperation in all countries, except the zones under Palestinian administration and the DRC”.

²³⁸ Interview with Cooperation Attaché, Kinshasa, DRC, 23 June 2011.

²³⁹ Wilén, N, Chapaux, V., “Problems of Local Participation and Collaboration with the UN in a Post-conflict Environment: Who Are the ‘Locals’?”, *Global Society*, vol.25, n°4, 2011, p.536.

This tendency to wait for somebody else to initiate or actually undertake the work is not uncommon in the military sphere either, and is certainly well-known in all post-conflict countries²⁴⁰. Military officers in Burundi state for example that:

“I think that the imagination, the planning, the dedication to work and the desire to improve, are not their strengths. And since we are there to assist, they wait for us to do a large part of the work”²⁴¹.

A majority of the officers interviewed felt thus that local ownership was absent or at best in progress. This perception led to another question regarding the utility of the Belgian officers’ work in Central Africa, which the next section looks into.

C. A Piece of the Puzzle

The answers of the officers reveal a mixture of fatalistic and optimistic thoughts regarding the missions and their usefulness. Those expressing the fatalistic attitude pointed out that the short-term formations and the lack of sufficient logistics or follow-up made them at times question the utility of the mission:

²⁴⁰ See for example : Bergamashi, I., “The Fall of a Donor Darling: The Role of Aid in Mali’s Crisis”, forthcoming, 2013; Wilén, N., “Capacity-building or Capacity-taking?”, *op.cit.*

²⁴¹ Interview via Email with High Officer ‘Olivier’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 28 March 2013.

“To train a Rapid Reaction Force in a country that does not have material or rapid means is a bit contradictory. It takes two weeks to cross the country in train”²⁴².

A Belgian EUSEC officer who previously has worked in PPM missions had a somewhat similar attitude:

“I will do everything to make my project succeed and then I will give the keys to my successor and say: ‘keep the house tidy’, but I don’t think it will work”²⁴³.

Frustration with local opposition against the projects was also voiced by several officers. As networks of corruption were threatened by the advancement of the Belgian trained battalions in the Congo, for example, a local High Officer clearly attempted to sabotage its progress and break the unit²⁴⁴.

Yet, despite the apparent negative outlook on the sustainability and the ownership of the projects, the majority of officers still thought that it was worth continuing:

“The moment we turn our back, there are good habits that will get lost, that is for sure. It could vary between 1-

²⁴² Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2013; It should be added that there are four-thousand kilometres of railway in the DRC, although much is narrow-gauge and in very poor condition, resulting in hundreds of derailments each year, see Keane, J., “Waiting in Vain for a Train in DR Congo”, BBC News, 24 November 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15859686>, accessed 21 November 2013. .

²⁴³ Interview with High Officer EUSEC, ‘Nicolas’, Kinshasa, DRC, 20 June 2013.

²⁴⁴ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

99%, but even if there is just one percent [that is sustainable] it is worth the effort. You can't come here too idealistic/.../You need to be satisfied with small successes”²⁴⁵.

As a follow-up question to this, they were asked how they would have liked to improve the mission to get better results. Given that the officers interviewed came from different backgrounds and had/participated in distinct mission, the answers varied. Many of the officers who had been training a brigade or a battalion wanted to stay and coach them during the operations in the field:

“I would have wanted to do like we do in Afghanistan, where we coach the Afghans in operation with our Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT), that way we continue to train them but we can go further and make the liaison in the field”²⁴⁶.

They are however, also aware of the risks that this would imply for Belgium and the interdiction issued by the Rwanda Commission report.

Other officers have figured out detailed ways of improvement for their particular mission, in Burundi, some Belgian officers suggested the creation of a coordination unit in the Burundian defence in order to organize and prepare before, during and after

²⁴⁵ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Simon’, Flawinne, Belgium, 11 May 2013.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

the mission to improve the efficiency of the logistics and the preparation²⁴⁷, while others wanted to make the missions more visible and show the added value of the trainings²⁴⁸.

A high officer who has been working in the Congo, advocate more 3D projects linked to the military trainings, with the example of developing railways or just functional roads to the East of Congo in order to be able to facilitate transport of logistics to the troops²⁴⁹.

Self-Reflection and Appreciation

With regards to their own roles in the missions, many of the officers compared with other nations, whose objectives according to the interviewed were unrealistic. Among the ones mentioned were the US and Sweden, where the US was considered as coming with a manual and too many conditions and rules to follow, while Sweden was simply too idealistic and naïve, demanding structural changes in little time²⁵⁰. In comparison, Belgium was considered as more realistic, down to earth and in tune with the local context:

²⁴⁷ See for example Interview with High Officer ‘Ruben’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 8 March 2013.

²⁴⁸ Interview with High Officer ‘David’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 18 March 2013.

²⁴⁹ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

²⁵⁰ The reference to Sweden is not from the officers, as Sweden is not part of the military training, but from one of the Diplomats interviewed.

“We [the Belgians] have the capacity to dialogue with the Congolese and pass on the message without imposing unrealistic things for the Congolese”²⁵¹.

This comment and the opinions regarding the other countries may very well be considered as typical examples of when interviewees tend to idealize their own contributions or put their own experiences in a particularly favourable light²⁵². From an external point of view, Belgium and Belgians in general are indeed seen as having a particularly biased view of their own role in the colonization, recalling for the most part, mainly the more positive elements, such as the building of infrastructure, schools and hospitals in the Congo, but ignoring or leaving out, the brutalism, racism and imperialism which were part of the colonial endeavour²⁵³. Another comment by an officer exemplifies this clearly:

“Belgians are still respected in the Congo. They remember the colonial period when there was a real infrastructure – now there is nothing”²⁵⁴.

Part of this biased view may be traced back to the fact that Belgium as a country did not actively seek to colonize the Congo, but was called upon to overtake the country after the King, Leopold II, no longer was entitled to rule it. This ‘involuntary

²⁵¹ Interview with EUSEC Officer ‘Thomas’, Kinshasa, RDC, 20 June 2011.

²⁵² Kaufmann J-C., *L’Entretien Compréhensif, op.cit.*, pp.63-69.

²⁵³ See for example: Evans, M., “Belgium and the Colonial Experience”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 11, n°2, 2003, pp. 167-180; See also: Stearns, J., “Belgium and the Congo: Mon Dieu”, *Congo Siasa Blog*, 16 January 2010, available at: <http://congosiasa.blogspot.be/search?q=Belgium>, accessed 27 November 2013.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Koen’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

experience of colonialism' and the conclusion drawn of the latter: that Belgians really were 'not a colonizing people' is found repeatedly in Belgian books about colonialism²⁵⁵. Part of this uncharacteristic Belgian self-righteousness²⁵⁶ may also originate on the one hand from the large number of former colonial servants who resent what they see as a denigration of their work in the Congo, which they believe to have been responsible and constructive²⁵⁷, and on the other hand from a lack of knowledge and interest in the colonial time. Evans explains this as if there is a feeling of lack of relevance, as it took place long ago in a country far away²⁵⁸.

Having said this, some of the higher officer and diplomats interviewed were well aware of Belgium's darker past, as an officer demonstrated in a discussion about human rights: "You cannot forget that a few years ago, it was us who didn't give a damn about human rights"²⁵⁹.

A diplomat followed the same reasoning:

"For the question of human rights, it is an internal policy question; it is not Belgium's policy. Because we do not have the same discourse when we are talking to Asian

²⁵⁵ See for example: Braeckman, C., "Introduction – Congo-Belgique", *op.cit.*, p. 8; Bouvier, P., "La Belgique et l'Afrique centrale", in Remacle, E., Vinand, P. (eds.), *L'Amerique, L'Europe, l'Afrique: 1945-1973*, PIE Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2009, pp.271-272; Gérard-Libois, J., "Du domaine de Léopold II à l'entreprise", *op.cit.*, p.29; Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.229.

²⁵⁶ Belgium scores in general extremely low in polls regarding national pride, see for example: De Winter, L., Türsan, "Belgian Presidency 2001", *op.cit.*, p.12.

²⁵⁷ See for example: Evans, M., "Belgium and the Colonial Experience", *op.cit.*, p.179.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Interview with High Officer 'Sebastien', Brussels, Belgium, 20 October 2013.

states as when we are talking to southern states. What's more is that we are holding these discourses in countries where we have committed the greatest stupidity! Do we have the right to say what to do?"²⁶⁰.

Regardless of which historical interpretation that is taken, Belgians in general are unexpectedly well accepted and liked in their former colonies²⁶¹, and, as one officer pointed out: Belgians are there for the long-term, making it possible to envision larger projects which are interesting both for the local population and the authorities. This long-term vision is related to Belgium's interest in the region and the strategy linked to the interest, which the next section examines.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Diplomat 'Niels', Bujumbura, Burundi, 4 March 2013.

²⁶¹ See for example OECD, "DAC Peer Review Belgium", Paris, 2010, pp.30,120.

CHAPTER VI

BELGIUM’S STRATEGY IN CENTRAL AFRICA: WITH THE FEET ON THE GROUND AND THE HEAD IN THE CLOUDS?

“We are far away from the operational and billion of years from strategy. We do what ‘we can’. There is no line of conduct; it is day-by-day politics”²⁶².

The last few chapters have examined Belgium’s changing relationship and military collaborations with Burundi, Rwanda and the Congo during the post-independence period up to the time of writing (2013) with a particular focus on the last decade when the military partnerships were renewed. These chapters have examined the most important projects, the so-called ‘flagships’ for the defence during this period. In addition, a complete chapter has been dedicated to get a bottom-up vision of the

²⁶² Interview with High Officer EUSEC ‘Nicolas’, Kinshasa, DRC, 20 June 2013.

projects, by providing a sociological snapshot of the military personnel involved in these projects. In this chapter the aim is to analyse where the policies have come from, the interactions between the different instances producing these policies and an examination into Belgium's 'grand strategy' for Central Africa.

BELGIAN INTEREST IN CENTRAL AFRICA: REASONS AND MOTIVATIONS

During the three years that this research was conducted (2010-2013), all interviews have included the questions: Why is Belgium still in Central Africa? And the follow-up question: What is Belgium's overall strategy for Central Africa? The first question falls back on Belgium's interest in the Great Lakes region and here the responses were more or less similar. Four different factors came up repeatedly in the answers: historical reasons, Belgian expertise, economic benefits and the capacity to evacuate Belgian nationals in case of emergency. The following sections will look into these four topics.

A. Historical Interests and a Diplomatic Window

Most of the interviewees evoked the historical links that had been forged during the colonial times, and related to this, a sort of mixture of responsibility and guilt to make sure that the African countries follow the right path to some sort of ideal state of stability, democracy and peace:

“Belgium will always be involved in Central Africa, I’m certain. One of the reasons is that the colonial past of course is playing a role”²⁶³.

This colonial past has, whether welcome or not, an unquestionable influence on today’s policies, both in Belgium and its former colonies. Rosoux and Planche’s excellent study on the colonial past and Belgium’s foreign policy demonstrates that although politicians position themselves differently and interpret the responsibilities in distinct ways, they are all, to some degree, coloured by Belgium’s past in the African region²⁶⁴. The mere reactions evoked and the feelings provoked by different politicians when stirring in this open wound of responsibility give an indication of how far away Belgium is from having the long-sought ‘normalised’ relations²⁶⁵. It appears therefore clear that the past will continue to impact future policies for some time to come, although perhaps to a lesser and lesser degree as the distance with the past grow wider.

The second answer that came up in the interviews related to Belgium’s interest in the African region was the international recognition of Belgian expertise related to the three African states: “We need a window here/.../for Belgium it is important to keep a French territory. Belgium wants to have a say here”²⁶⁶.

²⁶³ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Dries’, Brussels, Belgium, 18 September 2012.

²⁶⁴ Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*

²⁶⁵ See for example : Bucyalimwe, M., “Le ‘Noko’ vu par son ‘neveu’. Une vue Congolaise”, *op.cit.*; Mughendi, N.N., “La Belgique et l’ancienne ‘Afrique belge’ : Une vision congolaise”, *op.cit.*, pp.105-122; Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*

²⁶⁶ Interview with Cooperation Attaché, Kinshasa, DRC, 26 June 2011.

This Belgian expertise is also the ticket for Belgium to sit at the table of the ‘big’ countries for discussions related to the region. It was the recognition of Belgium’s knowledge of the area that gave it a seat in the Comité Internationale d’Accompagnement à la Transition (CIAT) during the transitional period in the Congo, and in the even more exclusive club of P3+2 after 2007 beside countries such as the US and France. In addition, Belgium is regularly consulted by members of the UN Security Council each time a new resolution or report related to the three African states is in the making²⁶⁷. Yet, the colonial past and the ambition to be an active player in the, often difficult and painful processes of state- and peacebuilding²⁶⁸ also puts Belgium in delicate positions which at times is the result of the shaky internal political base, and at times the origin. This ambivalent position will be examined more in the section on strategy. Doubtless however, the diplomatic window found in Central Africa is an essential part of Belgium’s limited national interest²⁶⁹.

B. Economic Interests and Belgian Expats

Quite a few officers also believed that there were some sort of economic interests linked to individual politicians, behind the investment in the region. Here it might be appropriate to recall that Belgium’s external trade with the Congo represents less than a thousandth of all Belgian trade and that Belgian export and import to the Congo is

²⁶⁷ Zeebroek, X., “Le paradoxe de l’expertise belge sur le Congo”, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

²⁶⁸ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.4.

²⁶⁹ De Winter, L., Türsan, “Belgian Presidency 2001”, *op.cit.*, 12.

less than 0,1 %; putting Congo at the 60th and 67th place respectively²⁷⁰. Regardless of these statics, both high officers and some diplomats evoked personal enrichment as one of the reasons behind Belgium's presence in the region:

“I think that there are economic interests on the side. It is very nice in theory, giving trainings and all that, but there is something else behind it”²⁷¹.

A cooperation attaché voices a similar belief:

“There are politicians who have interests here, the richness of this country.../.../I think that there are private interests, financial, that are behind our presence here in the Congo”²⁷².

Despite the low figure for Belgian trade with the Congo, Belgian private enterprises have, during a long time, been present and active in the Congo. Most noteworthy here is perhaps the fact that thirteen Belgian private companies were cited in the first UN group of experts' report on exploitation and illegal trade of resources in the Congo in 2001²⁷³. This led to the Belgian government creating a commission of enquiry,

²⁷⁰ Presentation of “Security Issues in Central Africa”, Presentation given by High Officer at the Summer University, Royal Military Academy, 4 September 2013, see also Belgium's National Bank Statistics at: www.nbb.be, accessed 29 November 2013.

²⁷¹ Interview with Junior Officer ‘Thibault’, Flawinne, Belgium, 17 May 2011.

²⁷² Interview with Cooperation Attaché, Kinshasa, DRC, 26 June 2011.

²⁷³ UN Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, A/2001/357, 12 April 2001.

examining Belgium's role in the exploitation of natural resources in 2003²⁷⁴. Yet, the analysis was criticized in the OCDE peer evaluation for lack of depth and follow-up, in particular as Belgium in 2005 was Congo's largest client for diamond and coltan, two natural resources which are closely linked to bad working conditions and a negative impact on the environment, which are factors that clash with Belgium's public policy of promoting sustainable development and human rights²⁷⁵. In the following peer review by the OCDE in 2010, there was no particular comment on Belgium's private companies in Africa, however, there was a general remark noting that Belgium should continue and amplify its efforts of promoting the code of good governance for multinational companies. The degree to which these enterprises, mainly established in the Congo, have an impact on policy makers in the Belgian government is obviously difficult to determine as links in these cases remain unofficial. Yet, publicly at least, economic benefits can at present not justify Belgium's interest in the Great Lakes region.

Finally, a fourth issue which was evoked as a reason for Belgian presence in the African countries were the Belgian citizens, the expats, living in the three former colonies:

“The Military Partnership (PPM) is a way to keep and enlarge or reinforce Belgium's influence in Africa and in particular to have ‘hops’ from where we can evacuate

²⁷⁴ Belgian Senate, “Commission d'enquête parlementaire chargée d'enquêter sur l'exploitation et le commerce légaux et illégaux de richesses naturelles dans la région des Grands Lacs au vu de la situation conflictuelle actuelle et de l'implication de la Belgique”, document 2-942-1, 20 February 2003.

²⁷⁵ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium”, Paris, 2005, p.49.

nationals in case of crisis without making any strategic movements”²⁷⁶.

The number of Belgian expats living in the three African states may however not justify the motivation for the expansive military collaborations alone²⁷⁷, but combined with the other factors, the expats factor remains part of the larger picture.

Belgium’s interest in Central Africa remains therefore a mixture of the ingredients: historical reasons, diplomatic motives, economic incentives and national expats. The degree to which each one of these factors influences Belgium foreign policy depends on both individuals and context, but diplomatic and historical motives appear to be constantly high on the agenda. Given that there is a continuous, long-term interest to maintain a relationship with the countries in Central Africa, interviewees were asked about Belgium’s overall strategy for the region, both for politics in general and defence in particular which the next section explores.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON BELGIUM’S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

As a polity, Belgium has witnessed major changes during the last few decades, going from being a unitary state to gradually transforming into a federal unit. The federal

²⁷⁶ Interview with High Officer ‘Ruben’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 10 March 2013.

²⁷⁷ Numbers vary, but around 5000 expats are believed to live in the Congo alone, Zeebroek, X., “Le paradoxe de l’expertise belge sur le Congo”, *op.cit.*, 3; Presentation of “Security Issues in Central Africa”, Presentation given by a High Officer at the Summer University, Royal Military Academy, 4 September 2013.

Belgian state was created from a process of devolution rather than from the will to ‘bring together’ already existing entities²⁷⁸, giving an indication of exactly how deeply divided Belgium as a polity is. The fragmentation of a common political culture is best exemplified by the non-existence of any national parties and an almost complete division of the nation’s cultural life, including influential media instruments, which increases the gap between the two communities²⁷⁹. The solution to handle this division has been an institutionalization of consociational responses, resulting in a depoliticized democracy where the principle of power-sharing coalitions also has caused an overly bureaucratic and complex decision-making system²⁸⁰. However, influenced by the New Public Management philosophy, Belgium underwent a major, federal administration reform in 2000.

A. Copernicus comes to Belgium – Efficiency and Flexibility Guaranteed?

New Public Management (NPM) is the label given to a global reform movement inspired by a broad neo-liberal ideology, economic values and a normative focus on increasing efficiency. It emerged in the Anglosaxophone countries in the late 1980’s and 1990’s and was subsequently diffused to other states with the aim to introduce

²⁷⁸ Swenden, W., Brans, M., De Winter, L., “The Politics of Belgium: Institutions and Policy under Bioplar and Centrifugal Federalism”, *West European Politics*, vol. 29, n°5, 2006, p.864.

²⁷⁹ Billiet, J., Maddens, B., Frognier, A-P., “Does Belgium (still) exist? Differences in Political Culture between Flemings and Walloons”, *West European Politics*, vol. 29, n°5, 2006, p.913.

²⁸⁰ See for example, Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.10; OECD “DAC Peer Review Belgium”, Paris, 2005 and 2010.

flexibility and efficiency in the public administrative system²⁸¹. In other words, this could be seen as the remedy to Belgium's complex and heavy bureaucratic administration. In 2000 Belgium's federal government introduced the Copernicus reform, clearly inspired by the NPM features. The Copernicus reform's objectives were to redefine the organizational structures of the Belgian administrative system, as well as the human resource management²⁸². As a result of the reforms, the ministries were transformed to Federal Public Services (FPS), and in 2003, the Ministry of Cooperation and Development was integrated into the new Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, External Commerce and Cooperation and Development, to enhance cooperation and coordination between ministries²⁸³. Yet, despite these reforms, intended to facilitate the decision-making process and lighten the impact of the political parties, the Belgian political system did not change radically and the bureaucratic and heavily polarized structure remained, including difficulties to collaborate in between the different ministries²⁸⁴.

Two consequences of this complex and fragmented political system can be chiselled out: 1, that political parties play a predominant role in the chain of delegation of power from voters to MPs (Members of Parliament) etc. reducing the influence and control of

²⁸¹ Christensen, T., Laegrid, P., "Introduction – Theoretical Approach and Research Questions", *op.cit.*, pp.4-5.

²⁸² Joris, G., et al., "Federal Public Administration Reform in Belgium", *op.cit.*, p.4.

²⁸³ OECD, "DAC Peer Review Belgium", Paris, 2005, p.10.

²⁸⁴ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium*. *op.cit.*, p.14 ; OECD, "DAC Peer Review Belgium", Paris, 2005; Joris, G., et al., *op.cit.*

voters²⁸⁵, and 2, a clear lack of debate, flexibility and performance because of strong veto powers which can block all processes of decision-making²⁸⁶.

Foreign policies tend therefore to follow the same direction as the coalition system prevents radical changes, yet the locked system make political parties keen to put their on specific mark on it, which Louis Michel and Karel de Gucht are examples of. Yet, despite the possibilities to formulate a long-term strategy for the relations with Central Africa, given the lack of flexibility in the consociational system and the cemented interest to remain visible in the region, no clear, public strategy for Belgium's bilateral relationship with the Africa region exists today, a fact which provoked frustration with many interviewees.

B. *No More Africa Strategy?*

In the beginning of the 2000's when Louis Michel advertised the new start in the relationship with Central Africa, several documents were produced to guide and direct the reinvestments in the region. One out of five chapters was devoted to Belgium's African policies in 1999's bill on Foreign Policy and in Belgium's programme for its presidency of the European Council one of the sixteen priorities was devoted to a greater involvement in the peace process in the Great Lakes region²⁸⁷. In addition, an

²⁸⁵ De Winter, L., Dumont, P., "Do Belgian Parties undermine the Chain of Democratic Delegation?", *op.cit.*, pp.957-976.

²⁸⁶ Deschouwer, K., *The Politics of Belgium. op.cit.*, p.10

²⁸⁷ Roosens, C., Lanotte, O., "Une 'nouvelle' politique Africaine", *op.cit.*, p.205; Sénat et Chambre de Représentants de Belgique, session 2000-2001, 15 June 2001, "La

extensive Belgian action plan for peace in the African region was published in June 2001, outlining how Belgium could contribute to stability for Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo²⁸⁸. Three country-specific notes were also published at the end of 2002 by the Direction for the Cooperation and Development department which analysed the challenges faced by each of the state and linked the Belgian involvement in the countries to the Millennium goals²⁸⁹. In the government accord in 2003, a paragraph established Central Africa as one of Belgium's absolute priority, but no strategy or analysis was accompanying the declaration²⁹⁰.

After 2003 it is difficult to find any public analysis or strategy for Belgium's involvement in Central Africa. A fact which is deplored by the OECD peer-review report in 2010 which points out that:

“Although the 1999 law on international co-operation stipulates that each priority sector and cross-cutting issue must be backed by a strategy that is updated every four

présidence Belge du Conseil de l'Union européenne (1 juillet -31 décembre), 2-673/2 (Sénat) DOC 50 1155/2 (Chambre).

²⁸⁸ Belgian Government, “Construction de la paix dans la Région des Grands Lacs: Un plan d'action belge”, 27 June 2001, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/construction-de-la-paix-dans-la-r%C3%A9gion-des-grands-lacs-un-plan-daction-belge>, accessed 12 October 2013.

²⁸⁹ Federal Public Services, Foreign Affairs, External Commerce and Cooperation and Development, General Direction of Cooperation and Development, ‘Strategic Notes’ Burundi, Rwanda, Congo, December 2002, (these are three different notes, one for each country).

²⁹⁰ Governmental Declaration and Governmental Accord, ‘Une Belgique Créative et Solidaire’, July 2003.

years, Belgium has not kept to this schedule. Most of its policies date back to 2002 and provide little operational guidance/.../Belgium should develop new strategies for its priority areas that define clear objectives and results and are supported by appropriate implementation tools. It should regularly review them in line with operational good practice”²⁹¹.

Already in 2005, Belgium’s objective of developing a regional strategic approach was noted in the OECD peer review:

“Belgium is aiming to develop and implement a regional strategic approach/.../ In the future, Belgium will benefit from taking a more strategic approach, emphasising greater coherence between the diplomatic, military and economic components of its action and placing its response in a more sub-regional context. The planned updating of the action plan for Central Africa could provide an opportunity for this”²⁹².

Yet, as the 2010 review shows, the planned action plan for Central Africa, which could have provided a comprehensive approach for the three Ds (Defence, Diplomacy and Development), does not exist, which is regretted by interviewees in the field:

²⁹¹ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p.12.

²⁹² OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2005, pp.39-40.

“I do not think that Belgium has a coherent policy towards the states in Central Africa/.../I know that it is sensitive and that certain political parties are against it/.../but we still have to develop some sort of coherence”²⁹³.

A diplomat explains that: “we had started to write a new policy note for Central Africa, but it was put on hold because of the absence of a government”²⁹⁴.

This is confirmed by a High Military Officer who discloses that: “there is no global strategy for Africa. The Foreign Minister Vanackare had started to write one, but because of the political crisis, it was never finished”²⁹⁵.

The same officer explains that the Defence has written a confidential strategic note for the region, but as there was no government (at the time of the interview in 2010), they were waiting to get it approved by the new government. However, three years later, the Defence’s strategic note has still not been given to the government:

“It is logical; our approach needs to work as an extension of Foreign Affairs’ policies”²⁹⁶.

The political crises that Belgium endured between 2007 and 2011 certainly made a heavy impact on the lack of strategy for Central Africa²⁹⁷. In total, Belgium was

²⁹³ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Diplomat ‘Nacer’, Kinshasa, DRC, 23 June 2011.

²⁹⁵ Interview with High Officer ‘Timmy’, 25 November 2010.

²⁹⁶ Interview via Email with Junior Officer ‘Axel’, 13 November 2013.

²⁹⁷ See for example OECD “DAC Peer Review Belgium”, 2010, p.25.

without a government for almost two whole years, which clearly affected the overall functioning of the state. Yet, even at the time of writing (end 2013), there does not seem to exist a strategic note for the region and only three lines of the governmental accord of 2011 declare Belgium's intention of continuing to promote good governance and rule of law in the region²⁹⁸. This should be considered against the fact that Central Africa continues to be a priority in Belgian Foreign Policy and is amongst the five first beneficiaries of Belgian aid, receiving 21 % of the total public aid to development²⁹⁹ as well as the region in which the Belgian defence has its most expansive military collaboration schemes. Internationally, Belgium also remains the link to the region, as the EU counts on Belgium to maintain the African states on the agenda, a fact which is well-known by the Belgians³⁰⁰:

“I am against the ‘Belganisation’ of the European Politics; it is not good for Europe. It is easy for the EU to say: we give that to the Belgians, they know better, but all the countries know that the EU's policy here in Central Africa is just a prolongation of Belgium's policy”³⁰¹.

Yet, for Belgium to maintain its diplomatic window in the region, it is undoubtedly a publicity which is welcome given its discreet presence.

²⁹⁸ Accord de Gouvernement, 1 December 2011.

²⁹⁹ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p.15.

³⁰⁰ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p. 32.

³⁰¹ Interview with Diplomat ‘Niels’, Bujumbura, Burundi, 4 March 2013.

The absence of a strategy also affects the relations with other actors, as some of Belgian partners doubt that the highly abstract and general ‘Notes de Politiques’, will survive the next elections³⁰². The lack of a comprehensive policy has not gone unnoticed in academic circles either, as Klimis article: “Belgian Development and Cooperation and Fragile states: Advocacy for the Adoption of a Specific Strategic Vision”³⁰³ shows, although this particular report concerns the Cooperation and Development Ministry which leads us to the next issue; the collaboration between the individual departments of the 3D approach.

C. Structured Interdepartmental Synergy or Personal Chemistry?

The Belgian political system is intricate and complex, and as a bonus, so is the structure and functioning of the ministries. Confusion regarding the duties of each department has permeated the Belgian structure as far back as the 1841 when three departments were added to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which called for a reform³⁰⁴. The role of the Ministry has since then constantly been challenged and changed, in particular with regards to the newcomer in the 1960’s, Cooperation and Development. In the Copernicus reform in 2000, the latter was integrated into the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, External Commerce and Cooperation and Development. Two Ministers are included in this Public Service: the Minister of

³⁰² OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p.27.

³⁰³ Author’s translation : Klimis, E., “La coopération belge au développement et les Etats fragiles, plaidoyer pour l’adoption d’une vision stratégique spécifique”, Rapport Grapax, n°3, 2007.

³⁰⁴ Coolsaet, R., Voet, A-S., “Belgium”, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Cooperation and Development³⁰⁵. The relationship between them is at times tense, as a High Officer explains:

“The Minister of Foreign Affairs, he has the big hat, but no money, and the other one [the Minister of Cooperation and Development] has the money but not the big title”³⁰⁶.

Although this image no longer may be completely accurate after a number of reforms, the perceived inequality between the two ministries appears to persist.

These departments are nevertheless two out of the three main actors for the relationship with Central Africa, the third one being the Ministry of Defence, and need therefore to work in synergy. One of the recommendations of the Rwanda Commission in 1997 was to install a weekly inter-departmental meeting between the different instances concerned by the Central African region³⁰⁷. The meetings, called ‘Black and White’, gather representatives from the Ministry of Defence, Cooperation and Development, and Foreign Affairs, and include the intelligence service and the police. These reunions aim to assure that relevant information is shared between departments and cabinets in order to prevent malfunctioning and misunderstandings³⁰⁸. As such, they are both part of a preventive organism and a progressive means to enhance inter-departmental collaboration.

³⁰⁵ Royaume de Belgique, Affaires étrangères, Commerce extérieur, et coopération au Développement, Organigramme, available at: <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/>, accessed 5 December 2013.

³⁰⁶ Interview with High Officer ‘Romelu’, Brussels, Belgium, 22 October 2013.

³⁰⁷ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2005, p. 39.

³⁰⁸ Interview with High Officer ‘Timmy’, 25 November 2010.

However, as the number of persons attending the meetings has increased, the open discussions have decreased, as an officer acknowledges:

“we did no longer know with whom we could share the information, so when there were too many people, nobody said anything. After the meeting, small, bilateral groups were formed where the real discussion took place³⁰⁹.

This way of functioning is not unusual for larger meetings between different sections in international organisations such as the Security Council at the UN, or in an EU organ for example. However, in a national setting, where the aim is to produce if not a whole of a government approach so at least an interdepartmental scheme, this appears as an inefficient mode of functioning. The difficulties of creating a coherent and comprehensive mode of working between the three different departments have been well documented by the OECD review, which despite noting an improvement in collaboration between departments, much thank to the modernisation efforts of the Copernicus reform, criticises the lack of a strategic note for the coherence of the internal and external policies, which could reinforce the synergies among the different sectors³¹⁰.

The complications of creating a functioning and lasting cooperation, rather than ad hoc collaborations related to specific projects between the different departments have also

³⁰⁹ Interview with High Officer ‘Romelu’, Brussels, Belgium, 27 November 2013.

³¹⁰ OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p.99.

prevented the establishment of a permanent unit where militaries, diplomats and cooperation personnel could develop the much desired comprehensive approach:

“Then the discussions started and first the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that they wanted to have the unit under their authority, since they were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then, the Cooperation of Development said that it should be with them, because they had the finances and then you had the Defence who said that it should be under their direction as the one who was supposed to head the unit was a military. In short, the unit was never created, although everybody thought it was a brilliant idea”³¹¹.

The absence of such a unit has forced the actors involved to count on ad hoc collaborations when needed for specific projects, yet, good personal relations cannot substitute a coherent framework³¹², which might explain why the successor to FAMIKI, FAMILO, was blocked for over a year, until a new Minister of Cooperation and Development took over the seat and agreed to its continuation³¹³.

* * *

³¹¹ Interview with High Officer ‘Romelu’, Brussels, Belgium, 22 October 2013.

³¹² OECD, “DAC Peer Review Belgium, 2010, p.62.

³¹³ Interview with Junior Officer, ‘Axel’, Brussels, Belgium, 3 December 2013.

The previous sections have analysed Belgium's lack of a comprehensive, 'grand' strategy for the relationship with its African partner countries. In addition, collaborations between the three D's, Defence, Diplomacy and Development, have been examined with an emphasis on the absence of structured and institutionalised cooperation, which has been replaced by personalised ad hoc collaborations.

The lack of a public, coherent strategy for the African Great Lakes region has repercussions both internally, as it impedes long-term planning and a systemic comprehensive approach and externally, as partner countries are uncertain of the continuity of Belgium's different policies and therefore may be hesitant to get involved in collaborations with the former. It also frustrates the people in the field, who despite specific assignments, would like to be able to connect them to the larger picture.

The collaboration between the different departments involved in Central Africa appears in addition to be characterized more by ad hoc projects initiated on the basis of personal contacts than a structured scheme which would have enabled this cooperation to be consistent and long-term.

The lack of strategy, structure and institutionalised collaboration have, as the last few pages have shown, several disadvantages for the efficiency and coherence of Belgium's collaboration with the Great Lakes region. Yet, it is also crucial to point out that this mode of functioning provides advantages such as a large flexibility and diversity of projects. It enables individual actors to initiate projects on a short-term basis which may fill specific needs. These may in turn be followed-up with complementary projects so as to constitute a comprehensive strategy. This is exemplified by the Defence's step-by-step collaboration with the Congolese Defence, whereby three battalions have been formed to finally compose a full brigade in 2014. One battalion at the time, with subsequent evaluations, have constituted the building

bricks. Complementary projects, such as FAMIKI and FAMILO as well as the renovations of military barracks and train-the-trainers education of Congolese engineers who in turn contribute to the construction of the housing, show how the whole idea has been broken down into several pieces, which together can form a comprehensive ensemble. It also avoids Belgium to take any political position or exert any political pressure as the 'bottom-up' approach makes sure that Belgium remains far away from the strategic domain. This obviously also limits its impact on the larger picture, as although small, elite units are needed and welcome by the Congolese government to crush rebels, they do not induce any of the much needed structural reforms in the Congolese Army.

The individual short-term projects, rather than a grand long-term vision, also enable Belgium to secure fast exit-strategies if the relations were to deteriorate.

CHAPTER VII

NO MORE TINTIN IN THE CONGO – CONCLUSION

The title of this study ‘No More Tintin in the Congo’ may appear as provocative. The interpretation is obviously up to readers, however the intention with the title was to suggest, not, as might be presumed, that Belgium no longer is present in Central Africa, but that its presence looks completely different from the time when Tintin was there. The new relationships that have developed between Belgium and its former colonies post-independence are deeply complex and highly unstable, which also are adjectives that characterise Belgium’s policies towards the Central African states.

Belgium as a polity is in itself an intricate constellation, which politically suffers from its divided society just as its society suffers from its divided politics. The heavy bureaucracy, the strong position of the political parties, the complicated administration and the eternal negotiations to form coalition governments are examples of this. Belgium needs constant attention in the shape of different sorts of structural guarantees and concessions to survive both from a political-administrative and a polity perspective. The many political parties and their leaders’ desire to put their own mark on the rigid coalition politics is another sub-consequence of the divided system: ministers are keen to, at least, make their own initiatives visible.

This fragmented system has repercussions on its relations with other states and organizations. It may for example explain Belgium's complete adhesion to the development of a strong European Union, where a small and unstable country can be embedded into a larger unit through which it can exert influence concerted with other small countries³¹⁴. To a certain degree Belgium's polity and political-administrative traits may also explain Belgium's complicated relationships with the countries in the Great Lakes region.

Walking on Eggshells

Most former colonial powers have some sort of delicate relationship to their ex-colonies. Yet, few appear to have such a strong desire to maintain the relationship intact as Belgium. The previous chapters have examined Belgium's interest in keeping the relationships alive. This national interest, which is one of few for Belgium³¹⁵, also complicates Belgium's role in the partnerships with the African states. Belgium is, for natural reasons, exceptionally prudent to avoid neo-colonial connotations in its new relationships³¹⁶, and goes to great extent to avoid any misinterpretation or action which may be interpreted as too intrusive or too decisive. The example of waiting until most international organizations already had issued sanctions before imposing them on Rwanda in 2012 is but one³¹⁷. The

³¹⁴ Although it is questionable whether the EU can be considered stable today.

³¹⁵ De Winter, L., Türsan, "Belgian Presidency 2001", *op.cit.*, p.12.

³¹⁶ Here the exception which confirms the rule may be the example of Karel de Gucht.

³¹⁷ Dusabemungu Ange, "Belgium Refuses to Take Sanctions Against Rwanda", IGIHE, 22 November 2012, available at: <http://en.igihe.com/news/belgium-refuses-to-take-sanctions-against-rwanda.html>, accessed 18 November 2013.

decision to not put any formal conditions on the use of the battalions or the brigades trained in the Congo is another one. Belgium almost exclusively chooses the safe option of no conditions in its relations with its African partners, to avoid any neo-colonial interpretation.

This lack of condition is also evident in the military collaborations, which evoke comments from the interviewees. Whereas one high military officer exclaims that: conditions are good in theory but unrealistic in practice³¹⁸, another high officer clearly regrets the absence of conditions:

“You cannot continue projects without any conditions.
Ok, they are sovereign and we have to respect that,
but then they must also be confronted with their errors
and their promises”³¹⁹.

Yet, both OECD peer review reports state that Belgium’s good reputation in the partner countries, and the long-term relationships, would make it beneficial to develop a more strategic and coherent approach with the national authorities. This could reinforce Belgium’s capacity to tackle questions that go beyond technical issues, to touch upon sensitive themes like corruption or good governance³²⁰.

However, so far, this does not seem to be a risk that Belgium wants to take, as its will to remain the primary expert and partner - for at least the Congo - outweighs

³¹⁸ Interview with High Officer ‘Eden’ Brussels, Belgium, 11 May 2011.

³¹⁹ Interview with High Officer ‘Radja’, Brussels, Belgium, 17 October 2013.

³²⁰ OECD DAC, ‘Peer review’ Belgium, 2005, p. 71 ; OECD DAC, ‘Peer review’ Belgium, 2010, p.120.

any desire to impose conditions. An additional reason for this reluctance may also be found in the lack of a comprehensive strategy for the region, which would enable Belgium to embed conditions in a long-term collaboration, whereas today, given the absence of such a strategy, conditions would be imposed on a one-dimensional project-to-project basis. This would certainly be both more difficult to present for Belgium and harder to accept for the partner country.

To Be or Not to Be: Advantages and Disadvantages with a Regional Strategy

The Belgian government's unwillingness to engage and commit to a long-term, comprehensive strategy appears partly to be based on the risk that the relationship with the Great Lakes region deteriorates rapidly. In such a case, a long-term strategy might impede a rapid exit.

The advantages of formulating at least a medium-term, comprehensive strategy seem however to balance any risks of 'getting stuck' in a complicated context. Firstly, such a strategy would enable the Belgian departments to greatly improve their compatibility, and projects such as FAMIKI, which undeniably must be considered a success, would be based on structural collaboration, rather than good chemistry between key individuals.

Secondly, as the OECD reports pointed out, a strategic and comprehensive approach would enable Belgium to touch upon sensitive subjects and not remain stuck in the technical outskirts, which in the long term, could improve the efficiency of the projects. Here, an example might be that the Belgian Defence would demand the Congolese Defence to respect the time-line for the start of a project, rather than run after different individuals to get it started, or that the Burundian Defence authorities would be asked to promote the importance of the

trainings given by the Belgians rather than undermine it by making the local instructors work double shifts in order to follow them. This would not only improve the efficiency of the projects, but also gain time that could be used to go ahead with the next.

Thirdly, such a medium- or long-term strategy could have the impact of a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense that a long-term engagement secures the relations between the different partners, which in turn may increase the confidence and the trust among them, hence, reducing the risks of deteriorated relations and enabling a more balanced relationship to take over, which finally might ‘normalise’ the relations, a term which Belgium has sought to materialise since the early post-independence period³²¹.

The newly introduced ‘Marshall Plan’, is not such a regional and comprehensive strategy. The initiative has been both hailed and criticised for the will to focus the collaboration on a specific part of the region, rather than all of it. The risk of a balkanisation of the Congo has been raised by Congolese observers, while Belgium appears quite satisfied with taking the credit as the drivers behind the initiative, given their expertise in the region³²². Yet, at times it appears as this

³²¹ See for example : Bucyalimwe, M., “Le ‘Noko’ vu par son ‘neveu’. Une vue Congolaise”, *op.cit.*; Mughendi, N.N., “La Belgique et l’ancienne ‘Afrique belge’ : Une vision congolaise”, *op.cit.*; Rosoux, V-B., Planche, S., “Passé Colonial et Politique Etrangère de la Belgique”, *op.cit.*

³²² See for example : Babanya Kabudi, M., “La Belgique active le plan de la balkanisation de la RDC”, Kongotimes, 7 October 2013, available at: <http://afrique.kongotimes.info/rdc/politique/6709-congo-belgique-active-balkanisation-rdc-plan-marshall-pour-est-pan-balkanisation.html>, accessed 9 December 2013; Belga, “Un ‘plan Marshall’ pour l’est de la RDC mis en place par la Belgique?”, La Libre, 25 September 2013 available at:

expertise remains curiously untouched when launching large, public initiatives like the Marshall Plan. Interviewees explain that it was evident from the beginning that such a plan would evoke frustration and irritation with the Congolese. This shows that some top-down initiatives manage to pass the ‘go’ sign without a sufficient discussion and debate with actors in the field and with the departments that have the expertise. A long-term strategy would not only structure collaboration between the three D’s and prevent internal misunderstandings, but also make sure that Belgium’s initiatives benefit from its expertise in a three-dimensional way.

A Strategy for the Defence

In the section discussing the first brigade training in the Congo, the Belgian Defence learned that more is not necessarily more, and that there is a greater chance of success and visibility if projects are focused and coherent. This lesson has been well integrated in the sense that the projects in all three countries have been focused to a great extent on trainings and education. The coherency of the projects differs depending on country: in Burundi, the projects appear to fill gaps without any overarching approach while in the Congo there is an underlying complementarity between the projects, which however is difficult to discern for

<http://www.lalibre.be/actu/international/un-plan-marshall-pour-l-est-de-la-rdc-mis-en-place-par-la-belgique-5242577e3570bed7db9dbd7c>, accessed 9 December 2013.

external observers³²³. A stronger visibility of this complementarity would undoubtedly benefit the Belgian Defence's reputation.

Yet, there continues to be a lack of a strategic plan and of a long-term vision of what role Belgium and the Belgian Defence wants to play in Central Africa. The Defence rightly points out to the absence of such a grand strategy at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which could serve as the umbrella for the different initiatives. However, until such a document exist, the Defence could seize the opportunities of gaining visibility and efficiency in both Burundi and the Congo by expanding existing projects through the ad-hoc bottom-up approaches that do exist, to develop multilateral approaches with the other two D's. In addition, a reinforcement of the dialogue with the national authorities in the two countries would enhance the opportunity of exerting an influence outside of the technical sphere and provide a more structured, top-down approach. The building blocks, in the shape of individual projects, such as the training of battalions, are easily shattered when military and political objectives clash, whereas a more structured, top-down approach would increase both the efficiency and the sustainability of the Defence's contributions.

The assistance in the re-opening of the Military Academy in Kananga is an example of a top-down project which is likely to have repercussions on several levels. Likewise, the aim of training the command structure of the Belgian trained

³²³ This is for example, not the case with the Dutch SSR initiative in Burundi, which has gained international reputation for its visibility and multidimensional approach, see for example CIGI, Security Sector Reform Monitor, "Burundi", n°4, October, 2010.

brigade in 2014 is an initiative which provides configuration to the previous building blocks (the battalion).

* * *

Tintin is definitely no longer in the Congo. Today the relationships and the collaborations between the Central African countries and Belgium are characterised by mutual respect, although misunderstandings still are common. Belgium, and the Belgian Defence in particular, are by contrast very much present, and the Defence is a popular and trusted partner in the region. The advantages and possibilities of making this relationship a strong and lasting one are numerous and can be seized if Belgium manages to overcome its internal divisions and create a structured, comprehensive and coherent approach.

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