The Burundians’ Perception of the Causes of the Fall of CEPGL

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Abstract

Composed of three member countries, the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries has suffered from a prolonged lethargy since the 1990s. Over four decades of existence, the community has had practical difficulties in fulfilling its missions. Long before his fall, many projects were already executed and others in progress. Our study aims to seek the main causes of its fall through responses to the census using a questionnaire with closed and open questions administered to 158 students from the University of Burundi and the Higher Teacher Training School. The results show that 23.46% believe that the fall is due to insecurity in the sub-region, 13.92% point to the ignorance of political leaders, 17.08% give they opinion about a lack of will for regional integration by political leaders and 15.82% consider that the fall was caused by the lack of financial means on the part of member countries.

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1. Introduction

In Africa, regional organizations remain fragile just as member states are economically fragile. The Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), which has Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo as member countries, is plunged into a deep and prolonged sleep [1] in which certain functions of life seem to be suspended. Created in 1976, the CEPGL had the objective of promoting and intensifying trade and the movement of people and goods, ensuring the security of States and their populations so that no element disturbs order and tranquility on their respective borders, to cooperate closely in the social, economic, commercial, scientific, cultural, political, military, financial, technical, touristic fields, and more specifically in judicial, customs, health, energy, transport and telecommunications matters. From the beginning, achievements have been made, including the establishment of a migration document called "Laisser-passer CEPGL" allowing the inhabitants of the three countries to move freely. In addition, projects were born such as the International Electricity Company of the Great Lakes Countries (SINELAC) in 1984 with its headquarters in Bukavu; the Economic Development Bank of the Great Lakes Countries (BDEGL) with its headquarters in Goma; the Institute of Agronomic and Zootechnical Research (IRAZ), the Energy of the Great Lakes (EGL) with headquarters respectively in Gitega and Bujumbura in Burundi. The Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries has experienced a gradual dysfunction since the 1990s. The Conference of Heads of State and Government no longer meets regularly, the institutions arising from it seem to be dormant and the projects of the said community are almost abandoned. Despite the missions assigned to the community, since the 1990s, insecurity has become widespread in the sub-region. Indeed, the Great Lakes region remains marked by the lack of peace and security following the socio-political crisis, especially since the 1990s, which was followed by generalized conflicts between the Member States. Geopolitically speaking, the heaviness of the regional problem and its international interweavings today widen this space to the Horn of Africa as well as to the various borders of what is agreed to be called "the soft underbelly" of Africa, which is the DRC [2]. Indeed, Burundi has been shaken by a civil war since 1993 without the CEPGL being able to help restore peace. Three months after the presidential elections, the democratically elected President, NDADAYE Melchior, as well as some of his collaborators are assassinated. A large mass of the population was cowardly killed in the countryside and a civil war ensued. Burundi has really suffered. In Rwanda, on April 6, 1994, there was an attack and an indescribable social crisis. The DRC was not spared as rebellions against Burundi and Rwanda were training in eastern DRC where until now eastern DRC is unstable. Where was the CEPGL during these ten years to save the populations? The sub-region has a strong thirst for peace. The problem here, everyone wants to witness the fall and failure of the organization. The negative angle is more aimed at criticizing the situation of poor functioning
instead of focusing on the benefits and achievements already made. To cure a
disease, the diagnosis of the causative agents is necessary. This is why we wanted
to study the causes of this community to finally identify the ways out so that this
community is revitalized, this could lead the population to lasting peace and to the
development of the sub-region.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is a diagnostic analysis work on the state of evolution of the economic
community of the Great Lakes countries. Since the 1990s, it has evolved in
decrescendo. He is interested in the Great Lakes sub-region made up of three
countries including Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC. We targeted higher education
students because they have a high level of understanding of the geopolitics of the
sub-region compared to the population of the countryside. The method is defined
as the set of guiding ideas guiding an investigation [3] and the methods and
techniques used. According to Aktouf [4], it is not enough to know the proper use
of methods and techniques, but it is also necessary to know how to use them at the
right time. This article presents an analysis of the causes of the dysfunction of the
CEPGL. For data collection, the instrument used was the survey questionnaire
which was composed of closed and open questions addressed to the students at
universities. The universities taken are University of Burundi and Burundi Higher
Institute of Education. These students are in the sections of History, Political
Science and International Relations. Our survey population is composed of students
whose age varies from 21 to 32 years. They are chosen because they have a high
level of understanding of the geopolitics of the sub-region. Indeed, in History, they
have courses from the Great Lakes region and in Political Science, courses in
International Relations and Political Science are given to them.

Presentation of the respondents
The sample is made up of students in higher education over the age of 21. The age
group [24-26] is the most represented with 56.87%. But here age does not matter
much; what interests us is the choice of a section of the population that is
intellectually advanced in relation to the great mass of peasants who perhaps have
no ideas about the sub-regional organization, the CEPGL. It is also part of the
educated population who will soon be in the management of public affairs. Among
the respondents, the female sex is not sufficiently represented (21.5%) and all the
respondents are all of Burundian nationality.

3. Results of the study

The causes of the fall of CEPGL are mainly lack of security (23.46%), lack of will
for regional integration (17.08%), lack of financial means (15.82%), ignorance of
political leaders (13.92%) and the dominant nationalism (11.39%).
Figure 1: Causes of the fall of CEPGL.

![Figure 1: Causes of the fall of CEPGL.](image)

Table 1. Level of training they knew the existence of the CEPGL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Frequency (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>93.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>158</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table (Table 1) shows us the level of knowledge of the existence of the CEPGL by the students questioned. In primary school (the first three cycles), we notice that there are no notions concerning regional and sub-regional organizations because this level represents only 5.69%. The majority of respondents claim to have known of the existence of the CEPGL in secondary school (from the 4th cycle of basic school: they represent 93.05% of respondents. We had 1.26% of respondents who say they have known the CEPGL at university level.

My questionnaire has been given to the students in International Relations and Diplomacy section at the University of Burundi (55 students). At University of Burundi, in the section of Political Science, the respondents were about 45 students. At Higher Teachers Training School of Burundi, the student in the History section were about 58.
4. Discussion of the results

The Burundian students who participated in our survey gave their opinions regarding the causes of the fall of the CEPGL. 23.46% of respondents confirmed that the fall of the CEPGL is based on insecurity in the sub-region (Figure 1). Insecurity has affected all member countries of the CEPGL where until now the eastern DRC is in full insecurity. Regarding security, this region of the Great Lakes has been symbolized by insecurity based on violence: ethno-political conflicts, wars, large-scale massacres, rapes and genocide. Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC are experiencing conflicts whose origins lie in the distant and recent past, ideologically charged and intellectually manipulated [5]. Yet the cultures of these peoples are more similar than different [6]. Furthermore, no specific overall structure responsible for conflict prevention and management has been put in place by the Member States. Only the councils of ministers and summits of heads of state in the region meet periodically and consider security issues. It was normally about the security of political regimes and individuals in power sometimes supported from outside. Hence the CEPGL is an institution incapable of dealing with all the problems of the Member States. Thus, for a long time, relations between Kigali and Kinshasa, Kigali and Bujumbura, sometimes Kinshasa and Bujumbura remained tense. The nature of the political problems that the Great Lakes Region has experienced is reflected in the absence of a common vision at the political level of the States making up the Great Lakes Region. The prolonged absence of political consultation between these States was the result of misunderstandings noted in their relations. To this end, the CEPGL sub-region has been described as the epicenter of armed political conflicts, the effects of which have embraced the entire Great Lakes Region. The revitalization of CEPGL should be seen as a decisive step forward in the process of stabilizing the entire Region. In view of the extent of the suffering endured and the suspicion reigning in regions undermined by communal fears, and the impact of the forced displacement from their homes of more than a
million people living in homelessness and insecurity, "it would be vain to claim to spontaneously encounter a feeling of friendship or a forced eagerness on both sides to live together again in harmony"[7]. A modus vivendi between the communities requires above all that a right to security be recognized for each of them. In the most favorable scenario, the return to peace must bring security to the displaced populations who will be able to return to their villages and resume their activities. It should make it possible to remove obstacles to trade and restore the administration in its role of regulator and controller against fraud. The measures to be taken are on the agenda of numerous peace agreements (Kisangani, Nairobi, Goma) and successive United Nations resolutions, in particular that of December 2008, resolution 1856, which renews the mandate to protect civilians, with a new initiative: those of joint civilian protection teams associated with MONUC military contingents. The United Nations Mission for the DRC (MONUC) is the most… deployed in sensitive areas, experts in human rights, child protection, civil affairs and information. The cessation of hostilities, disarmament, mobilization and reintegration (DDR) of armed groups are essential prerequisites. The national program (PNDDR) implemented since December 2003 aims to substantially reduce illegal weapons, reintegrate demobilized combatants either through work of collective interest, or through integration into the army. The beginning of 2009 saw an acceleration of the program with the "accelerated" integration of several hundred rebels or "refractory" within the national armed forces. The return to peace is inseparable from the reform of security systems. The arguments in favor of the creation of a modern and efficient army, police and justice are unavoidable, if only to stop the abuses committed by a troop totaling 140,000 men, poorly trained and poorly supervised, even impoverished. The task is complicated when it is necessary on the one hand to organize and professionalize and on the other to integrate rebels who were enemies and who include former looters. Moreover, the political and technical capacities to carry out a reform are not easily brought together: "It is paradoxical to try to reintegrate individuals into structures which are being reformed, disorganized and penniless and which must in theory undergo a cure of The arguments in favor of a reform of the security systems are certainly numerous and visible, but the political and technical capacities to carry out a reform are at their lowest for reasons which range from the sharing of power to the absence of trained cadres. through security pressure and the prevalence of corruption"[8]. Consequently, the increase in the numbers of the army by the absorption of a fraction of the former rebels in the structures which are being reformed, should be as limited as possible and it will require time and method, which precisely what has been lacking until now, in the Congo as elsewhere [9]. The other principal cause of the fall of CEPGL confirmed by the respondents is the lack of regional integration on the percentage of 17,08%. Regional cooperation is the major post-conflict option. It promotes peace and security by reducing sources of conflict. It makes it possible to reduce suspicions between neighboring countries and therefore to curb military spending. It then makes it possible to launch projects that federate rather than suffer from appetites that divide. The basic ideas are those of the concerted economic and social development of the region, integrating cross-
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The community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), the sleeping beauty, and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (CIRGL), for the moment undermined by inertia, are potential assets for the rebuilding trust as they can provide an institutionalized forum for dialogue. With the CEPGL awakened, its institutions in place, why not go further? Drawing inspiration from other experiences, we can support the idea that a regional cooperation project such as that of the Great Lakes must be based on a pragmatic approach and on the conviction that the creation of production and exchange spaces cannot only be progressive, by adding decisions and concrete actions on points of common interest. The goal is to create non-fraudulent traffic and maximize economies of scale [10]. It involves removing barriers to trade between neighboring countries in order to play on regional specializations, with minimum protectionism, limited to defense against dumping (in this case of Asian products) and support for emerging or resurgent industries.

In a few words, the absence of institutions responsible for the prevention and resolution of both domestic and regional conflicts have been instrumental in the intensification of tensions. The origins of this conflict to be located far back in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history.

Conclusion

To cure a disease, the diagnosis of the causative agents is a necessary condition. In our research work, our results revealed that two main causes are at the origin of the fall of the CEPGL. These are the lack of security in the Great Lakes sub-region (23.46%) as well as the lack of will for regional integration (17.08%) on the part of political leaders. In the institutions of the CEPGL, we have not put in place the one to fight against conflicts. Let us summarize that the absence of institutions responsible for the prevention and resolution of conflicts, both national and regional, has been “a thorn in the feet” of member countries. The origins of this conflict are to be located far back in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history. Although having targeted the major cause of the fall of the CEPGL, the securing of people and their property; the Member States focused their attention more on the economy, not only because it was the economic problems that were more urgent, but also the assumption that economic exchanges and common economic projects are likely to push, not only populations, but also governments to see the world more objectively. This would be a necessary step for certain conflicts to find their solution in economics.

References


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