

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

DRC Monthly Briefing December 2015

December Summary 20 December 2015

Opposition parties come together to form the new Front Citoyen 2016 coalition to prevent President Joseph Kabila (2001-present) from overstaying his constitutional mandate in November 2016. The movement includes figures from all major opposition parties and potential presidential rival Moise Katumbi. Kabila calls on the United Nations (UN) to facilitate the long-awaited dialogue on the November 2016 elections with the opposition, but opposition figures object to the choice of UN Great Lakes special envoy Said Djinnit as moderator. The Virunga Alliance, a government/NGO partnership, commissions its first independently funded hydro generation plant in North Kivu Province. United States-based Howard Buffet fully funded the 13.8MW installation. The security situation in the east of DRC continues to be poor, despite ongoing military operations against rebel groups in the area since March.

New opposition coalition: 'Front Citoyen 2016' forms

Members of **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** opposition parties and civil society groups formed a new opposition coalition on 19 December. They committed to keeping President **Joseph Kabila** (2001-present) from overstaying his constitutional mandate by delaying the November 2016 elections.¹ Kabila has refused to say whether he intends to stand down. The government has missed repeated milestones in the electoral calendar, including not holding municipal elections in October (see *ARC Briefing DRC October 2015*).

The statement, which 27 opposition figures signed, states that the parties intend to combine their "resources, strategies and actions" to create the **Front Citoyen 2016 (FC16)** (citizen's front 2016) coalition.² It set a deadline of 31 January for the government to create and agree a new electoral timetable with the **Commission nationale électorale indépendante (CENI)** (independent national election commission) which will organise the election.³ Other demands include the start of new voter registration on 6 February. There are currently 5 to 8 million unregistered voters who have reached the legal voting age (18) since the 2011 elections. The CENI decided in April that it did not have the time or resources to register them prior to the general election (see *ARC Briefing DRC April 2015*). FC16 set a 'red line' date of 16 February after which it will implement "a programme of non-violent action" to force the government to stick to the electoral timetable.⁴

Key opposition figures who signed the FC16 statement include:

- **Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS)** leader **Félix Tshisekedi**;
- potential presidential candidate and former **Katanga Province** governor **Moise Katumbi**;
- **Union pour la Nation Congolaise (UNC)** leader **Vital Kamerhe**;
- **Eve Bazaïba Masudi** secretary general of the **Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC)**; and
- **Martin Fayulu** president of **l'ECiDé (Engagement pour la Citoyenneté et le Développement)**.^{5 6}

¹ RFI, 19 Dec 2015.

² RFI, 19 Dec 2015.

³ Front Citoyen Statement, 19 Dec 2015.

⁴ Front Citoyen Statement, 19 Dec 2015.

⁵ Front Citoyen Statement, 19 Dec 2015.

⁶ Other signatories are: **Samy Badibanga (UDPS)**, **José Makila (GPLDS)**, **Frank Diombo (MLP)**, **Delly Sessanga (ENVOL)**, **Mbusa Nyamwisi (RDCK-ML)**, **Freddy Matungulu (CNB)**, **Albert Moleka (UDPS)**,

Notably missing from the signatures was the **G7** group of parties that left the ruling **Majorité Présidentielle (MP)** in September (see *ARC Briefing DRC September 2015*). Representative **Olivier Kamitatu** left his signature space on the document blank, telling the media that he needed the agreement of all the parties⁷ to sign.⁸

The new coalition is a merger of the UDPS, the largest opposition party, an existing coalition **Dynamique de l'Opposition** (which consists of the MLC, UNC and l'ECiDé and smaller opposition parties), and Katumbi. If the G7 does join FC16 then it will be the most powerful coalition that Kabila's **Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD)** has faced. It is not currently clear which of the parties within the G7 are hesitant to join FC16 but the group has so far acted unanimously. In previous elections, the UDPS and MLC have split the opposition vote, but political observers hope that a viable presidential alternative – Katumbi – could keep the FC16 coalition together.⁹

*"The opposition could have won more provinces in 2011 if they hadn't spent time on arguing and infighting...if they want to unseat Kabila even with Katumbi they will need to work together."*¹⁰

The FC16 offered membership to any party within the MP that shares its aims of a peaceful transition next year.¹¹ Members of the ruling coalition also appear concerned at the electoral timetable slipping. Some are considering new ways to ensure Kabila leaves power peacefully. Majorité Présidentielle member of parliament, and publisher of daily newspaper **La Potentielle, Modeste Mutinga**, tabled a bill that offers greater immunity from prosecution for former heads of state on 16 December.¹² The bill would extend a general immunity clause in the constitution to cover any common law violations while in office. It also increases the presidential pension and grants state funding for bodyguards and other security for former heads of state.¹³ It would not offer immunity from war crimes or crimes against humanity, and would only be valid if an outgoing head of state agreed to step down in advance of the election.¹⁴ According to Mutinga,

*"Impending loss of power awakens an instinct for the conservation of power by any illegal means and constitutional chicanery which this bill will assuage."*¹⁵

However, according to sources within the national assembly, the bill is unlikely to pass.¹⁶

...as Kabila approaches the UN to facilitate electoral dialogue

Kabila has informally approached the **United Nations (UN)** to facilitate a long-promised dialogue with opposition parties on the 2016 elections.¹⁷ The presidency issued an official bulletin on 28 November announcing a dialogue between the MP and opposition parties. Currently only the UDPS

Gilbert Kiakwama (CDC), Jean Claude Katende (ASADHO), Jonas Tshiombela (NSCC), Rostin Manketa (VSV), Francois Banza Ngoy (Friends of Nelson Mandela), Paul Nsapu (League des Electreurs), Micheline Mwendike Kamate (LUCHA), Isloketchi Anzuluni (FILIMBI), Mike Mukeyayi (C-NEWS), Jean-Jacques Wondo (DESC-Wondo), Vuenba Jellate (OIPCK), Edo Kasomgo (Diaspora IDSK), Luc Nkuzula, Sakomizi Kolendo, and Ntuali Londondo.

⁷ G7 members are: **Mouvement Social pour le Renouveau (MSR); Alliance pour le Renouveau du Congo (ARC); Parti Démocrate Chrétien (PDC); Union Nationale des Démocrates Fédéralistes (UNADEF); Union Nationale des Fédéralistes du Congo (UNAFEC); Mouvement Solidarité pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MSDD); and Avenir du Congo (ACO).**

⁸ RFI, 19 Dec 2015.

⁹ Source, DRC political analyst, London

¹⁰ Source, DRC political analyst, London

¹¹ Front Citoyen Statement, 19 Dec 2015.

¹² La Potentielle, 16 Dec 2015.

¹³ La Potentielle, 16 Dec 2015.

¹⁴ La Potentielle, 16 Dec 2015.

¹⁵ Mutinga quoted in Reuters, 16 Dec 2015.

¹⁶ Source, national assembly member, Kinshasa

¹⁷ Reuters, 28 Nov 2015.

and some minor opposition parties have expressed an interest in the dialogue (see *ARC Briefing DRC November 2015*). The bulletin said that the government will arrange for international arbitration from the UN. It also described the primary topics of discussion: the electoral register, election timetable, security, election finances and the role of external partners.¹⁸

The president's offer to the UN remains vague. He called for international arbitration to "offer its good offices in the event of major difficulties" which could leave the UN marginalised from the process.¹⁹ There is also a matter of who the facilitator will be. The government reportedly asked for one of: **Senegalese** diplomat **Moustapha Niasse**; former UN secretary general **Kofi Annan**; president of **Angola**, **José Eduardo dos Santos** (1979-present); and UN special envoy for the **Great Lakes** region, **Said Djinnit**.²⁰ Kabila reportedly has a preference for Djinnit, an **Algerian** diplomat, but the UDPS sees him as a pro-Kabila figure.²¹ Sources in DRC say that the dialogue is an opportunity for the UN to exercise its mandated role of ensuring smooth electoral transitions:

*"On the one hand this could be the legitimacy that the UN mission has desired for years...but Djinnit needs to be careful that he doesn't end up legitimising Kabila's attempts to extend his time in office."*²²

Virunga Alliance commissions first new power project

The **Virunga Alliance** has completed its first hydro-electric power generation plant in **North Kivu Province**.²³ This is the first of at least three hydro projects that the NGO/government partnership hopes to complete in the province. The new 13.8 megawatt (MW) hydro-electric generation plant in **Rutshuru**, North Kivu Province, came online this month. **United States (US)**-based philanthropist **Howard Buffet** privately funded the development at a cost of \$19.8m, through his **Howard G Buffet Foundation**.²⁴ Buffet is the son of US billionaire **Warren Buffet**.²⁵ Kabila commissioned the power plant on 16 December.²⁶ The power plant will provide electricity to the remote territory, and North Kivu governor **Julien Paluku** praised its "lasting impact on the productivity" of the province.²⁷

The alliance is a partnership between the DRC's parks authority, the **Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN)**, and **United Kingdom (UK)**-based charity, the **Virunga Foundation**.²⁸ The alliance brought Buffet on board to fund the projects and he has pledged a further \$39m towards power generation projects in North Kivu.²⁹ It attempts to attract a further \$166m in investment in power and other infrastructure projects from 2015-2022.³⁰ So far, the **European Union (EU)** and the government of **Belgium** have expressed an interest in supplying finance.³¹

The government announced on 2 December that it hopes to start building the **Inga 3** dam in late 2016 or early 2017.³² The government will develop the 4.8 gigawatts (GW) power project in partnership with **South Africa** in return for 2.5GW of power from the dam.³³ According to prime minister **Augustin Matata Ponyo**, the government is in the final stages of choosing contractors to build the

¹⁸ Radio Okapi, 20 Dec 2015.

¹⁹ CRG, 8 Dec 2015.

²⁰ CRG, 8 Dec 2015.

²¹ CRG, 8 Dec 2015.

²² Source, senior Congo commentator, Goma

²³ Radio Okapi, 16 Dec 2015.

²⁴ Radio Okapi, 16 Dec 2015.

²⁵ Reuters, 16 Dec 2015.

²⁶ Radio Okapi, 16 Dec 2015.

²⁷ Reuters, 16 Dec 2015.

²⁸ Virunga Alliance website, 2015.

²⁹ Radio Okapi, 16 Dec 2015.

³⁰ Virunga Alliance website, 2015.

³¹ Reuters, 16 Dec 2015.

³² Radio Okapi, 2 Dec 2015.

³³ McKinsey, 17 Feb 2015.

dam.³⁴ However, the dam will take an estimated 10 years to reach full generation capacity.³⁵ The **Grand Inga** project is a 40GW hydro project that started in the 1970s, the last phase to reach completion was **Inga 2** in 1982.

Poor power provision is a major obstacle to DRC's economic development. National power utility, **Société Nationale d'Electricité (SNEL)** is only able to meet a fraction of demand. The **Inga 1** and **Inga 2** hydro plants, DRC's largest installed power facilities, together produce less than 600 MW.³⁶ This is 34% of their installed capacity of 1,775 MW and 80% of the 800MW required to power capital city **Kinshasa**.³⁷ The government has worked to upgrade both dams for the last 10 years.³⁸ An estimated 63 million of DRC's 70 million population live without reliable electricity supply.³⁹ The lack of power also hurts DRC's crucial mining sector, which has to either develop its own generation plants or contend with regular power outages.⁴⁰ DRC has the potential to fulfill its electricity demand. It has an estimated 170GW of untapped hydro generation, nearly 50% of the generation potential of the continent.⁴¹

A year of nothing: stalled progress against rebel groups in eastern DRC

The operations of the **Forces Armées de la RDC (FARDC)** against the **Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)** have not produced any significant gains in 2015.⁴² The FARDC started the operation against the **Rwandan Hutu** militia in March 2015, without the support of the **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en RDCongo (MONUSCO) Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)** which is based in the region (see *ARC Briefing DRC March 2015*) The security situation has not improved, according to sources based in the region:

*"Rebels still operate with impunity, half the time you can't tell if they are FARDC, FDLR or any other force until they start shooting...it is still very unsafe here, especially around Beni."*⁴³

The **Ugandan** anti-government insurgency, the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)**, currently poses the greatest security risk. Its attacks in the Beni region have killed an estimated 500 people since October 2014.⁴⁴ The ADF is growing increasingly bold. It attacked FIB bases in the city of **Eringeti** on 30 November killing 30 people.⁴⁵ The FIB responded by launching helicopter gunship attacks against ADF positions in the hills around Beni on 1 December.⁴⁶ Sources in the region believe that the central government has no interest in taking on the rebel groups. They argue that this is either due to anti-Rwanda and Uganda sentiment (as both groups are antagonistic to those respective governments) or because they profit from the illegal mining and smuggling activities that finance the rebels.⁴⁷

*"If they wanted to get rid of the FLDR or ADF they could drive them over the border like they did with M23 [a Rwanda-backed rebel group that the FARDC and FIB defeated in 2013]."*⁴⁸

While the FARDC is either unwilling or unable to act against the major rebel groups, and the UN forces are sidelined, the security environment is becoming more complex. The **Congo Research Group (CRG)** reported that the number of rebel groups operating in North Kivu and **South Kivu** provinces

³⁴Radio Okapi, 2 Dec 2015.

³⁵ Radio Okapi, 2 Dec 2015.

³⁶ 30 Rivers, 13 Apr 2015.

³⁷ 30 Rivers, 13 Apr 2015.

³⁸ 30 Rivers, 13 Apr 2015.

³⁹ 30 Rivers, 13 Apr 2015.

⁴⁰ Reuters, 16 Dec 2015.

⁴¹ McKinsey, 17 Feb 2015.

⁴² CRG, 30 Nov 2015.

⁴³ Source, anti-conflict NGO, Goma

⁴⁴ Reuters, 3 Dec 2015.

⁴⁵ Reuters, 1 Dec 2015.

⁴⁶ Reuters, 1 Dec 2015.

⁴⁷ Source, anti-conflict NGO, Goma

⁴⁸ Source, anti-conflict NGO, Goma

has increased to 69 in 2015, up from 23 in 2008.⁴⁹ This is due to a number of splits within more established groups, and many have only a few hundred fighters.⁵⁰ However, according to the CRG report:

“The proliferation of groups shows the fundamental failure of the government to offer a better alternative to plunder and looting to members of rebel groups.”⁵¹

Implications

The FC16 coalition is one more in a long series of anti-Kabila coalitions that the opposition has formed over the last ten years. Most of them have ended up splitting as the interests of the MLC and UDPS have diverged. FC16 could be different for two reasons. First, both the UDPS and MLC are without their longstanding leaders. **Etienne Tshisekedi** of the UDPS is in hospital in **Brussels** (Belgium), and unlikely to return.⁵² **Jean-Pierre Bemba** of the MLC is standing trial for war crimes in **The Hague**. The two old leaders had a poor relationship. Tshisekedi’s son and Masudi, the new MLC secretary general, are already cooperating more than the previous generation. Second, the movement has a single presidential figure to back – Katumbi. Katumbi is popular, has the backing of the crucial G7 group, and doesn’t come from one of the major opposition camps. If FC16 moves from an anti-government coalition into an electoral coalition then the opposition stands a better chance than in 2006 or 2011 of winning an election.

However, Kabila will work to split the coalition. The announcement of a UN moderated dialogue has already separated the UDPS from the rest of FC16 as it is the only party willing to come to the table. The last-minute announcement of the dialogue fits into a pattern where Kabila acts just as the opposition against him seems certain. The president can now use the dialogue to push the electoral timetable back further. It looks less and less likely that elections will happen in November 2016.

The NGO sector is stepping in to fill the gap on power generation. The Virunga Alliance’s projects will deliver more new power to the under-developed North Kivu Province than the government has done since 2001. The state’s focus on mega-projects like Inga 3 leads to years of delay as the country lacks the infrastructure to support the construction of the project. In order to improve the power situation the country needs more independent generation projects and they need to be larger than 14MW.

The FARDC promised action and results against the FDLR in March. The mobilisation came after a year-long amnesty process stalled. Unfortunately the lack of tangible progress against the FDLR, which is highly entrenched in local communities, comes as no surprise. The security situation in eastern DRC will not improve until the MONUSCO forces and FARDC cooperate with full government backing. With an election next year the government will not put further funds towards a major operation – the security risk remains.

⁴⁹ CRG, 30 Nov 2015.

⁵⁰ CRG, 30 Nov 2015.

⁵¹ CRG, 30 Nov 2015.

⁵² Jeune Afrique, 1 Dec 2015.

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Please contact us by email info@africariskconsulting.com or call + 44 (0) 20 7078 4080

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