

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### DRC Monthly Briefing August 2022

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#### DRC Summary 19 August 2022

*President of the opposition party, Mouvement lumumbiste progressiste (MLP), Franck Diongo, calls on citizens to reject the new electronic voting system to be used in the scheduled December 2023 presidential elections, stating it is a way for President Felix Tshisekedi to “cheat” his way to victory. Tshisekedi launches licensing round for 28 oil and three gas blocks. It fails to draw the attention of oil and gas majors because of the ecological, security and logistical problems. A United Nations Group of Experts claims “solid evidence” of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) fighting alongside the M23 rebel group in eastern DRC. The United States Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, visits as part of a three-nation Africa tour. Blinken highlights the depth and importance of relations between the two countries and advocates closer links. The ruling Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social youth wing protests against United Nations peacekeeping mission Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO) resulting in violent clashes in Goma and Butembo.*

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#### Election build-up heats up

President of the opposition party, **Mouvement lumumbiste progressiste (MLP)**, **Franck Diongo**, has called on citizens to reject the new electronic voting system to be used in the scheduled December 2023 presidential elections, stating it is a way for President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2019-present) to “cheat” his way to victory.<sup>1</sup> Diongo, who initially joined the **Union sacrée de la nation (USN)** (sacred union) coalition under Tshisekedi also announced that he would be leaving the USN, undertaking to fiercely fight Tshisekedi in the next election, who he believes poses a threat to democracy in DRC.<sup>2</sup>

Other notable candidates in the election include former prime minister **Augustin Matata Ponyo** and businessman and lawmaker, **Martin Fayul**. Former president **Joseph Kabila** (2001-2019) has not announced his candidacy, but it is highly anticipated he will be running.<sup>3</sup>

**Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI)** (independent national electoral commission) is also working to implement its electoral roadmap ahead of the election, a spotlighted topic during the high-profile visit of **United States (US)** secretary of state, **Anthony Blinken** to DRC (see below). The US pledged \$23m to the support the organisation of the elections on the side lines of Blinken’s visit.<sup>4</sup> A further \$10m will be released in August 2023 to promote political participation and transparency in the 2023 presidential elections.<sup>5</sup> A statement from the US state department read:

*“This donation aims to support the elections in the DRC, with the aim of strengthening transparency and the proper functioning of the electoral body, improving the knowledge of citizens on civic and electoral rights, enabling the population (including women and young people) to participate widely in elections, also to help marginalized communities to understand and participate in political processes.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Radio Okapi, 21 Jul 2022

<sup>2</sup> Radio Okapi, 21 Jul 2022

<sup>3</sup> The Africa Report, 18 Jul 2022

<sup>4</sup> Actualite, 10 Aug 2022

<sup>5</sup> Radio Okapi, 10 Aug 2022

<sup>6</sup> Actualite, 10 Aug 2022

In February the provincial elections were postponed due to a lack of funding, raising concerns of funding issues ahead of the 2023 presidential election (*see ARC Briefing March 2022*). The formal budget for the presidential elections has not been announced yet, making it unclear how far the \$23m donation from the US will go. The introduction of the electronic voting system also presents logistical challenges, transporting equipment into remote areas of the country and especially into the provinces of **North Kivu** and **Ituri**, which remain under a state of siege meant to combat the ongoing violence and insecurity being peddled by rebel groups. CENI has not yet addressed how it will work around this issue.

Ensuring free, fair, and credible elections will prove to citizens and the international community that the country is on a path to true democracy, marking a departure from the years of oppression and irregularities seen under former president Kabila.

### Oil and gas licensing rights launched

President Tshisekedi's hopes that **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** will become a significant African fossil fuel producer are dampened as the launch of a licensing round for 27 oil blocks and three gas blocks generates little interest from major oil companies.

Currently, hydrocarbons contribute 6% to DRC's national revenue with the Coastal Basin in **Kongo Central** province as the only area under production, producing a modest 8m barrels of oil per year.<sup>7</sup> The government estimates that this could increase to 40% should the new deposits be developed. Tshisekedi's aim is for DRC to produce 200,000 barrels of oil per day (up from current production of 25,000 per day.). If successful, DRC could earn approximately \$32 billion a year in hydrocarbons revenue, more than half of its current gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>8</sup>

The involvement of oil and gas majors in the bidding process is uncertain.<sup>9</sup> Analysts have highlighted that ecological impacts, regulatory uncertainty, logistical issues in moving equipment in highly remote areas, and the ongoing insecurity a result of the more than 120 armed groups that operate in DRC, makes DRC a hostile environment for oil majors.

The oil blocks are distributed between the coastal basin of **Kongo Central** province, **Cuvette Centrale**, **Lake Tanganyika**, and **Lake Albert**. The gas blocks are on **Lake Kivu (province, region?)**.<sup>10</sup> The launch, attended by several local companies and **French** oil and gas giant, **TotalEnergies** who said they will not be bidding, gave Tshisekedi an opportunity to address why he feels the tenders are important now:

*"This is in a context where fossil fuels, including crude oil and gas are at the centre of global issues of peace and stability because of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict."<sup>11</sup>*

The allocation period for the oil blocks, which hold an estimated 22 billion barrels of oil, is six months. The allocation period for the gas blocks said to hold 66 billion cubic metres of gas, is three months.

The licence round has drawn fierce opposition and criticism from environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including the **Netherland**-headquartered **Greenpeace**.<sup>12</sup> Activists from **Greenpeace Africa** presented Tshisekedi a petition signed by 100,000 people on 25 July, after sending a letter to oil and gas companies on 19 July warning them against participating in the tender process.

<sup>7</sup> Congo Independent, 28 Jul 2022

<sup>8</sup> New York Times, 24 Jul 2022

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, 28 Jul 2022

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, 19 Jul 2022

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, 28 Jul 2022

<sup>12</sup> Congo Independent, 28 Jul 2022

Greenpeace claims 12 of the oil blocks are in protected areas, including four that cover peatlands which the organisation's research states stores 5.8 billion tons of carbon, equivalent to more than 15% of global energy-related CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Two of the oil blocks also overlap with the **Virunga National Park**, which borders **Rwanda** and **Uganda**. The park is home to endangered mountain gorillas and is an important tourism revenue source for Rwanda and Uganda. Tshisekedi, during the launch event, referred to modern drilling methods and tight regulations in place that would help minimise the ecological impact.

Tshisekedi has denied that the bidding round reneges on the commitment he made at the 26th **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)**, the global climate summit in **Scotland** in November 2021 to protect the rainforest of the **Congo Basin**, the second largest rainforest in the world.<sup>14</sup> Tshisekedi's commitment then generated international pledges of \$500m to support Congo to protect the rainforest. Tshisekedi said:

*"These invitations to tender in no way constitute a renunciation of commitments made internationally. I reassure international partners of my government's determination to carry out mining and exploration work using tools that protect the environment, ecosystems and the ecological balance. All works on the negative impact on the environment will be carried out with an exhaustive study on the environment with a view to minimizing the impacts. These studies will be examined and approved by the ministry of the environment before the work."*

Hydrocarbons minister, **Didier Budimbu Ntubuanga**'s response to the Greenpeace petition was to highlight Congolese people's needs:

*"I think that 100,000 signatures against 100 million inhabitants, the choice is clear. The option we have taken is to be able to improve the daily life of the Congolese through its economy..."<sup>15</sup>*

Ntubuanga rejected claims that oil and gas development would not have a trickledown effect. Ntubuanga is said to have consulted other oil producing in Africa, including **Nigeria**, **Angola**, and **Equatorial Guinea** on how they have handled oil wealth.

ARC analysts note sources note that none of these countries is considered a good example to follow, with their populations reaping minimal, if any, benefits from their country's oil wealth.<sup>16</sup>

A DRC and commodities analyst with long-standing experience of DRC told **ARC Briefing**:

*"Firstly, DRC has a poor reputation as an investment destination, - mining companies have all faced repeated expropriation of their assets by previous DRC governments. There is not too much distance between old and new with Tshisekedi to give comfort to investors. Secondly, there is real opacity over the ownership of the oil blocks. Many of the blocks under auction are likely to have hidden owners from either the current regime or Joseph Kabila's close allies and family. Sanctioned businessman, **Dan Gertler**'s presence at the launch of the oil licencing round raises doubts about Tshisekedi's commitment to anti-corruption. Finally, the global transition is real. Oil majors will struggle to raise international financing for fossil fuel projects - especially in DRC's pristine rain forest or areas of environmental interests. The lack of interest may mean that DRC is too late for these blocks to be developed. None of the major oil companies with the deep pockets to do it want to do it with their own funds and nor do they want to face the likes of Greenpeace activists in their own country headquarters."*

<sup>13</sup> Reuters, 28 Jul 2022

<sup>14</sup> New York Times, 24 Jul 2022

<sup>15</sup> Congo Independent, 28 Jul 2022

<sup>16</sup> ARC DRC Analyst

## Dan Gertler, neither down nor out

Controversial, sanctioned business man, Dan Gertler was present at the launch highlighting his continued involvement in DRC politics and business. The Israeli businessman - against whom US President **Joseph Biden** (2021-present) restored sanctions,<sup>17</sup> signed an agreement with the DRC government allegedly restoring Gertler's **Ventura Group's** mining and oil assets worth more than \$2 billion (see *ARC Briefing DRC Mar 2022*) to the government. Part of the deal involved Gertler giving up two of the blocks near **Lake Albert**, now under auction.

The **US Treasury** accuses Gertler of using his close friendship with former president **Joseph Kabila** (2001-2019) to gain favourable access to mining contracts and sales in the DRC. According to the Treasury, the DRC lost up to \$1.36 billion in revenue between 2010 and 2012.

## United Nations finds proof of Rwanda helping M23 rebel group

A UN **Security Council** experts provided a 131-report to the security council in June has increased tensions in the region. The report stated they found "*solid evidence*" of the official Rwandan army, the **Rwandan Defence Force (RDF)** fighting alongside the **M23** rebel group in eastern DRC, a source of regional tensions in recent months. The reports existence has since been made public, however, remains unpublished. The DRC government asked the UN Security Council to formally condemn the actions of Rwanda in DRC and insist on the withdrawal of all M23 rebels from eastern DRC.<sup>18</sup> Rwanda has said it will not comment on an "*unpublished*" and "*unverified*" report.<sup>19</sup>

Rwanda has previously denied these accusations, as has M23 (see *ARC Briefing DRC June & July 2022*).<sup>20</sup> The report also has evidence that the DRC's official armed forces, **Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** has asked anti-Rwandan group, **Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)** to help fight the M23 rebels and other rebel groups. Rwanda has long accused DRC of supporting the FDLR but for the reasons of destabilising Rwanda.

A DRC analyst who has read the UN report has told **ARC Briefing** that the evidence confirmed a deal was struck between the FARDC and FDLR, with FARDC to provide weapons and other equipment to FDLR in return for assistance in fighting rebels, not destabilising the Rwandan government. The government struck a similar deal with approximately four other rebel groups as part of the **Nairobi Process** peace talks in late April (see *ARC Briefing May 2022*).

The UN report alleges the RDF conducted operations with the M23 in November 2021 and July 2022 against the DRC armed forces, **Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo (FARDC)**. The report contains photographic evidence of the RDF in an M23 camp, drone footage of soldiers marching near the Rwandan border and other videos of M23 rebels wearing uniforms similar to those of the RDF.<sup>21</sup> The report further states that the RDF was directly involved in the attack on the border town **Bunagana** in June, which M23 subsequently took control of. The town has been occupied for 60 days, causing thousands of residents to flee to neighbouring Uganda.<sup>22</sup>

The report's publication has had a limited impact on DRC and Rwanda. Rwanda has denied the allegations and DRC has not taken any action other than asking the security council to condemn Rwanda's actions. The security council has not responded. If the international community takes no

<sup>17</sup> Al Jazeera, 6 Dec 2021

<sup>18</sup> Congo Independent, 5 Aug 2022

<sup>19</sup> Reuters, 4 Aug 2022

<sup>20</sup> Reuters, 4 Aug 2022

<sup>21</sup> Reuters, 4 Aug 2022

<sup>22</sup> Reuters, 4 Aug 2022

<sup>22</sup> Congo Independent, 13 Aug 2022

official action against Rwanda, tensions between Rwanda and DRC will increase unchecked and violence in eastern DRC will remain unaddressed.

### US Secretary of State visits Kinshasa

US secretary of state, **Anthony Blinken**, led a high-profile visit to the DRC assuring the US' influence in DRC and addressing how the US' **Sub-Saharan Africa** strategy involves the DRC. The US and DRC have greatly strengthened ties since President Tshisekedi came into power, with the focus shifting away from the relationship with China under former president Kabila. The US has also been actively involved in sanction individuals such as Dan Gertler, and **Alain Goetz** (see *ARC Briefing April 2022*) who have allegedly committed crimes in DRC, again expressing their relationship.

The visit centred on issues including security, the economy, the upcoming 2023 presidential elections and environmental issues. Blinken specifically raised the UN report, reforms in DRC's mining sector and US' concern over DRC's the impact of the oil and gas round on rainforest and wetland areas.<sup>23</sup> These issues fall within the four objectives of the US' new strategy to toward Sub-Saharan Africa, published in August. The four objectives include:

- Foster openness and open societies
- Deliver democratic and security Dividends
- Advance pandemic recovery and economic opportunity
- Support conservation, climate adaptation, and a just energy transition<sup>24</sup>

Blinken's trip coincided with the UN report's release about which<sup>25</sup> Blinken said the US is "very concerned" and called on all parties to halt support for M23 and other rebel groups active in DRC.<sup>26</sup>

Blinken met Tshisekedi to discuss the ongoing violence in eastern DRC and it formed a large part of his discussions with Rwandan President **Paul Kagame** (2000-present)<sup>27</sup> during his subsequent visit to Rwanda. Both presidents reportedly agreed to meet and discuss violence in eastern DRC.<sup>28</sup>

The visit also came two weeks after an Africa tour by **Russian** foreign affairs minister, **Sergei Lavrov**, to **Egypt, Ethiopia, Republic of Congo, and Uganda**. Lavrov's visit aimed to restore Russia's influence on the continent, seek support for its invasion of Ukraine and to sell mercenary support and arms to counter insurgencies and terrorism. Lavrov denied that Russia was to blame for Africa's food insecurity crisis. DRC has not followed neighbouring countries in seeking Russian support.

Blinken's deputy for the environment, **José Fernandez**, accompanied Blinken, and raised security issues with mines minister, **Antoinette N'Samba Kalambayi** and a contract between DRC and **Zambia** to produce electric batteries for possible export to the US.<sup>29</sup> The project, however, falls under the industry ministry and Kalambayi could not speak to specifics other than the cobalt and lithium minerals used in the project. Kalambayi did use the opportunity to invite US businessmen to invest in DRC's mineral sector while asking for increased support in the management of mines.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Reuters, 9 Aug 2022

<sup>24</sup> US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa, August 2022

<sup>25</sup> Reuters, 9 Aug 2022

<sup>26</sup> Radio Okapi, 10 Aug 2022

<sup>27</sup> Reuters, 9 Aug 2022

<sup>28</sup> Reuters, 11 Aug 2022

<sup>29</sup> ACP Congo, 14 Aug 2022

<sup>30</sup> ACP Congo, 14 Aug 2022

## Violence erupts between civilians and peacekeepers

Violent clashes erupted between the UN peacekeeping mission **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)** following protests led by the youth wing of the ruling party against the presence of the mission.

On 25 July, anti-MONUSCO protests erupted in **Goma** before spreading to **Butembo** on 26 July. Those protesting claimed that MONUSCO has failed at its mission of protecting civilians against violence from rebel groups.<sup>31</sup> By 26 July, three MONUSCO peacekeepers had been killed and at least 12 civilians. Protestors also set fire to UN buildings, throwing rocks and petrol bombs, and stormed houses of UN workers, forcing the UN to relocate its staff to temporary camps. The protests are reported to have been led by the youth wing of the ruling **Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS)**.<sup>32</sup> The UN and US both condemned the violence.

On 31 July, MONUSCO opened fire at the **Kasindi** DRC-Uganda border post, killing two people and injuring 15 others.<sup>33</sup> No explanation was given as to why MONUSCO opened fire. Bintou Keita, special representative of the UN in DRC addressed the event stating that the perpetrators had been arrested pending the conclusion of an investigation into the events in collaboration with DRC's authorities.<sup>34</sup>

Following the violence, the government announced on 2 August it would re-evaluate the withdrawal plan of MONUSCO.<sup>35</sup> MONUSCO welcomed the decision and said it is ready to support the decision made by the government. On 3 August, it also reported that the Congolese government had asked the spokesman of MONUSCO, **Mathias Gillmann**, to leave DRC, stating he had stoked tensions during the protests.<sup>36</sup> Gillmann, in an interview with the **French** news outlet, **RFI**, stated that MONUSCO did not have the means to defeat M23, further upsetting the protestors. MONUSCO is set to be in DRC for at least another two years, however, following the government's announcement it is likely they will leave earlier.

### Planner

20 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of peacekeeping mission **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)**;  
2023 **(DRC)** Scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections

### Chronology

18 Aug 2022 **Ituri & North Kivu (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** extends the state of siege in the provinces of **North Kivu** and **Ituri**  
17 – 18 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** hosts the 42<sup>nd</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)**, which he will chair for the 2022-2023 financial year;

<sup>31</sup> Reuters, 27 Jul 2022

<sup>32</sup> Reuters, 27 Jul 2022

<sup>33</sup> Reuters, 31 Jul 2022

<sup>34</sup> Reuters, 31 Jul 2022

<sup>35</sup> Reuters, 2 Aug 2022

<sup>36</sup> Radio Okapi, 3 Aug 2022

15 Aug 2022 **Uvira (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. The **Burundian Defence Force** officially enters **DRC** as part of the deployment by **East African Community (EAC)** members to assist in stabilising eastern **DRC**;

15 Aug 2022 **Itrui (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. Two **Chinese** nationals, taken hostage from the **Bwanga** mine, by **Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO)** militia, are released to the Congolese military authorities;

14 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. **Germany** donates \$55m for the protection and conservation of biodiversity in six protected areas across **DRC**;

10 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *VoA*. **United States** secretary of state **Antony Blinken** encourages the **DRC** to have “*free, fair, and on-time elections*” while expressing concern over the detention of an opposition leader arrested soon after Blinken arrived in the country;

10 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. Judicial sources say former head of President **Felix Tshisekedi**'s party, **Jean-Marc Kabund**, who recently joined the opposition, has been arrested on charges of slandering the head of state;

9 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *VoA*. **United States** secretary of state **Antony Blinken** arrives in **DRC** to raise concerns that tensions with neighbouring **Rwanda** could spread instability in the region;

9 Aug 2022 **Beni (DRC)** *Reuters*. Suspected **Islamist** militant group frees over 800 prisoners from a jail in eastern **DRC**, killing five police officers in the process;

4 Aug 2022 **Goma (DRC)** *AFP*. **United Nations** experts say they have uncovered “*hard*” evidence that the **Rwandan** army has intervened in the eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** in recent months, both directly and in support of armed groups;

3 Aug 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. Government asks the **United Nations** to expel its spokesman in the **DRC**, **Mathias Gillmann**, saying his presence is “*not likely to foster a climate of mutual trust and serenity*”;

26 Jul 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Congo Independent*. **Gaston Dyndo Zabondo**, a close collaborator of former president **Étienne Tshisekedi** (father of current president **Felix Tshisekedi**) announces his candidacy for the 2023 presidential elections;

25 Jul 2022 **Goma (DRC)** *Africanews*. Protesters storm **United Nations** base in **Goma** demanding the departure of peacekeepers from the region;

23 Jul 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *The Guardian*. Hydrocarbons minister **Didier Budimbu** announces that the **DRC** will auction oil and gas permits for two sites that overlap with **Virunga National Park**, a critically endangered gorilla habitat and the world's largest tropical peatlands;

21 Jul 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. **Franck Diongo**, president of the **Mouvement Lumumbiste progressive (MLP)** political party announces his candidacy for the 2023 presidential election;

20 Jul 2022 **Tanganyika (Tanzania)** *Radio Okapi*. Transport minister, **Cherubin Okende**, announces plans to strengthen cooperation with **Tanzania** in the transport sector, mainly

through the rehabilitation of the **Kalemie-Lubumbashi** railway and **Kalemie** and **Moba** ports;

19 Jul 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. Foreign trade minister, **Jean-Lucien Bussa** announces the abolition of import/export taxes;

18 Jul 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. Hydrocarbons ministry says **DRC** will offer 27 oil blocks and three gas blocks, nearly double as many as previously planned, in a licensing round next week;

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