

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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DRC Summary 20 October 2023

Ruling coalition Union Sacrée de la Nation (USN) endorses President Félix Tshisekedi (2019-present) on 1 October to be its flagbearer in the upcoming 20 December presidential elections. As of 15 October, 23 candidates have officially entered the race to challenge Tshisekedi. Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) (independent national electoral commission) head Denis Kadima says on 12 October that the elections will proceed as planned despite the armed conflict in the eastern region that has limited voter registration. Tshisekedi and his Zambian counterpart Hakainde Hichilema (2021-present) on 4 October lay the foundation stone for a new 345-meter bridge over the Lualaba River that divides the two countries. The \$850m ambitious transport corridor is a new transport corridor for cobalt and copper to the Port of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania).

Tshisekedi endorsed to run for presidency

The ruling **Union Sacrée de la Nation (USN)** coalition official endorsed President **Félix Tshisekedi** (2019-present) on 1 October as its flagbearer for the upcoming 20 December presidential elections.¹ The confirmation eliminates the possibility of any internal contests to challenge Tshisekedi to lead the party in the general elections. The USN held its first-ever congress on 1 October in **Kinshasa**, which was attended by several prominent figures. These included Tshisekedi, national assembly speaker **Christophe Mboso**, senate speaker **Modeste Bahati**, prime minister **Sama Lukonde** and deputy prime minister in charge of defence, **Jean-Pierre Bemba**.²

In a declaration read by the first deputy chair of the national assembly, **André Mbata**, and enshrined as article 2 of the USN congress resolution, all party members pledged to “*resolutely*” support Tshisekedi’s candidacy for the presidency of the DRC “*before, during and after his election on December 20, 2023*”.³ Lukonde said that by overwhelmingly backing Tshisekedi, the USN has signalled to national and international audiences that it is united, determined and committed to winning the December elections.⁴ While explaining that securing the coalition presidency signals a united front and that he had been chosen because of the “*visible achievements*” made under his leadership, Mboso warned Tshisekedi that he faces formidable challenges in the eastern DRC and that the continual and increasing violence has “*eaten into his promises to stabilise the country*”.⁵

Tshisekedi will be seeking a second term against several notable rivals and as of 15 October, 23 candidates have officially entered the presidential race.⁶ Observers have generally classified the presidential challengers into two categories, those who represent a formidable challenge to Tshisekedi and those who stand no real chance at securing the presidency. The formidable challengers include the **Nobel Peace Prize** winner and famous surgeon **Denis Mukwege**, who on 2

¹ Daily Nation, 2 Oct 2023; The East African, 3 Oct 2023

² Daily Nation, 2 Oct 2023; The East African, 3 Oct 2023

³ Daily Nation, 2 Oct 2023; The East African, 3 Oct 2023

⁴ Daily Nation, 2 Oct 2023; The East African, 3 Oct 2023

⁵ Daily Nation, 2 Oct 2023; The East African, 3 Oct 2023

⁶ The East African, 15 Oct 2023

October joined the growing list of candidates vying to unseat Tshisekedi.⁷ Mukwege received acclaim for his work with victims of DRC's conflicts. Another heavyweight challenger, although not expected to win, is former minister and member of parliament (MP) since 2006, **Delly Sessanga**.⁸ Former prime minister **Matata Ponyo** and politician, businessman and soccer club owner, **Moise Katumbi**, will also vie to unseat Tshisekedi. Other established candidates include opposition leader **Martin Fayulu** who rejected the 2018 presidential election results after the **Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI)** (independent national electoral commission) and the highly respected Catholic Church indicated that he was the likely winner.⁹

Candidates who present no real threat to Tshisekedi's presidential bid include pastors **Aggrey Ngalasi** and **Théodore Ngoy**, the only woman in the race **Marie-José Ifoku**, youth candidate **Constant Mutamba** and entrepreneur **Seth Kikuni**, who is running for the second time.¹⁰ Despite the numerous candidates contesting for the presidency, all generally agree that there is a need to transform the country and put its wealth of natural resources to better use.¹¹ During his term, Tshisekedi has overseen a sustained period of economic growth, especially in the country's world class cobalt and copper sectors.¹² He has also seen an exponential increase in the DRC's budget which has allowed the government to initiate a countrywide infrastructure program and expand free education programmes.¹³ However, the biggest challenge to Tshisekedi's re-election bid is the fact that he has struggled to curb and bring an end to the multiple violent conflicts in the eastern DRC where thousands have been killed and millions have been displaced. However, a local analyst told **Africa Risk Consulting and Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that it is "difficult" to remove a sitting Congolese president,

"Even when he has lost the election. Deals can always be made to maintain power or willing relinquish to a candidate who can be controlled".¹⁴

Electoral chief promises polls will proceed as planned...

CENI head **Denis Kadima** confirmed on 12 October that the December elections will proceed as planned despite the armed conflict in the country's eastern region that has limited voter registration and led to ongoing intimidation of electoral advisers.¹⁵ Last month, authorities in the DRC accused **Rwanda** and the **M23** rebel group of delaying a peace process that would allow voters in the eastern DRC to participate in the December elections (see *ARC Briefing DRC Sep 2023*).¹⁶ Electoral officials for months have been restricted from entering the rebel-held eastern region to finalise the registration process, which officially concluded nationally in April.¹⁷

The disarming of M23 rebels has stalled over the militia's refusal to completely withdraw its forces without first holding discussions with the government, a demand that Tshisekedi has repeatedly declined. Government spokesperson **Patrick Muyaya** said on 29 August that authorities are under pressure from the **United States (US)** government and international partners to hold the elections on time, but that approximately 1.5 million people in **Masisi** and **Rutshuru (North Kivu Province)** are still waiting to be enrolled.¹⁸ Kadima said that CENI will be able to register at least 1.5 million

⁷ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

⁸ The East African, 15 Oct 2023

⁹ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

¹⁰ The East African, 15 Oct 2023; Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

¹¹ East African, 15 Oct 2023

¹² Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

¹³ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

¹⁴ ARC Source, Local Analyst

¹⁵ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

¹⁶ Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

¹⁷ Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

¹⁸ Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

potential voters isolated by a rebellion in North Kivu in about two weeks if officials are allowed access.¹⁹

Kadima also pledged to avoid a repeat of the last electoral cycle when hundreds of Congolese died demonstrating what became a two-year delay and many challenged the outcome.²⁰ Kadima also noted on 12 October that while the holding of elections on time is “*important*”, it is crucial to hold “*holding elections of better quality*”.²¹ Kadima admitted that many think that the 2011 and 2018 elections “*were very poorly run*” and many citizens were left “*traumatized*” by the process.²² He emphasised that if candidates do not believe that they can win fairly through the ballot, “*they will go back to the bullet*”.²³ The December elections will be the DRC’s fourth since the end of the **Congo Wars**, also known as the **African World War**, which was a series of armed conflicts that began in 1996 and ended in 2003. Major concerns remain that this year’s polls will see a repeat of violence and the challenging of results, as was the case in 2018 when the local and foreign observers questioned the credibility of the elections after Tshisekedi was declared president despite reportedly not winning the vote.

Kadima also revealed that CENI officials have complained about intimidation and pressure. The electoral chief said that recently the DRC’s intelligence agency, **Agence Nationale de Renseignements (ANR)**, summoned and questioned several of his advisers for five hours to ensure that CENI officials “*toe the line*” and confessed that “*I’m not toeing the line*”.²⁴ However, many have questioned Kadima’s statements and his partiality, particularly since he is from the same region as the president and speaks the same language. Ultimately, the legitimacy of the December elections could be called into question if electoral officials are seen to be compromised and a significant portion of the population in the eastern DRC is not able to vote due to M23 rebels.

DRC, Zambia to build new \$850m road to expedite mineral exports via Tanzania...

Tshisekedi and his **Zambian** counterpart, **Hakainde Hichilema** (2021-present) on 4 October laid the foundation stone for a new 345-metre bridge over the **Lualaba River** that divides the two countries.²⁵ The \$850m ambitious transport corridor is expected to make it much easier for the two neighbouring countries to transport cobalt and copper to the **Port of Dar es Salaam** in **Tanzania**.²⁶ The project will also include the expansion of an 184-kilometre toll road that will speed up the transportation of critical resources from the mining belts in both countries to the port.²⁷ The proposed corridor will also streamline customs clearances and ease congestion by establishing special lanes for trucks carrying goods.

The public-private partnership (PPP) between the **Mauritius**-based contractor **GED Africa** and prospective investment from the **Trade and Development Bank**, the financial arm of the **Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)**, and the **African Finance Corporation**, the pan-African multilateral development financial institution.²⁸ Hichilema, speaking at the launch, noted:

*“Today’s launch of **Kasomeno—Mwenda** Road project, connecting Zambia & DRC, typifies our govt’s drive to develop transport corridors that boost regional movement of goods, promote mobility of citizens & enhance trade between land-linked Zambia & the region.”²⁹*

¹⁹ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²⁰ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²¹ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²² Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²³ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²⁴ Bloomberg, 2 Oct 2023

²⁵ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023; Bloomberg, 3 Oct 2023

²⁶ President Hakainde Hichilema X Account, 2 Oct 2023

²⁷ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

²⁸ Bloomberg, 3 Oct 2023; China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

²⁹ President Hakainde Hichilema X Account, 2 Oct 2023

There are several winners and losers from the ambitious project. For the DRC and Zambia, the project could see more efficient export of their critical minerals, a major contributor to GDP. The DRC's mining sector contributes about 30% (\$2.15 billion in 2020) of its GDP and, according to **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** data, has accounted for more than 90% of total exports over the last five years.³⁰ **Chinese** mining companies will also be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the new road project as it has been very expensive and unreliable for Chinese mining companies to transport raw materials via the **Port of Durban** in **South Africa**, which is currently Africa's largest port facility.³¹ The Port of Dar es Salaam will offer Chinese companies a much faster route and reduce shipping distances between **Africa** and China by 2,000km.³² Another winner is Tanzania and its president **Samia Suluhu Hassan** (2021-present) who in recent years, has pushed hard to make her country's ports the major shipping hub in **East Africa**, particularly as a gateway to China.³³ The construction of a new **Standard Gauge Railway (SGR)** will also strengthen Tanzania's standing as a new and major logistics force in the region.

Undoubtedly the biggest loser is South Africa and its Port of Durban. If the new DRC-Zambia transport route becomes successful, more traffic is expected to be diverted from the South African port.³⁴ Policymakers and mining executives in DRC, **Angola** and Zambia intend to develop new logistics routes in southern Africa's cobalt and copper belts beyond the traditional export point, Port of Durban, which has become increasingly difficult to access due to labour strife, social unrest, vandalism, disrepair and extreme weather.³⁵

The new DRC-Zambia corridor is also a major setback for the **United States (US)** and its **Partnership for Global Infrastructure Initiative (PGII)** which is seeking to refurbish the **Lobito Corridor** in Angola as the key alternative route to transport cobalt and copper from the DRC and Zambia's mining regions (see *ARC Briefing DRC Aug & Sep 2023*).³⁶ Another key takeaway is that neither Tshisekedi nor Hichilema are willing to wait for the US and the **European Union (EU)** to finalise their deals to refurbish the Lobito Corridor.³⁷ China-Africa expert **Eric Olander** emphasised this point when he said on 4 October:

"These are impatient men who both have elections coming up and getting a road project going is probably going to take a lot less time than rebuilding a railway."³⁸

³⁰ Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2 Dec 2020

³¹ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

³² China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

³³ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

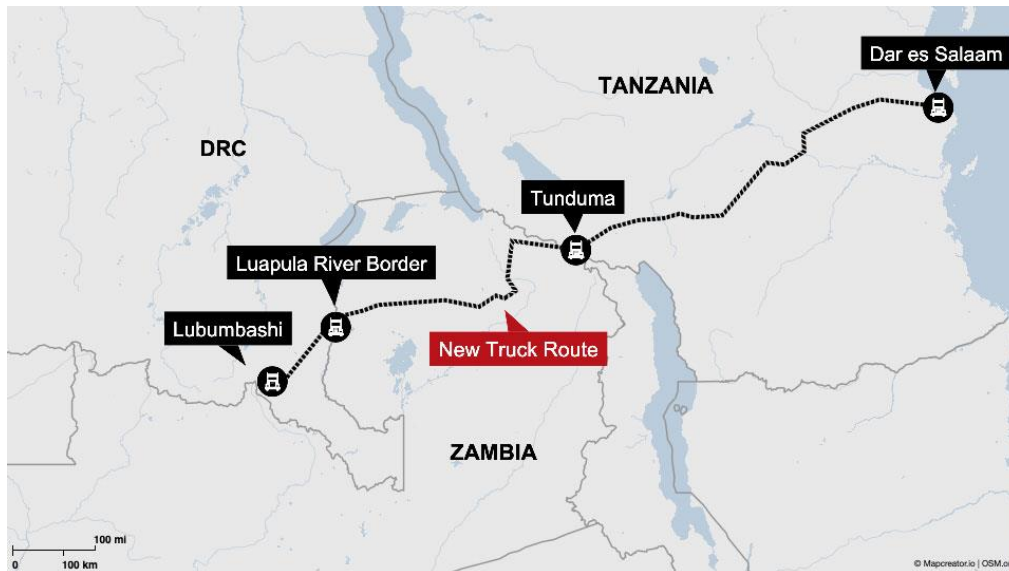
³⁴ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023

³⁵ China Global South Project, 5 Jun 2023

³⁶ China Global South Project, 5 Jun 2023

³⁷ China Lusophone Brief, 7 Feb 2023

³⁸ China Global South Project, 4 Oct 2023



Planner

8 Dec 2023 **(DRC)** End of the **East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)** mandate in the DRC;

20 Dec 2023 **(DRC)** Scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections;

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)**;

Chronology

17 Sep 2023 **Uganda (Kasese)** *NBS News*. The **DRC**-based rebel group, the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)**, kills a wildlife ranger and unnamed **British** and **South African** tourists at **Queen Elizabeth II National Park** in **Kasese** district in Western Uganda;

13 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *News Central Africa*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** declares “*a gradual and progressive easing*” of the emergency measures in **North Kivu** and **Ituri** provinces, including a transition back to civilian governance.

13 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *The East African*. The **East African Community (EAC)** expresses concerns over renewed hostilities between armed groups fighting in the **North Kivu** region of eastern DRC, in what could signal violations of an agreed ceasefire;

13 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *United Nations*. The **United Nations (UN)** announces that eight members of the **South African National Defence Force (SANDF)** have been arrested in the DRC for alleged sexual abuse;

12 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Bloomberg*. The **United States (US)** deputy assistant secretary of the bureau of energy resources, **Kimberly Harrington** says at a conference in **South Africa** that his country is stepping up efforts to boost ties with African countries, such as the DRC, rich in critical minerals to help secure supply;

9 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *China Global South Project*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** opens the new **Busanga Hydropower Station** on the **Lualaba River** in southern Lualaba province’s copper and cobalt belt;

6 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Bloomberg*. A newly built plant in DRC aims to produce 30% of the world's germanium, potentially easing **China's** dominance of the metal used in electronics and solar cells;

3 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *AFP*. Colonel **Mike Mikombe** has been sentenced to death for murder and other crimes related to the August killing of 56 people during an army crackdown on anti-**United Nations (UN)** demonstrations in the eastern part of the country;

2 Oct 2023 **DRC (Sakania)** *Sahel Intelligence*. President **Félix Tshisekedi** officially inaugurates a new **Chinese**-built **Sakania** dry port. The port is on the border with **Zambia** and will double as a border post and a nerve centre in the countries' cross-border mining industries;

2 Oct 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *The East African*. The DRC's regional peace force could begin tapping into a **United Nations (UN)** peacekeeping fund as early as January next year if the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** approves, boosting chances of an alternative conflict resolution for the troubled country;

29 Sep 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Bloomberg*. **United States**-based energy company **Winds Exploration and Production LLC** says it plans to start building a \$300m power and fertiliser complex in a year using methane trapped under the DRC's **Lake Kivu**;

28 Sep 2023 **United States (New York)** *The East African*. The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** formally agrees to a proposal to fund the **East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)** in the DRC. **East African Community (EAC)** secretary general **Peter Mathuki** says the deal will be finalised soon after MONUSCO finally withdraws from the DRC by December this year;

27 Sep 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Bloomberg*. The **European Union (EU)** is finalising partnerships with the DRC and **Zambia** to boost local industries as the bloc competes with **China** to secure critical materials for the green and digital sectors;

26 Sep 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Mining*. The DRC says it is backing plans for a new domestically owned copper-cobalt plant to help formalise artisanal mining in the country;

23 Sep 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *AP News*. **Ugandan** President **Yoweri Museveni** says a rebel leader of the **Islamic State**-linked **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)**, **Meddie Nkalubo**, was killed in a raid by the air force in neighbouring DRC;

20 Sep 2023 **DRC (Kinshasa)** *Bloomberg*. The DRC is still looking for partners for the world's biggest hydropower project and expects expanded mining investments from the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.

About Africa Risk Consulting:

Africa Risk Consulting (ARC) is a pan-African consulting company that provides timely, relevant information and advice that enables its clients to take informed investment decisions and to safeguard their reputations.

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