



Admission of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to The East African Community (EAC) and its Contribution to the Strengthening of Economic Integration within the East African Region

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this paper is about the admission of Democratic republic of Congo (DRC) to the East African community (EAC) and its contribution to the strengthening of economic integration within the east African region. The efforts of EAC in pursuing integration dates back to the colonial periods, it is one of the oldest regional economic communities in African continent with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. The study used historical and descriptive analysis method in the study, with reference from secondary data related to this study. The study concluded that the DRC now becomes the seventh country to join the East African Community. The regional trade bloc whose population now stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. The 90 million people in the DRC will be able to move freely and do business in six other African countries. Moving forward, all the heads of state of EAC proudly and warmly welcomed the DRC to the EAC, while looking forward to joining hands in strengthening the community together.

Keywords: Democratic republic of Congo (DRC), East African community (EAC), Economic Integration, Heads of state.

Highlights of this study:

1. To study the entry of democratic republic of Congo (DRC) to the East African community (EAC) and its contribution to the strengthening of economic integration within the East African region
2. To access the integration concept and the role of East African Community in the Economic Development of the East African Region.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have enjoyed a long history of co-operation under successive regional integration arrangements. These arrangements have included, the Customs Union between Kenya and Uganda in 1917, which the then Tanganyika later joined in 1927, the East African High Commission (1948-1961), the East African Common Services Organisation (1961-1967), the East African Community (1967-1977) and the East African Co-operation (1993-2000). Following the dissolution of the former East African Community in 1977, the Member States negotiated a Mediation Agreement for the pision of Assets and Liabilities, which they signed in 1984. However, as one of the provisions of the Mediation Agreement, the three Member States (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) agreed to explore areas of future co-operation and to make concrete arrangements for such co-operation. Subsequent meetings of the three Heads of State led to the signing of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation on 30 November 1993(East African Community Secretariat. 2014a). Full East African Co-operation operations started on 14th March 1996 when the Secretariat of the Permanent Tripartite Commission was launched at the Headquarters of the EAC in Arusha, Tanzania. Considering the need to consolidate regional co-operation, the East African Heads of State, at their 2nd Summit in Arusha on 29th April 1997, directed the Permanent Tripartite Commission to start the process of upgrading the Agreement establishing the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation into a Treaty. The Treaty-making process, which involved negotiations among the Member States as well as wide participation of the public, was successfully concluded within three years. The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community was signed in Arusha on 30 November 1999. The Treaty entered into force on 7th July 2000 following the conclusion of the process of its ratification and deposit of the Instruments of Ratification with the Secretary-General by all the three Partner States. Upon the entry into force of the Treaty, the East African Community came into being (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) 2004).

1.1 Milestones of EAC Integration

On 30th November 1993, 1st Summit of East African Heads of State sign Agreement establishing the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation in Kampala, Uganda. 14 March 1996, Secretariat of the Commission for East African Co-operation launched in Arusha, Tanzania. 28 April 1997, EAC Member States sign Tripartite Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation. On 29th April 1997, 2nd Summit of the East African Co-

operation Heads of State is held in Arusha, Tanzania; 1st East African Co-operation Development Strategy (1997-2000), East African Flag and East African Passport launched; and Permanent Tripartite Commission mandated to embark on process of upgrading EAC Agreement into Treaty (UNECA (2006). On 30th April 1998, 9th Meeting of the Permanent Tripartite Commission in Arusha launches a draft Treaty for Establishment of the East African Community; approves programme for its wide publicity; EAC Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in Defence signed in Arusha; Tripartite Agreement on Road Transport signed in Arusha; and Inland Waterway Transport Agreement signed in Arusha. On 30th November 1999, 4th Summit held in Arusha at which Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community is signed. Also on 7th July 2000, Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community enters into force; new regional organization, the East African Community, comes into being (McIntyre, MA. 2005).

On 15th January 2001, 1st Summit of the East African Community is held in Arusha; signs Protocols on, Rules of Procedure for the Summit of Heads of State; Rules of Procedure for the Admission of other countries to the East African Community; and formally launches the East African Community at the Sheikh Amri Abeid Stadium in Arusha. Another November 2001, 3rd Summit of EAC held in Arusha; EAC Heads of State inaugurate East African Legislative Assembly and East African Court of Justice. On 2nd March 2004, EAC Summit signs Protocol for Establishment of the EAC Customs Union. On 1st January 2005, EAC Customs Union becomes operational. 18 June 2007, The Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Burundi accede to EAC Treaty (Shivji, I.G. 2009). On 1st July 2007, Rwanda and Burundi become full members of the EAC. On 22nd October 2008, First EAC-COMESA-SADC Tripartite Summit held in Kampala, Uganda discusses single Free Trade Area and merger of the three regional blocs. On 1st July 2009, Rwanda and Burundi join the EAC Customs Union. Official launch ceremonies held simultaneously in the two countries' capitals on 6 July 2009. On 20th November 2009, Protocol for the Establishment of the EAC Common Market signed; climax of observance of EAC 10th Anniversary celebrations; laying of foundation stone for EAC Headquarters in Arusha. On 1st July 2010, EAC Common Market Protocol enters into force, following ratification by all the five EAC Partner States. On 12th June 2011, Second COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa; agrees to start negotiations for a Grand Free Trade Area among the three blocs. On 16th April 2016, The Republic of South Sudan joins the EAC and on 5 September 2016, The Republic of South Sudan becomes a full member of the (EAC East African Community 2018).

The East African Community (EAC) later grants Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) in June 2019 request for admission, at an Extraordinary Heads of State Summit. Reception to DRC's entry into EAC has divided opinion in recent times. For regional integration supporters in general, and DRC in particular, it is a long overdue but welcome move that holds the promise of opening up the bloc to more integrated development. For integration opponents, the admission of yet another 'problem child' into the Community (in addition to South Sudan that joined EAC in April 2016) is premature. A third group is neutral, watching how things are shaping up. 'Problem child' or not, DRC's impressive and unmatched resource portfolio (including mineral wealth [cobalt, gold, diamond, aluminum, and copper, among others]; with a population of 95.241, its GDP is projected to reach \$50.1 billion in 2022 (IMF 2021); numerous water bodies; vast farm land; rich biodiversity; and the world's second largest rain forest) is still untapped. To leverage the additional resources that DRC brings to the EAC table for the accelerated socio-economic development that the bloc absolutely needs to sustain its peace and security, EAC member states are best advised to embrace DRC wholeheartedly (World Bank, 2022).

That said, becoming EAC's newest member will not suddenly melt away the socio-economic and geopolitical problems that plague DRC. On the contrary, DRC will still be a rich-poor country on its admission into the bloc on March 29, 2022. Being one of the mineral-resource richest countries in the world, and having the "second largest primary humid tropical forest endowment and carbon sink globally" according to the World Bank – has not insulated DRC from becoming the home of "the third largest population of poor globally." DRC's inability to improve its development outcomes sufficiently despite rising commodity prices and her expanded production capacity could point to poor economic management, geopolitical interference, and protracted political crises. To be clear, DRC's entry into the EAC will not introduce anything that its six current members (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda) are not already accustomed to. With or without DRC, armed militant groups, terrorism, illegal migration, political turbulence, underdeveloped economies, youth unemployment, poverty, and poor infrastructure are realities that EAC has contended with for much of the time since July 2000 when the Community came into being. However, it will recalibrate the bloc's peace and security considerations. Some opponents of integration have expressed fear that DRC will import armed militants into EAC; these are not misplaced. The pursuit and/or protection of the often-competing interests of local populations; the government; regional, continental, and extra-continental actors; multinational corporations; development partners; and peace keeping troops have created a security dilemma. This has allowed for the growth of armed militant groups in the North Kivu province – which is one of the country's resource bedrocks. More than 100 militia groups are known to be active in eastern DRC. The change in the Allied Democratic Force's (ADF's) identity from a militia group into a militia-terror group has also complicated DRC's security challenges. Unsurprisingly, DRC's set of complex security challenges is one of misgivings about DRC's entry into EAC (African Development Bank (AfDB). 2022).

Then there is the issue of infrastructural underdevelopment. Compared to other less-endowed countries in EAC or SADC such as Kenya, or South Africa, there is room for DRC to develop her mining (high value minerals), agricultural, transport (roads, railways), energy (solar), financial (banking), and telecommunication sectors further (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). 2022).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 An overview of the journey of DRC joining the bloc

DRC joined the bloc guided by the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community, which entered into force on 7th July, 2000. One of the criteria for new members applying for admission into the bloc is 'Acceptance of the Community as set out in the Treaty.' Change of names would therefore require amendment of the Treaty.

As per Article 3 (2) of the Treaty Establishing the EAC, when a Partner State applies to join the following factors are looked into,

Geographical proximity to and inter-dependence between it and the Partner States;

Acceptance of the Community as set out in this Treaty;

Adherence to universally acceptable principles of good governance, democracy, the rule of law, observance of human rights and social justice;

Potential contribution to the strengthening of integration within the East African region;

Establishment and maintenance of a market-driven economy, Social and economic policies being compatible with those of the Community (East African Community Secretariat. 2014a).

In June 2019, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), H.E. Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, wrote to the then EAC Chairperson, President of Rwanda, H.E. Paul Kagame, expressing his country's wish to be a member of the bloc.

On 27 February, 2021 during their 21st Ordinary Meeting, the Summit of the EAC Heads of State considered the application by DRC to join the Community and directed the EAC Council of Ministers to expeditiously undertake a Verification Mission in accordance with the EAC procedure for admission of new members. In July 2021, the EAC undertook a Verification Mission to the DRC with the objective of establishing the country's level of conformity in accordance with Article 3 (2) of the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC. On 22 December, 2021 the 19th Extra-Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State received and considered the report of the Verification Mission to DRC and directed the Council to expeditiously commence and conclude negotiations with the DRC for admission into the bloc. The negotiations between the EAC and DRC were successfully conducted from 15th to 24th January, 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, with Kinshasa reaffirming willingness to be part of the bloc. Following the negotiations, the EAC Council of Ministers recommended to the Summit to consider admitting DRC into the Community in accordance with Article 3 (3) of the Treaty (www.eac.int).

On 29 March, 2022 the Summit of EAC Heads of State at their 19th Extra-Ordinary Meeting, admitted DRC into the EAC following the recommendation by the EAC Council of Ministers. The Chairperson of the Summit and President of Kenya, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, informed the meeting that DRC had met all the set criteria for admission as provided for in the Treaty. "We have concluded the regional processes for admitting new member as provided for in our rules of procedure," said President Kenyatta. "Admitting DRC into EAC is historic for our Community and the African continent at large. It demonstrates the agility of the Community to expand beyond its socio-cultural boundaries to new people and trade-centered partnerships and collaboration, thus increasing trade and investment opportunities for the citizens," added the Chair. President Kenyatta said that he was looking forward to the DRC signing the Treaty of Accession before the stated date of 14th April, 2022. On 8th April 2022 in Nairobi Kenya, The Democratic Republic of the Congo formally joins EAC after signing of the Treaty of Accession to the Community. (EAC) becoming its 7th Partner State (www.eac.int).

Welcoming his country's admission into the EAC, DRC President Felix Tshisekedi termed it a historical day for DRC, stating that it paves the way for the harmonization of the country's policies with those of the EAC. President Tshisekedi said that DRC was looking forward to increased Intra-EAC trade and reduction of tension amongst the EAC Partner States. "It is the desire of DRC to see the creation of a new organ in the EAC that is solely focused on mining, natural resources and energy that will be based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo," he said (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

In his remarks, Uganda's President, Hon. Yoweri Museveni said that DRC joining the Community was an event of great significance, adding that he had personally been waiting for the last 60 years for DRC to reconnect with EAC. "DRC has strong historical, social and cultural links with EAC Partner States. It is the onus of the EAC to now work on restoring peace and stability in Eastern DRC, a fete we can achieve by working together," he added.

On his part, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda hailed the EAC Council of Ministers and the Summit for fast-tracking the entry of DRC into the EAC. "I call upon EAC Organs and Institutions to accelerate the integration of DRC into the Community. Rwanda is committed to support the process," he stated (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

Speaking at the event, Tanzania's President H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan observed that DRC has a long historical relationship with EAC. President Samia expressed hope that DRC would ratify the Treaty of Accession to ensure full integration of her people into the bloc and reaffirmed Tanzania's commitment to the integration process in East Africa.

On behalf of Burundi's President H.E. Evariste Ndayishimiye, Vice President Prosper Bazombanza hailed DRC President Felix Tshisekedi for the admission of his country into the Community. "EAC projects and programmes are vital and their implementation critical for the integration process. As we move towards the Political Federation, we need to strengthen our efforts to protect our borders against terrorism, piracy and other trans-national crimes," said the VP, as he reiterated Burundi's commitment to constructively contribute to promoting peace and stability in the region (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

Speaking on behalf of South Sudan President H.E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, Hon. Barnaba Marial Benjamin, the Minister for Presidential Affairs, hailed the entry of DRC into the EAC. Hon. Benjamin said that his country had fallen behind in its contributions to EAC due to the prolonged armed conflict in the country and the Covid-19 pandemic. "The President has cleared the way for all outstanding contributions to the Community," said the Minister, even as he praised efforts to employ South Sudanese nationals into EAC Organs and Institutions.

Addressing the Summit, EAC Secretary General Hon. (Dr.) Peter Mathuki, said that the admission of DRC into the EAC comes with increased GDP and expanded market size making EAC a home to about 300 million people, which would be mutually beneficial to the people of both EAC and DRC by

providing employment and investment opportunities that come along with this new development. “The EAC now spans from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean making the region competitive and easy to access the larger African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA),” said Dr. Mathuki. “With lower tariffs on goods and the removal of trading restrictions among Partner States, we anticipate that goods and services will move more freely. With a larger market, manufacturers in the EAC, whether large, or SMEs, will benefit from economies of scale, making them increasingly efficient and competitive,” he added. The Secretary General invited the Private Sector to work closely with the Public Sector to tap the benefits of the entry of the central African nation into the bloc (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

Further, Dr. Mathuki said that DRC’s entry also requires integrating the EAC’s trade infrastructure, intermodal connectivity, One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs), and trade systems to reduce trade time and costs, adding that enhancing trade facilitation will enable formal and informal cross-border trade along the region’s transport corridors. Upon ascension to The Treaty establishing the East African Community and depositing of the instrument of acceptance with the Secretary-General, DRC will join EAC’s cooperation in all the sectors, programmes and activities that promote the four pillars of EAC Integration. Collaboration in these areas will help us achieve the Community’s objectives as set out in Article 5 of the EAC Treaty (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

The resource portfolio of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the newest member of the East African Community, is impressive and unmatched in the region. It has cobalt, gold, diamond, aluminum, copper and other precious minerals; 95 million people, numerous water bodies, vast farmland, rich biodiversity, and the world’s second-largest rain forest.

On its accession to the bloc, during an extraordinary Heads of State Summit, DR Congo’s President Félix Tshisekedi promised to optimize the exploitation of these economic assets in collaboration with his new partners. That was music to the ears of many citizens and corporations of the EAC, who have been salivating at the opportunities Kinshasa brings to the table. For instance, energy transition is one of the hottest areas of investment and, given the global challenges related to the development of industries, many states are seeking to create wealth based on this transition. Congo’s mineral reserves, added to the hydroelectric power potential of the giant Inga dam — an Agenda 2063 flagship project meant to contribute to the East African Power Pool — are assets for which Kinshasa is being wooed the world over. And now the EAC has the dibs on ventures around this transition. The DRC is the world’s leading producer of cobalt, used in the manufacture of batteries. It is also the world’s fourth-largest producer of copper, used in the assembly of electric cars and the infrastructure of most renewable energy sources. Lithium deposits, estimated at over 130 million tonnes, are also present in the southeast (East African Community Secretariat. 2022).

In the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Kinshasa plays a central role in the provision of raw materials, without which important technological components would not exist. Congo has most of the mineral ores that produce key components in making computer chips and electric vehicles, technologies that are powering the drive to the future. In a typical computer, copper and gold are key components used in making the monitor, printed circuit boards and chips. Cobalt constitutes 6.45 percent of the materials that make electric vehicle batteries while copper constitutes 25.8 percent. Jointly, copper and cobalt constitute more than a third of EV batteries. DRC is rich in these minerals, producing 68 percent of the world’s cobalt, the largest globally and over 1.8 million tonnes of copper annually (worldbank.org 2021).

2.2 Economic dividend, other benefits of DRC entry to EAC

2.2.1 Intra-trade

The admission of the DRC into the EAC, with a population of above 95 million people, has been hailed as a game-changer in a region where intra-trade, infrastructure development, health and food security suffered shocks due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It’s vast population has the potential to contribute to expanded market and investment opportunities.. The new EAC state now offers a combined market-driven economy of 266 million people and a GDP of \$243 billion. DRC, sub-Saharan’s largest country, will also be EAC’s largest. It brings her French heritage and, together with Rwanda and Burundi, gives EAC a new identity, Africa’s largest Francophone bloc (www.eac.int).

2.2.2 Connectivity and The trade potential of this are significant.

With this bloc now stretching from the Indian Ocean in the East to the Atlantic in the west, the DRC presents the potential to open the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Trade Corridor and link the region to Central Africa, North Africa, and other continental sub-regions. In return, the DRC will benefit from the EAC Common Market and Customs frameworks, with easier and seamless access to the markets and seaports of Kenya and Tanzania at cheaper rates. During the admission summit, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu emphasised the importance of Kinshasa in terms of infrastructure development. While referring to the planned construction of the railway from Tanzania to Burundi and by extension to the DRC, President Samia observed that the entry of Congo has the potential to spur much more development in the region. “Connecting the DRC railway network with the EAC will provide an opportunity for increasing access to EAC markets and reducing the cost of intra-regional trade,” she said (www.eac.int).

2.2.3 Trade and investment

More cargo is expected to shift from the Northern Corridor to the Central Corridor. Truckers are weighing their options on which route to use to ferry goods to the vast DRC. The Central Corridor, which is 1,300km long, begins at the Port of Dar es Salaam and serves Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Eastern DRC. The Northern Corridor, 1,700km long, starts at the Port of Mombasa and serves Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, eastern

DRC and South Sudan. DRC's entry means integrating the EAC's trade infrastructure, intermodal connectivity, one-stop border posts, and systems to reduce trade time and costs. "With lower tariffs on goods and the removal of trading restrictions among partner states, we anticipate that goods and services will move more freely. With a larger market, manufacturers in the EAC will benefit from economies of scale, making them increasingly efficient and competitive," said Peter Mathuki, EAC Secretary-General. The Congolese expect a lot from the region. "The benefits expected from the EAC membership is the multiple administrative facilities, the reduction of charges and the increase in commercial and economic activities of citizens as well as the facilitation of their mobility between our countries; the reduction of Customs tariffs for goods received in the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam," said President Tshisekedi. The private sector says Congo's admission is a milestone in the transformation of the bloc into the most attractive trade and investment destination in Africa. According to the East African Business Council, EAC's exports to the DRC have averaged 13.5 percent in the last seven years to 2020. In 2018, the value of imported goods into the DRC stood at \$7.4 billion against exports of \$855.4 million (IMF 2021). "Following this milestone, trade is set to increase immensely, as DRC shares its borders with five EAC partner states. We call for the improvement of regional infrastructure connectivity plus the implementation of EAC commitments to unlock trade opportunities," said the council's CEO John Bosco Kalisa (East African Community 2022).

2.2.4 Continental market

DRC is a Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) member state. As membership to EAC and SADC are not mutually exclusive, DRC's entry into EAC will strengthen the EAC-SADC bridge that Tanzania already established when she joined SADC. It will also bolster ongoing bilateral negotiations for a Grand Free Trade Area between EAC and the 16-member SADC, and among EAC, SADC, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Furthermore, the addition of DRC's over 95 million people to EAC will swell EAC's current population to over 303,370,369 individuals, and expand the EAC-SADC one to about 613,588,439 people. DRC, sub-Saharan's largest country, will become EAC's largest country. She will also bring her French heritage with her, and, together with Rwanda, and Burundi, give EAC a new identity; EAC will become Africa's largest Francophone bloc. The trade potential of this is significant (East African Community 2022).

Like Tanzania, DRC is a Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) member state and its entry into the EAC strengthens the EAC-SADC bridge, and bolsters ongoing bilateral negotiations for a Grand Free Trade Area between EAC, SADC and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Even before its admission, EAC countries had already signed bilateral deals with Kinshasa. For example, Uganda and Rwanda are already constructing three roads into eastern DRC to ease business and increase trade and investment between them. In the region, Uganda is the second largest exporter to Congo, after Rwanda. Uganda mainly sells cement, cooking oil, rice, sugar and tubes and pipes. It also exports food and traders hope Congo will provide market for products such as food, spirits, textiles, plastics and others. In the last quarter of 2021, DRC accounted for 96 percent of Rwanda's total re-exports, covering food and live animals (\$ 39.87 million), mineral fuels and lubricants (\$ 33.55 million), (Rwanda's Institute of Statistics 2022). Rwanda's total exports with EAC member countries, which represent 4.7 percent, rose by 32.9 percent in value, standing at \$72.3 million in 2021 (**Rwanda central bank 2022**). Imports from EAC increased by 6.4 percent. Trade experts from across the continent under the Akademiya2063 think tank, which recently met in Kigali to discuss the regional trade outlook, said 40 percent of the region's trade costs are attributable to transport, high cost of electricity and gaps in trade facilitation. Although regional countries and trade partners have succeeded in eliminating some non-tariff barriers, it has had little impact on trade costs, a burden often shouldered by the consumer. "It is more expensive to transport avocado from Kigali to DRC by air compared with transporting it to Dubai. A lot needs to be done at a bilateral level to address these issues if the cost of trade is to be brought down," (**national bank of Rwanda 2022**)

"DRC is bringing a large mass of consumers and producers to join the bloc. This spells much more expanded trade fortunes for the region,". If DRC had only had bilateral agreements with EAC member states, these have limited its traders from enjoying some benefits. "There are trade frameworks that traders for DRC will enjoy after joining the bloc. For instance, small traders will be exempted from duties while trading across the bloc. For a Rwandan trader to take goods to DRC the \$20 CEPGL levy will no longer be applicable (**national bank of Rwanda 2022**)

2.2.5 Cutting bureaucracy

DRC shares borders with 5 of the EAC Partner States, namely Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan. There is a sense of belonging and attachment to EAC socially, economically, historically, culturally and geographically. Some provinces in the DRC have easier access by road to East African countries, while to reach Kinshasa and other western provinces, the only way is by air. "This is another step in reducing bureaucracy and costs". DRC's membership will negatively impact local industries in the long term. Given the nature of the Congolese economy, where almost everything is imported, local industries will face competition that could undermine local productivity. "On the production side, we are below the regional average. We have few distribution structures, from a logistical point of view. In my opinion, the Congolese economy is not yet ready to join the EAC. In the current state, in the long term, this will inevitably destroy our production capacity. The other countries in the Community will produce at a lower cost than us. As a result, our products will not find a market (www.eac.int 2022).

2.2.6 The EAC and its prepared to handle the cases of instability and conflict in DRC

As established under Article 124 of the EAC Treaty, with DRC being part of the EAC, it will benefit from the Partner States' commitment to foster and maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to peace and security through co-operation and consultations with a view to prevent, better manage, and resolve disputes and conflicts between them. Further, the DRC will benefit from various regional cooperation mechanisms that address regional security issues

such as cross border crime, provision of mutual assistance in criminal matters including the arrest and repatriation of fugitive offenders and the exchange of information on national mechanisms for combating criminal activities (www.eac.int 2022)

2.2.7 The EAC addresses the issue of Non-Tariff Barriers among member states

Disputes emanating from imposition by member countries of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) are part of challenges faced by most regional economic communities, EAC included. NTBs hinder intra-regional trade and by extension, economic growth and prosperity in the region. EAC has established a Trade Remedies Committee that will address these NTBs and trade disputes before they get to higher levels like the EAC Council and even the Summit. It is hoped that the Trade Remedies Committee should be operational before the end of 2022. The EAC and the East African Business Council (EABC) have also set up a Technical Working Group (TWG) whose core task is to resolve trade disputes before they are escalated higher (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) 2022).

2.2.8 Free movement of people across the border

As a result of the EAC, citizens of member countries are now moving freely across the border by the use of East African Passports which are issued in all member countries. To facilitate more the movement of people in the region, EAC member countries have agreed to remove visa requirements for their citizens. Free movement of people is very important because it eases cross border trade and it also creates a sense of unity and community through increased interaction of the citizens of the member states. East African citizens can easily move from one country to another and do their business activities there. This is a good step towards the deeper integration including the East African Common Market of which negotiations have already been launched by the member states. The East African passport was launched on 1 April 1999. The East African passport has been introduced as a travel document to ease border crossing for EAC residents. It is valid for travel within the EAC countries only and will entitle the holder to a multi-entry stay of renewable six months' validity in any of the countries. The passport is issued in three of the five EAC member states (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). 2022).

2.2.9 Security problems

But DRC admission also brings with it major security problems. The eastern DRC is notoriously unstable, home to about 100 rebel groups. Recently, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), responsible for about 6 000 civilian deaths since 2013, has aligned with the Islamic State West Africa Province, drawn in new recruits from throughout East Africa and expanded its operational footprint in Uganda and Rwanda. Relations between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda have been plagued by conflict and mistrust with much of the rebel group activity in the region being a by-product. Rwanda has long been accused of supporting M23 rebels in eastern DRC, allegations that arose again in relation to recent M23 activity. Strengthening relations between Kigali, Kampala and Kinshasa a few years ago would have seemed unlikely. As head of the AU, President Paul Kagame unexpectedly challenged the results of the controversial 2019 Congolese election, which granted Tshisekedi (backed by former president Joseph Kabila) victory over the opposition coalition candidate, Martin Fayulu. But Tshisekedi has met Kagame on several occasions since coming to power and there has been notable bilateral cooperation on both economic and security issues, possibly indicating a major policy change in the post-Kabila era (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) 2022).

In 2019, a joint intelligence team was established to analyse data collected by the two countries in the fight against the ADF. Two high profile rebel leaders, Sylvestre Mudacumura and Juvénal Musabimana, were killed in DRC armed forces (FARDC) raids with the help of Rwandan intelligence. And last year, after terrorist attacks in Kampala, Uganda's military deployed alongside FARDC troops in the eastern DRC to find and destroy rebel strongholds. Security risks to regional economic projects may be helping to create a convergence between the states which DRC's admission to the East African Community could accelerate. Conflict in eastern DRC is close to oil-bearing areas near the western border of Uganda, which Kampala is eager to develop and transport through a planned new pipeline. Rwanda will need DRC's resources, markets and access to its Atlantic coast ports if it is to transcend its relatively small geographic size and population and become the African powerhouse Kagame seems to envision for the nation. In recent years, Rwanda has effectively used military diplomacy to support its economic and foreign policy ambitions. Its deployments in the Central African Republic and Mozambique have created an appearance of a highly professional military able to defeat rebel groups (UNECA 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY,

The study used historical and descriptive analysis method. The gathering of the required information for the study came mostly from secondary information, largely collected from the EAC research reports, websites and journals. In addition, this study focused on some data about the East African Community mostly based on analysis of secondary data.

3.1 Scope of the Study,

This study employs a case study approach in finding out how admission of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the East African Community (EAC) contributes to the strengthening of economic integration within the east African region, with the East African Community (EAC) as the case study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the DRC, joining the EAC will allow it access to the bloc's Customs Union and Common Market. These are envisioned as "transitional stages to and integral parts thereof, subsequently a monetary union and ultimately a political federation."

The EAC's Customs Union has successfully created a common customs territory where internal tariffs have been eliminated and a common tariff on imports outside the region imposed. Its Common Market protocol has seen the harmonization of immigration procedures and waving of work permit fees among some member states. Today, citizens in East Africa can cross borders using their identity documents and international tourists need only one visa to travel between countries in the region.

The African Regional Integration Index identifies the EAC as one of the well-integrated blocs on the continent, scored along five dimensions: trade, productive, macroeconomic, and infrastructural integration, as well as the free movement of people.

DRC will now have six additional accountability partners with whom she can navigate the integrated development terrain better. This navigation could begin with DRC confronting and resolving its persisting problems with a greater sense of urgency. To shed its 'problem child' tag, for example, DRC could seek the support of member states that are dealing with challenges similar to DRC's such as insecurity. To prevent and/or counter terrorism better, DRC could draw from experiences of Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, for example to improve DRC government's capacity to counter terrorist and insurgent groups. DRC could also partner with other EAC member states besides Uganda to strengthen joint operations against ADF and other militant groups in DRC. Further, DRC could also engage in an aggressive campaign to improve the living standards of ordinary Congolese citizens. This could be through demands for multinationals' to engage in more corporate social responsibility in their areas of operation, focusing on poverty reduction, education, and environmental conservation. Commitment to timely remitting of its annual quota to the EAC will be another plus. At the same time, member states should expedite bilateral and multilateral trade and security agreements to reduce the increased risks such as trafficking of persons, money laundering, and fraud that tend to accompany the increased movement of people and goods within integrated territories in the region. Agreements should be arrived at consultatively for sustainable integrated development. Then DRC's EAC admission will be worth the effort. DRC has a lot of resources and joining the East Africa Community adds more to microeconomic conditions and microeconomic stability of the region in terms of foreign earnings and attracting investments in the region for wider economic growth.

5. CONCLUSION

From the discussion concerning admission of DRC to the regional economic integration of EAC, the study drew five principle conclusions and recommendations,

The study provides evidence that the Democratic Republic of Congo now becomes the seventh country to join the East African Community. The regional trade bloc, who includes Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, now reaches a quarter of Africa's population, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. The 90 million people in the Democratic Republic of Congo will be able to move freely and do business in six other African countries.

All the heads of state of EAC proudly and warmly welcomed the Democratic Republic of Congo to the East African Community, while looking forward to joining hands in strengthening the community together.

The primary purpose of EAC regional economic community is to facilitate regional economic integration between East African member states, but they have increasingly become involved in areas beyond economic integration, including peace, security and governance.

Criteria for admission into the EAC are outlined in Article 3 of the bloc's establishing treaty and essentially includes sharing a border with an EAC member state and acceptance of the treaty's principles. The DRC's admission to the EAC seemed long overdue. The country borders five EAC member states and shares ethnic populations, languages and the natural environment with its neighbours. The DRC's markets account for roughly 7% of EAC exports and are set to grow in coming years.

Security and instability in the region creates an environment not conducive for investors, especially DRC that is likely to be aided by participation in the EAC on security matters. DRC has suffered a number of civil wars the effects of which usually spill over to neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Rwanda. The DRC has suffered from continued violence due to armed groups in the eastern part of the country such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) a militia group from Uganda that continues to terrorise the DRC citizens. Former Kenya President Uhuru Kenyatta called on the armed groups in DRC to lay down their weapons and work with President Felix Tshisekedi in order to bring peace to DRC. On 22 April 2022, in Nairobi, the EAC partner states agreed to establish a regional force to curb the unrest in Congo.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The DRC should fast-track its efforts to start enjoying the already available fruits that has been realized through the East African Community including the free movement of people, goods and services across the Community that has boosted trade and strengthened people-to-people ties thereby enabling East Africans to harness the comparative strength of each member state for the benefit of all and to confront and solve problems together.

The East African region including the new member DRC faces similar challenges in terms of infrastructure development, insecurity, poverty, underdevelopment, disease and ignorance that can best be addressed collectively by the Partner States for the well-being of their people. This can be well achieved through the Heads of State summit that has always been having political will to achieve the objectives as outlined in the EAC Treaty.

More effort is needed in improving regional infrastructure within and across the borders of the member states including the new DRC state. These include but are not limited to improvement of infrastructure (the roads, railways, airways, energy, and telecommunications), because it is fundamental to lowering costs of business and facilitating efficiency in production, transportation and delivery of goods and services. All member countries need to be well connected with a view to facilitate and increase trade within the region thus allowing partner states realize more profits.

The EAC secretariat should now strive to enhance more cooperation to DRC with other partner states in all the sectors, programmes and activities that promote the four pillars of regional integration. These pillars include the Customs Union, the Common Market, Monetary Union, and Political Federation.

Lastly, the EAC has to establish peace, stability and security in conflict zones from DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and parts of Kenya. They should therefore focus its efforts on crisis prevention, conflict resolution, small arms and light weapons control, and promotion of good governance. The EAC should therefore create strong institutional structures within EAC secretariat, set up Directorate for peace and security and adequately implement all regional strategies and standards within the partner countries.

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