

The “Balkanization” of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

HEATED DEBATES AND
CONSPIRACY THEORIES
IN GREATER KIVU AREA

Godefroid Muzalia
and Thierry Rukata

... LA BALKANISATION DE
...
... FARGO ET AU COMMAN
... AVEC PLUS DE 10 MILLIONS
... CA SUFITE.
... A LA NOTIFICATION PREALABLE
- NON A LA BALKANISATION

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Executive Summary

As early as after the country's 1960 independence, Prime Minister Patrice-Emery Lumumba denounced a plan for the "balkanization" of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sixty years later, the debate about the country's purported repartition continues. Taking a historical and ethnographic perspective, this study looks at the *longue durée* of the phenomenon. It demonstrates that each time the country goes through political crisis, the spectre of "balkanization" rises anew: the 1960s secessions, the war context of the 1990s and 2000s, and the recent resurgence of the M23 rebellion. The protagonists of the debate denounce a conspiracy supported by an international community that would use Rwanda to partition the DRC, while others deplore Kinshasa's inability to drive the country's development as a whole and believe that there is a need for a different approach, which would be either federalism or balkanization. However, it appears that despite strident discussions balkanization seems not to be an alternative for the majority of Congolese, even though many fear invasions by Rwanda or other foreign forces. Therefore, the debate remains open.

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Introduction

A “new” flag was flown in Bukavu on 30 June 2020: a square cloth with three different coloured stripes (yellow, blue and black) and a white star in its centre. The new flag was accompanied by leaflets and banners announcing a “Republic of Kivu”.¹ Comments went in all directions. Some were supportive, others denounced a “balkanization plan conceived by Western powers”. Provincial authorities condemned a “grotesque adventure” by the so-called Wazalendo (“patriots”), while civil society actors went on air and condemned “an international conspiracy to partition” the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Others traced back the conspiracy to the early 1960s. Indeed, what happened on 30 June 2020 is not the first expression of separatist initiatives in the DRC. Two such initiatives had already been formulated and materialized in the 1960s with the support of Belgium: one resulted in the secession of Katanga and another led to the secession of southern Kasai (Kalubi 2005). Thirty-six years later, warnings against a “balkanization” were issued by religious and civil society actors in the context of the cyclical wars the DRC experienced between 1996 and 2003. In his sermon on Christmas Day 1999, Emmanuel Kataliko, the then-Archbishop of Bukavu, denounced that “foreign powers, with the collaboration of some of our brothers, organize wars over control of the resources of our country” (Kataliko 1999). At the same time, he warned against “a certain Balkanization plan supported by the West”. Kataliko was echoed by civil society actors and protestant pastors (including Bishop Kuye Ndongu) who saw an “international conspiracy” against the DRC. Twenty-two years after religious and civil society actors mobilized against balkanization, the debate about a potential disintegration

¹ The “Republic of Kivu” referred both to a new armed group based in South Kivu in December 2019 and a “secessionist state” project that would include the current provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, Ituri and Tanganyika. This group is said to be controlled by followers of former President Joseph Kabila.

of the DRC has resurfaced. The notion of balkanization is often brought up by opponents, many of whom have used it to criticize the various governments that successively ruled the country since the fall of Mobutu in May 1997.²

This report foreground two aspects: the first is that balkanization discourses often emerge during periods of deep socio-political crisis. The second is that since the 1996 invasion by the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL, with the support of the Rwandan, Burundian and Ugandan armies), this discourse has been linked to conspiracy theories and involves a constellation of state and non-state, national and international actors. This raises some questions: what factors make this debate survive over time? How can we explain the resurgence of the balkanization discourse in the current context, where the country seems to be evolving at two speeds: a more or less stable “western part” and an “eastern part” plagued by an almost permanent activity of local and foreign armed groups? Finally, what hidden registers need to be untangled to understand the drivers and dynamics of the recurrent “balkanization” discourse?

This report is organised in four chapters. After this introduction, the first provides a general overview of the balkanization dynamics and examines the extent to which they might apply to the DRC. The second presents the main views of pro- and/or anti-balkanization of the DRC. The third examines the issue beyond the discourse and looks at the internal socio-political dynamics of the DRC. Finally, the fourth focuses on external pressures through conspiracy theory lenses. In conclusion, the report returns to potential explanations about how separatist tendencies in the DRC and even more so, rumours about them, have survived over time. Looking at the *longue durée* of the phenomenon, this report is drawing from both literature and ethnographic research. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bukavu (South Kivu), Goma (North Kivu) and Kinshasa with political actors (members of parliament and party leaders), religious leaders, civil society leaders, traditional chiefs, representatives of tribal communities, and two actors from armed groups.

² Honoré Ngbanda, who had been an advisor to former President Mobutu, had constantly denounced “the complicity of former President Joseph Kabila in executing a balkanization plan to benefit Rwanda.” Martin Fayulu, the unsuccessful Presidential candidate of the 2018 elections, is currently vocal in the balkanization debate

A brief history of the term “balkanization”

In a longer-term perspective, the making and unmaking of political entities are a frequent and recurrent process in the history of humanity. If the constitution of great empires was often the result of conquests (political and/or economic), their disintegration can be explained either by endogenous factors (difficulty in federating multiple nations, leadership struggles, governance issues, etc.), or by exogenous factors (external attacks by more powerful empires), or by both (Veyne 2016). Thus, the reality behind the concept of “balkanization” is older than the concept itself. It had already been reflected in neighbouring concepts such as separatism and independence, all of which have negative connotations. More specifically, there is a link between the word balkanization and the history of the Balkans in the 19th century and refers to the partition of the Ottoman Empire into a series of small countries (Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro). Then called “the sick man of Europe” (Bazin 1986), the Ottoman Empire was founded at the end of the 13th century by Osman I and was once among the world’s largest empires (Vasiliki 2014). In 1453, his successors occupied Constantinople (now Istanbul). Once established, the multinational entity became the crossroads of East-West interactions for nearly six centuries. The vast empire was torn apart by the turmoil of the “eastern question”, a conflict between the Great Powers and the nations of Southeast Europe over the territorial division of the Ottoman Empire (Loannis 2005). “Balkanization” refers to a fragmentation of one single territorial and political entity into numerous states (Rosière 2010). In 1918, the concept is introduced into the public debate through an interview in New York Times by Walter Rathenau. For the German politician, it was about keeping Germany from dismantling its territory and industry

(Capdepuy & Jesné 2012). Thus, besides the territorial fragmentation of a political entity, balkanization has a geo-economic dimension. When this happens, it refers to the economic exploitation of part of a sovereign state, without partitioning it, by other states or foreign structures. Several states have experienced this type of process.

Indeed, following the disintegration of the “sick man of Europe”, other entities were also reconstituted or partitioned. A very interesting case is former Yugoslavia. This vast political entity emerged just after World War I (Sabri 1992). In 1964, at the peak of its power, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia), six nations (Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) and two religions (Islam and Christianity) (Nano Ruzin 2013). Yugoslavia was conglomerate of people with high cultural and religious diversity. While there is no comparison, it is nonetheless important to point out that the process of moving from the Yugoslavia of empires to that of the nation-state (Gossiaux 2002) after World War I, could have similarities with the one that led to the construction of the Congo Free State by Leopold II during the last quarter of the 19th century, as a result of the 1885 Berlin Conference (Stengers 1985), from which today’s African states have emerged. They are mosaics of peoples and ethnic groups, which lack the kind of unity that would allow them to become real nations (Kodjo 1985). As a result, initiatives in favour of balkanization usually employ the “obsolete” character of colonial borders as a basis for their argument. The European powers that participated in the balkanization of the former Ottoman Empire also claimed that its borders were “aberrant,” even though they later took these same borders into account in the new configuration of the states resulting from balkanization (Capdepuy & Jesné 2012). In reality, there is often a question of access to resources beyond the issue of “obsolete” borders. Questioning borders inherited from colonization and the determination of former colonists to maintain control over mining regions in their former colonies were among the causes of crises that tore apart some African countries after gaining independence. Right after independence, Angola, Sudan, Nigeria and the DRC were particularly threatened by balkanization. While separatist movements in the first three countries was linked to oil fields (Morency-Laflamme 2011), in the DRC it was the mining provinces

of Katanga and Kasai that benefited from the support of Western powers, eager to get these regions out of the control of the now independent former Belgian Congo (Kalubi 2005).

In 1996, thirty-six years after the 1960s secessions, eastern DRC experience the “Banyamulenge rebellion”, leading then-Rwandan President Bizimungu, a supporter of the rebels, to reopen the debate on the borders between DRC and its neighbours. He called for a second Berlin Conference to redraw the borders of the countries in the region in order to reconstitute “Greater Rwanda” (Njangu 2000: 64). Thus, the reconstitution of the “Greater Rwanda” was to be achieved after some areas of the Kivu region had been annexed (Goma, Masisi, Rutshuru and Walikale in North Kivu and Kalehe, Kabare and parts of Mwenga in South Kivu). The Second Congo war, known as the “Rectification war”, led by the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD) between 1998 and 2003, revealed that, in addition to the question of colonial borders and security issues, Rwanda and Uganda had economic motivations behind their intervention in the DRC, namely access to natural resources. The reunification of the country in 2003 did not prevent the RCD rebellion from fostering a form of “economic balkanization” (Capdepuay & Jesné 2012), with the eastern parts of DRC (South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri) not only remaining a hotbed for violence and the proliferation of armed groups, but also a real area of predation for mining companies, as first documented by the 2002 UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC. Journalist Colette Braeckman wrote, already in 1999, that the DRC was in the middle of a truly relentless competition for free and exclusive access to untapped natural resources (Braeckman 1999). Later, in 2006, the same author described the DRC as a “self-service counter for the mining country” (Braeckman 2006).

In addition to economic motivations, identity considerations are sometimes used as a “smokescreen” in balkanization discourses (Rosière 2010). In this regard, the first separatist attempts in the DRC are striking examples. Beyond the external support it received, the Katangese secession of the 1960s involved the *Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga* (CONAKAT), led by Moïse Tshombé. The leaders of the secessionist republic thrived on a regional identity, that of the Katangese, which included all

the tribal communities established in the former province of Katanga at the time. A similar pattern was followed in the secession of southern Kasai during the same period. Its leader, Albert Kalonji Ditunga, took the title of Mulopwe (lord or supreme chief) from the cultural heritage of the former Luba kingdom. In fact, historical and cultural references predominate many separatist discourses (Diouf 2021). This is also true for separatist tendencies that timidly expressed themselves on the margins of the Congolese rebellions of the 1990s, such as those carried by the *Front de libération du Grand Kasai* of Professor Julien Ciakudia,³ the *Comité Moïse Tshombé* in Katanga,⁴ the *Rassemblement pour l'indépendance du Grand Kivu* (RIK),⁵ or the BDK (Bundu dia Kongo, or Union of the Bakongo), a politico-religious movement that has been demanding autonomy for the province of Central Kongo from the central government for three decades (Muzalia 2011). These movements have tried to mobilize a somewhat foggy “regional identity”. For one spiritual leader of BDK, for example, “Zaire (DRC) was the result of a forced marriage forged by Leopold II. This forced marriage was impossible for the Zairian rulers to transform into a love marriage. Under these conditions, divorce is not inevitable” (Muzalia 2012). Indeed, transforming a “forced marriage into a love marriage” thus refers to national integration, one of DRC’s greatest challenges. However, it is clear that the Congolese population, despite any separatist tendencies, remain generally committed to the unity of their country in its current shape.

³ The *Front de Libération du Grand Kasai* was created in London on 10 December 2004 by Julien Ciakudia. The goal was to create the Republic of Greater Kasai. This would include the former provinces of Kasai Oriental and Kasai Occidental. Its capital city would be in the Lake Munkamba region.

⁴ The *Comité Moïse Tshombe* was created in 2000 by the Moïse Tshombe Foundation. Chaired by Lucien Naki, based in Canada, the *Comité* has been demanding since 2002 the rehabilitation of Moïse Tshombe's memory as founder of the State of Katanga in 1960. On 11 July 2010, demonstrators claiming to be “Tshombists” gathered at the main square of the post office in Lubumbashi to demand the independence of Katanga.

⁵ The *Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance du Kivu* (RIK) is an offshoot of the MJPC (*Mobilisation pour la Justice et la Paix au Congo*) of Amede Kyumbwa. Created in February 2008, the RIK is ready to proclaim the independence of Kivu (North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema) if the “DRC government fails to address insecurity in this part of the country”.

Views on the “balkanization” discourse

The arguments in favour of balkanization, as expressed by respondents in Bukavu and Goma, are generally based on the fact that, sixty years after independence, the country has not yet achieved economic growth.⁶ On the contrary, they contend that the country seems to be economically and socially falling apart, as it is caught up in quasi-permanent repetitions of insecurity and predation. The pro-balkanization argument can thus be divided into three themes: a critique of the centralization of all power in Kinshasa; chaotic governance; and negative effects of the east-west divide.⁷ There are also three main anti-balkanization arguments, or solutions: the first proposes the relocation of the capital from Kinshasa to another province, the second proposes federalism as an alternative to balkanization, and the third rebukes the presumed or actual “annexation” attempts of eastern Congo by Rwanda.

3.1 “Nothing works, let’s just break up this country...”⁸

When it comes to centralizing all power in Kinshasa, interviewees argued that the country is too big to be properly governed from Kinshasa by leaders who have demonstrated inability to govern. An ex-combatant of the *Congrès*

⁶ Interview No. 9, Goma, 18 July 2021.

⁷ In the collective imagination, the west is built around Kinshasa and includes in its zone of influence the former provinces of Kongo Central, Bandundu, Equateur, and part of the former Orientale Province (mostly Kikongo- and Lingala-speaking). The east would include the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, Katanga (mostly Kihwahili-speaking), and the east of Orientale Province. In the center of the country, Kasai is considered part of the west rather than the east (mostly Ciluba-speaking).

⁸ Interview No. 12, Bukavu, 2 August 2021.

nationale pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), who operated in North Kivu between 2004 and 2008, said that, “since attempts to decentralize the country are not working, the DRC should try something new. Either federalism or balkanization.”⁹ In fact, it was not until 1982, after nearly 17 years of centralized rule, that Zaire took its first step toward decentralization. Ordinance-Law No. 82-006 of 25 February 1982 introduced territorial decentralization in both urban and rural areas (Vunduawe 2009). This development was more a response to power struggles in the context of the two Shaba wars of 1977 and 1978¹⁰ than a genuine move to open up the political space (Kapyka Kabesa 2009). Elections were organized to implement the provisions of Ordinance-Law No. 82-006. However, political decentralization did not follow. A second ordinance was promulgated on 20 December 1995, calling for elections in 1997. These elections never took place, as the country plunged into war from September 1996 to 2003, the effects of which can still be seen in the persistence of armed groups in the eastern part of the country, such as in South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri. While the technical and political debate on the form of the state is within grasp of the political class, it is difficult for the majority of the population, especially in North and South Kivu, to differentiate between federalism and actual balkanization given a prolific political rumour mill. This point is further illustrated by a comment made by a potato seller¹¹ on the role of national representatives:

[...] Tukisha bachagula, banapoteya. Saa banaendaka kule Kinshasa, bana tusahabu lote. Ikiwezekana, tu ingiye tu mu fédéralisme. Kila batu babakiye kwabo, na ba jenge kwabo [...] basi miye ndafikaka kule Kinshasa. Sina za avion. Au moins nikuwe na enda angu goma, njo kwenye na toshaka byashara yangu.¹²

⁹ Interview No. 13, Irambi-Katana, 27 September 2020; No. 8, Goma, 17 July 2021; No. 7, Goma, 14 July 2021.

¹⁰ On 13 May 1978, Nathanael Mbumba’s “Katangese Tigers” occupied Kolwezi city in Katanga. Their military organization, the *Front de libération nationale du Congo*, set out to overthrow the Mobutu regime and establish federalism to better govern the country. The rebellion was quickly crushed by French intervention on 19 May 1978 (Aleth Manin 1978).

¹¹ Interview No.12, cited above.

¹² “As soon as they are elected, they disappear. When they go to Kinshasa, they forget us. If possible, we should adopt federalism. That way everyone can stay in their own environment and concentrate on their own development (...) Will I ever go to Kinshasa? I can't afford the plane ticket. I'd rather go to Goma. That's where I buy my goods”.

The idea of having each people stay in their own province and develop it simply means to many a carte blanche for “let’s balkanize this country”. It is more explicit with those in favour of the “Republic of Kivu”:

The provinces are ignored by Kinshasa. For example, when President Tshisekedi took power, he implemented his 100-day program. All his initiatives are carried out in Kinshasa. The provinces are completely forgotten. For them (Kinshasa), the provinces are irrelevant! We have to look after ourselves.¹³

This need for self-reliance leads to the issue of governance. Indeed, the social and economic regression of the DRC is attributed to the amateurism of political elites based in Kinshasa. According to some respondents, “DRC’s development will not come from Kinshasa”.¹⁴ There are basically two arguments put forward by those in favour of balkanization. The first is that Kinshasa “monopolizes all the country’s resources” at the expense of the provinces, and that it is imperative to put an end to this situation. The second argues that the leaders in Kinshasa are merely “enjoying themselves while in office”. Regarding Kinshasa’s monopolization of resources, a member of parliament from South Kivu said:

90% of the national wealth comes from the provinces, but Kinshasa returns almost nothing. All the provincial governments have problems with their provincial assemblies and with their populations because they do not have the means to support the development of their entities.¹⁵

These views are echoed by many other informants, including a civil society actor who argues:

Personally, I do not support a system of governance that has failed. Our decentralization has remained in the text, but as far as Congolese political actors at all levels are concerned, we remain centralized, so I would like to see a shift from this form of government, which has proven its limits, to a federation in which we would have provincial authorities elected by direct universal suffrage and therefore accountable to the people.¹⁶

¹³ Interview No. 13, quoted above.

¹⁴ Interview No. 7, Goma, 19 July 2021.

¹⁵ Interview No. 6, Bukavu, 20 July 2021.

¹⁶ Interview No. 1, Bukavu, 26 July 2021.

As for the leaders “who enjoy themselves”, it is in particular the *kinoiserie politique*¹⁷ and a head of state who travels extensively abroad that leaves people confused: “Since he came to power, Felix [Tshisekedi] has been traveling at the expense of the public treasury and no impact has resulted from these trips”.¹⁸ Indeed, from 24 January 2019 (his first day in office) to 12 July 2019 alone, the Congolese president and his often large entourage have made 17 trips abroad. After July 2019, the head of state did not rest. These trips, which cost the state budget heavily, have earned him evocative nicknames such as *ahadi*, *musafiri*, or *maangaiko* (promise, traveler, wanderer). The first (*ahadi*) refers to all the promises made during the electoral campaign, especially the promise to bring peace to eastern DRC. The second (*musafiri*) portrays a president who enjoys himself, while the last (*maangaiko*) describes a president who is irresponsible and willing to travel even when “his house is on fire”. These nicknames reflect a popular early assessment of Tshisekedi’s mandate, a largely negative one. Some also argue that politicizing the east-west divides accelerates the process of state fragmentation, as frustrations with the “tribalization of politics” under Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi have grown. A large segment of national members of parliament criticizes what they call the “luba-ization” of power:

Imagine that you are the head of state, but all the senior positions in the government are given to people from the same geographical or linguistic area of the country. The head of state, the president of the constitutional court, almost all the heads of the country’s high courts, the central bank, the ministry of justice, the ministry of the interior, the ministry of finance and many other senior positions are all from the same geopolitical zone. All parliament’s vice-presidents are from the same linguistic and geopolitical zone. These are balkanization tendencies. What message do you give to others?¹⁹

It should be noted, however, that the above situation does not necessarily reflect a political desire to break up the DRC. Rather, it sums up the eternal

¹⁷ The term *kinoiserie politique* would be defined by three elements: a council of ministers with no follow-up on decisions, embezzlement of public funds, and rest in luxurious hotels or on vacation in the West. This term reflects an attempt by the ordinary man to explain the disarticulation between the executive and the public administration.

¹⁸ Interview No. 8, Goma, 17 July 2021.

¹⁹ Idem.

competition among Congolese political actors for access to power and the resources that come with it, in other words: “Congolese geopolitics”²⁰ (Muzalia 2012). Such logics have existed throughout the history of the DRC and have not led to its implosion. In fact, when Joseph Kasavubu came to power in 1960, his inner circle consisted of Bakongo politicians from the Abako (*Alliance des Bakongo*). After the 1965 coup, power shifted to Equateur, Mobutu’s region, and was controlled by his Ngbandi community. The same happened with the Baswahili (the people of the east, Kiswahili-speaking) when Laurent-Désiré Kabila and Joseph Kabila were in power. Today “it is the turn” of the Baluba to rule. Clearly, the “tribalization of politics” contributes to the lack of national integration in the DRC, but it does not necessarily lead to its balkanization. Finally, it should be noted that in South Kivu, discourses in favour of balkanization have been linked to the actions of a group of armed actors under the label of the *Mouvement congolais pour la paix et la démocratie sociale* (MCPDS), a group rumoured to be behind Bukavu’s “Republic of Kivu” event of 30 June 2020. According to this rumour, MCPDS is a political-military movement involving former PPRD elites (*Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie*), from Greater Kivu, as well as people close to Joseph Kabila. According to the same rumour, the “Congolese” epithet that appears in the movement’s name is only a distraction to hide separatist ambitions:

[...] the Republic of Kivu seems to be a politico-military organization loyal to the former president of the DRC. This was Plan B in case he felt threatened after handing over power to Felix. Kabila would then be forced to partition the country. Unfortunately, this plan would only protect him and his supporters.²¹

Talking about Joseph Kabila’s supporters, it should be noted that immediately after the “peaceful transition” of power in Kinshasa on 24 January 2019, some heavyweights of the former presidential majority who did not manage to position themselves in the new Tshisekedi regime, had returned to their respective provinces. In South Kivu, for example, Norbert Basengezi Kantintima, former vice-president of the Independent National Electoral

²⁰ Congolese geopolitics relate to regional and tribal coteries in the allocation of senior positions in state institutions and public enterprises. It exploits the rivalry and power relations between ethnic and regional groups (De Villers 1998b: 23).

²¹ Interview No. 1, cited above.

Commission (CENI), and Marcellin Cishambo Ruhoya, former governor of South Kivu, left Kinshasa to settle in their respective villages (Kaziba and Nyangezi), where “men in arms” were soon afterwards reported. The emergence of the “Republic of Kivu” in the area is believed to date from this period. However, there is no reliable evidence linking the presence of this armed group in eastern DRC to the recent return of these politicians, let alone between the “Republic of Kivu” and the former President Joseph Kabila. However, while the flag of this projected secessionist Republic was being raised in Bukavu on 30 June 2020, the presence of MCPDS elements was reported in three villages of the Irhambi-Katana grouping in South Kivu’s Kabare territory, namely Kabushwa, Kahungu and Mabingu. At the same time, there were rumours about the presence of Republican Guard soldiers in Kaziba, in the “triangle of death” between Kamanyola, Kaziba and Lemera, a neuralgic zone for previous rebellions in eastern DRC since the 1990s. This trend to militarize the area, just after the inauguration of the new president in Kinshasa, has led to all kinds of speculations.

Why do such rumours persist? One answer lies in social media. In fact, while the flag of the “Republic of Kivu” was flying in Bukavu, a government of the future secessionist state was published. It included the “big names” of the province, starting with Nobel Prize laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege. He immediately spoke out against what he called “another attempt to destabilize and partition our country”.²² Moreover, former PPRD stalwarts mentioned in this new “government” (Norbert Basengezi Kantintima and Marcellin Cishambo Ruhoya) spoke on the national television (RTNC) to clarify that they were in no way linked to the so-called “Republic of Kivu”. The denials, however, failed to stop rumours of impending balkanization, which spread through the streets of Bukavu, where they were reinforced by the leaders of the “Republic of Kivu,” which according to the movement’s spokesman interviewed in Irhambi Katana, includes a large coalition called the Coalition congolaise pour le changement radical et la démocratie (CCCRD). He also claimed that this coalition had supporters in the territories of Beni,

²² *Mise au point et désapprobation du Dr. Denis Mukwege à propos de la création d’une « République du Kivu »*, at <https://fondationpanzirdc.org/mise-au-point-et-desapprobation-du-dr-denis-mukwege-a-propos-de-la-creation-dune-republique-du-kivu/>

Lubero and Masisi in North Kivu and in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, Uvira and Fizi in South Kivu.²³ These territories all experienced insecurity and troubled past. The territories of Beni and Lubero, for example, have experienced several waves of violence characterized by massacres and killings considered genocidal by some observers (Tunamusifu Shiralbe & Mpamwa 2020). South Kivu in general, and the highlands of Kalehe and Uvira-Fizi in particular, have become hotbeds of local and regional insecurity dynamics (Verweijen et al. 2019 and Bouvy et al. 2019). People are tired, feel completely abandoned by the state, and are desperately waiting for a saviour. This sense of helplessness has been manipulated by the leaders of the “Republic of Kivu” in order to gain popular attention. Ethnic and/or regional divisions have been exploited in the separatist discourse, as well as the suffering of the population in insecure areas and the exclusion from power of certain political actors.²⁴ During the Murhesa II peace talks, this “victimization” was expressed by the CCCRD through the armed group Biloze Bishambuke.²⁵ This armed group, in alliance with the MCPDS, had set out a number of condition for demobilization:

- Releasing Vital Kamerhe, President of the Union pour la Nation Congolaise (UNC);
- Integrating South Kivu political figures into the institutions of the Republic;
- Publishing of the obduction report of the late General Delphin Kahimbi;
- Promoting FARDC officers from the eastern part of the country.

With these claims in mind, it is clear that the balkanization discourse is also being used as a political tool to negotiate access to an increasingly luba-ized

²³ Interview No. 13, Irambi-Katana, 26 September 2020.

²⁴ Interview No. 6, quoted above, and interview No. 12, Bukavu, 12 September 2021.

²⁵ “Biloze Bishambuke” means “come what may”. The expression refers to an armed group composed of Banyindu (a tribe from South Kivu). This group is said to be part of the *Coalition Congolaise pour le Changement Radical et la Démocratie*.

political space, and not necessarily to partition the country. In fact, the position against or for balkanization is not crystal clear even among those who support it.

3.2 “...no, balkanization is not the solution!”

The DRC is neither larger than the United States nor Nigeria! The problem, in my opinion, is not the size of the country. The problem is the country’s leaders. We have to try something new. For example, we could first relocate the capital to another city in the centre of the country, then try federalism and finally work on governance at the level of the federated states [...]. Balkanizing the country would make it easier for Rwanda to take over the eastern provinces.²⁶

The arguments of those who oppose the balkanization of the DRC are summarized in the above statement. There are three main trends. The first suggests relocating the capital from Kinshasa to another province, the second proposes federalism as an alternative to balkanization, while the third fears the “annexation” of the east of the country by Rwanda. The idea of relocating the capital is not new. Many political leaders, including those in Laurent Desire Kabila’s short-lived AFDL regime, raised this possibility after taking power on 17 May 1997. Their argument was that Kinshasa was too far away and inaccessible for people in the country’s eastern provinces, which would explain weak bureaucracy and the failure to govern the provinces. According to a former supporter of the *Mouvement du 17 mai* (supporters of Laurent-Désiré Kabila), the AFDL was already thinking about creating a new political capital city in what is now Sankuru province in the centre of the country.²⁷ In anticipation of the implementation of this project, Laurent-Désiré Kabila had apparently decided to disperse the institutions of the Republic throughout the country. While the executive branch was to remain in Kinshasa, the legislative branch was to operate in Lubumbashi, and the courts and tribunals were to be relocated to Kisangani. The reasons for abandoning Kinshasa as the capital are twofold, objective and subjective. The first reason is that the capital of the DRC is too far away. It is completely disconnected from the provinces. Originally, it was

²⁶ Interview No. 15, Kinshasa, 7 July 2021.

²⁷ Interview No. 14, Bukavu, 9 July 2021.

a question of physical isolation. This would have led first to the isolation of the provinces from the capital and then to the division of the country into eastern and western provinces.

Kinshasa is one of the most inaccessible capitals for the so-called interior Congolese [...]. Unfortunately, Congolese politicians have learned nothing from Stanley, who said at the end of the 19th century that the Congo was worthless without railroads.²⁸

According to several informants, this isolation of the provinces works against national integration. People in the east would be attracted to East Africa (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, etc.), while those in the west would be attracted to Angola and the ocean (Europe) rather than within the country. There is reason to believe that this argument, used by those who are in favour of balkanization, is an alibi to justify what appears to be a concealed political battle. The fact is that all the provinces of the DRC are isolated from Kinshasa. Framing the problem in terms of East-West divides is therefore simplistic. The northern provinces (Mongala, Bas-Uélé, etc.) are just as difficult to reach by road from Kinshasa as those in the south (Haut Lomami, Lomami, etc.). The same is true of the provinces in the centre of the country (Sankuru, Tshuapa, Kasai Central, etc.). The isolation of the provinces from Kinshasa is apparently a distraction from a second, more subjective argument. The following narrative, circulated by the Wazalendo movement,²⁹ tells us more:

Kinshasa ni duniaya ingine. Batu ni bavivu. Hatuko sawa nabo. Habatumikake, kazi yabo ni ma kope na ambiance. Na njo byenye bana fanyaka mu politique. Ina faa tu siku moya tuna achana nabo. Na njo dawa ya maendelo ya Kivu [...].³⁰

This narrative is biased and relies on the famous “East-West divide”. Just like the “objective” argument presented above, it is also questionable. As a matter of fact, those in power in Kinshasa do not necessarily come from the “West”.

²⁸ Interview No. 3, Goma, 10 July 2021.

²⁹ Interview No. 13, cited above.

³⁰ “Kinshasa is a different world, people are lazy. We (the people of Kivu) are different from them. They don't work. They are only good at being resourceful and having fun. This is what they do in politics. One day we will have to get rid of them. That's the way to develop the Kivu”.

In fact, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, several “eastern” political actors have occupied strategic positions in the government, thanks to the various rebellions and the 2006 elections. They have had a mixed track record. The real problem is the quality of leaders, not their geographical origin. Under a very evocative title, Bagenda Balagizi addressed this issue in his writings titled “Le Congo malade de ses hommes”.³¹ He accuses the Congolese political class of having ruined their country and caused war in the east (Bagenda 2003). A number of political actors are currently calling for federalism as a solution to state collapse. In reality, the entire process of decentralization in the spirit of the 2006 Constitution has stagnated. This constitution guarantees a high degree of autonomy to the provinces, as stipulated in the Organic Law of 7 October 2008.³² However, Kinshasa still controls everything. Local elections were never held, although they were supposed to contribute to the establishment of democratic institutions at the territorial level. According to one member of parliament³³, the ruling party (UDPS) is not willing to organize these elections. It wants to follow the same pattern as the PPRD (for 18 years, the political party monopolized the right to appoint and dismiss authorities at the entity level) in order to control the 2023 elections. In fact, these authorities at the entity level are often co-opted into polling stations and are loyal to the ruling government. This is the reason why almost all civil society actors want to have local elections, which, they argue, would reduce central authority weight and interference in decentralized entities and encourage local development efforts. Supporters of federalism as an alternative to breaking up the country usually bring up the monopolization of power and resources by the Kinshasa-based elite as main argument. A third trend is plain reject of balkanization as a Rwandan intention to annex North and South Kivu: “We will surely be dominated and absorbed by Rwanda if we balkanize this country”,³⁴ declared one informant. It should be noted that the fear of Rwanda invading the DRC dates back to the 1990s. President Kagame’s attempts to maintain influence over the east of the DRC between

³¹ Bagenda, B. (2003): *Le Congo malade de ses hommes. Crimes, pillages et guerres*. Bruxelles, Luc Pire.

³² Organic Law No. 08/016 of 7 October 2008 on the composition, organization and operation of the Decentralized Territorial Entities and their relations with the State and the provinces.

³³ Interview No. 6, cited above.

³⁴ Interview No. 20, Bukavu, 10 July 2021.

1996 and 2003, the international community's perceived favouritism towards him, and the uncertainty about the establishment of separatist army in the states that would result from balkanization, are all factors contributing to fears of Rwanda among Congolese living in the east. To avoid unpleasant surprises, many Congolese opposition figures thus believe that the unitary form of the state should be preserved, and decentralization implemented as foreseen in the constitution. It is in that sense, that some see federalism, rightly or wrongly, as a step towards balkanization to the benefit of Rwanda.

4 |

Contextualising the balkanization debate in Congolese history

There are two key issues that deserve particular attention beyond the balkanization discourse. First, national integration and second, political and economic governance of the Congolese state. With regard to the issue of national integration, it is necessary to specify that the famous “east-west divide” is rooted in the very building the Congo Free State that emerged from the Berlin Conference was a legal entity. Yet, socially, it was an amalgam of nations gathered together in a vast territory whose borders were not clear at the time (Stengers 1985). Autonomous kingdoms lost sovereignty to colonizers. The unity displayed by the Congolese political class on the eve of independence was thus embryonic. After independence, the fledgling Congolese political class faced many challenges, including the question of which form of state to adopt. In fact, long before independence, Joseph Kasavubu, leader of the *Alliance des Bakongo* (ABAKO), used the cultural diversity of the state inherited from colonization to justify his argument in favour of federalism:

(Cultural) diversity is not necessarily an obstacle to unity. The kind of unity we want for the Congo would take the form of a federation of autonomous provincial entities. With the establishment of the provincial governments in January 1960 and the Congolese government in March 1960, this unity, which should be neither fragile nor artificial, can be achieved (Niemba 2000).

By opting for federalism, Joseph Kasavubu contradicted the *Mouvement national congolais* (MNC) of Patrice Emery Lumumba, who believed that unitarism was the only way to preserve the fragile nation inherited from colonization in a modern state structure. This debate is reflected throughout the DRC’s political history. In fact, on the eve of independence, the Fundamental

Law of 19 June 1960, a product of the Belgian Parliament, opted for unitary state structures and did its best to provide the state with some aspects of the federal system. The federal aspect of the Fundamental Law consisted in the recognition of the right of provinces to have a constitution and an administration (articles 159 and 160), as well as the right to have their own government and an elected assembly (articles 15 and 162). The law also provided for the distribution of state sovereignty, which is the key issue in any federal system, and for matters to be dealt with exclusively by the central government (Article 219) and others by the provincial government (Article 221).

Belgium used its Western legal system to try to unite this “new Congolese nation” around a state ideal that was not really been reflected by 80 years of colonial history. The agency of an inexperienced Congolese political class was not taken into account, nor were regional fault lines and interests. Unable to integrate the administrative model inherited from colonization, the Congolese political class contributed to the chaos the country experienced after independence. On 25 November 1965, Mobutu seized power in a coup. He decided to have non-native governors administer the provinces in an attempt to promote national integration. The totalitarianism of Mobutu was thus able to impose, in its own way, the idea of a Congolese nation. But the unity achieved by *the Mouvement populaire de révolution* (MPR) regime was fragile. Mobutu had deliberately disregarded provincial specificities, which soon resulted in local protests (Niemba 2002). In the end, the Mobutu system coped with provincial autonomy tendencies through an ‘ostrich approach’ that could not last long. The country’s economic situation was gradually deteriorating, as tribalism and clientelism characterized the Second Republic until Zaire, in the early 1990s, got nicknamed the ‘sick man of Central Africa’, having missed its destiny. Only in the 1970s did Zairians have some hope. At the beginning of the 1980s, the country began to collapse. After the political crisis caused by the failure of the democratization process initiated in 1990, followed by decades of war, DRC is a fragmented state. Still the ‘sick man of Central Africa’ DRC is struggling to recover despite international efforts to build peace and rebuild the state. Ultimately, the threat of balkanization that hangs over the DRC is part of the classic pattern of the fragmentation of large political entities: a continental state without an effective administration, a conglomerate of ‘militia-like’ power spaces, a failed state (Tréfon 2002), a state that is ‘already balkanized’ economically, socially and culturally.

What if “balkanization” came from somewhere else?

Conspiracy theories are part and parcel of the balkanization discourse in the DRC. A conspiracy theory explains an event, a series of events, or even a whole part of national or world history based on deliberate, hidden and malicious actions of a few people (Lebourg 2008). Conspiracy theories are usually partially based on facts, which serve as clues to the construction of a theory whose main elements are hidden and therefore difficult to prove. Thus, proving the veracity of a rumour or the effectiveness of a “conspiracy” is not the point. It is well known that conspiracy theories denounce not so much a conspiracy as a social condition (Madelin 2002). Thus, a rumour about Rwanda’s determination to establish a “Hima-Tutsi empire” (Barnes 1999) in eastern DRC with Western support is the basis of the “balkanization plan” of the DRC. After more than two decades of instability and territorial fragmentation in eastern DRC, many believe there is a concrete plan to balkanize the DRC. The term is currently driven by the Congolese opposition under Martin Fayulu, the unsuccessful 2018 presidential candidate. Other politicians, religious and civil society leaders, and even some “independent” scientists associate this “balkanization plan” to external factors rather than domestic action of Congolese political actors, let alone of the population. In this context dominated by rumours, the creation of the rural commune of Minembwe³⁵ in South Kivu not only came at an awkward moment, but became the “proof” for the creation of a “Hima-Tutsi Empire”. Several names

³⁵ Minembwe is located in the Fizi, Uvira and Mwenga highlands. The Banyamulenge, who are perceived as outsiders, live there alongside other local communities. The locality was established as a rural commune on the initiative of Banyamulenge leaders and against the will of the other local communities.

have been used to describe this so-called empire: Republic of Volcanoes, the Hima Empire, Havila, etc. This would be a large country as it would include what is now Rwanda, Burundi, southwestern Uganda, Buha (named after the Ha people of eastern Tanzania), and by Buhavu in South Kivu – all linked by linguistic commonalities. The “Greater Kivu”, made up of North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema, would be annexed once this project is completed. Despite the progress made in the reunification of the DRC after the rebellions of the 1990s and 2000s, several informants believe that the project to create a “Tutsi state” is carried out in Fizi and that Minembwe would be the starting point.

The driving force behind the partition of the DRC is said to be the great powers, in particular the United States, France and Israel. One civil society actor even declares that four states must be created and that the new political map of Central Africa is already available in Berlin³⁶, citing a recent sermon by the Bishop of Bunia. In reality, what undermined the territorial unity of the DRC was the cycle of wars (1996-2003) and the subsequent proliferation of armed groups between 1996 and 2021. Warlords in control of vast territories have brought back memories of the 1960s, when the country was torn apart by secession and was on the verge of disintegration. In 1999, nearly four decades after the secessions of the 1960s, the country was effectively partitioned by two major rebel movements: Jean-Pierre Bemba’s *Mouvement de libération du Congo* (MLC) and the RCD. An “international conspiracy to balkanize the DRC” was denounced by the young members of the BBC-Carrefour. In 1999, they quoted a Ugandan newspaper (without much detail) saying:

Four autonomous states will be created on Congolese territory. The Republic of Volcanoes, including Greater Kivu and the two Kasais will become the zone of influence of the United States under the control of Rwanda. The Eastern Province (Kisangani) will be dominated by Uganda with the blessing of England. Belgium will get back its Katanga state of the 1960s, while the rest of the country will be oriented towards Brazzaville and Bangui, in the French sphere of influence.³⁷

³⁶ Interview No. 10, Goma, 13 July 2021

³⁷ Pressure group initiated in the early 1990s by the UDPS South Kivu Federation. The BBC sign has no particular meaning.

Given this rumour, the RCD-led rebellion from 1998-2003 was interpreted as a war to balkanize the DRC. In urban areas, resistance was organized around the civil society coordination office, while in rural areas there was a revival of armed groups known as “Mai-Mai”. The rise of “Rwandophobia” in the Kivus also coincided with this period. According to a former civil society leader from the 1990s:

The Rwandan aggressors, conspiring with the Americans, the British and the Jews, were simply after the balkanization of the DRC. This plan was only defeated by the nationalist resistance led by civil society and the Mai-Mai. But the battle is not over. The Americans will not give up. With Felix in charge, anything is possible.³⁸

In fact, such a conspiracy is impossible without accomplices. While the plan to break up the DRC involves the international community and neighbouring countries, the accomplices are inside the country. In this respect, a member of the national parliament made it clear:

The sad truth is that to this day, whenever public opinion denounces balkanization or even secessionist tendencies, it focuses its attention outside the country [...]. When the US ambassador attended the installation of the rural community of Minembwe, he was surrounded by Congolese, right?³⁹

For this informant, the balkanization machine is already in motion. The presence of the US ambassador in Minembwe to inaugurate a “rural commune” should be seen as a strong signal from the US, not only to the Congolese government (represented in Minembwe by the Minister of Defence and Former Combatants, the Minister of Decentralization, the Chief of Staff of the FARDC, and the Governor of South Kivu), but also to those Congolese who continue to view the Banyamulenge as foreigners. As a result, the Banyamulenge are no longer seen as mere loyal accomplices to Rwanda, but as key players in the process of establishing a “Hima-Tutsi empire” in eastern DRC. As Judith Verweijen rightly observed, the case of “Minembwe invokes the spectre of balkanization that regularly recurs in Congolese political debate”.

³⁸ Interview No. 20, cited above.

³⁹ Interview No. 6, cited above.

During the 1996 and 1998 wars, two very vague concepts – Hutuland and Tutsiland – further enabled the spread of conspiracy theories about the “balkanization” of the DRC. The conspiracy suggested a process undertaken by the West to offer Rwanda, which allegedly struggled to find space for its population given the size of the country, to deport its Hutu population to the DRC. According to those who believed in it, the idea was to use Congolese Hutus to create a buffer zone in the Kivu, between the DRC and Rwanda, to contain the former Hutu refugees of 1994. The buffer zone would then be annexed to the “little neighbour.”⁴⁰ This space (mainly between Rwanda and the DRC) is characterized by overlapping ethnic and national identities (Pourtier 2000). During the height of the Congolese rebellions, the “Kivu imbroglio” was described as the “Balkans of Africa”. This expression did not go unnoticed. It caught the attention of certain civil society actors (*Collectif des organisations des jeunes du Sud-Kivu* and *Dauphins Munzehirwa-Kataliko*) who, hostile to the RCD, mobilised the population of Bukavu against “a war of occupation, part of the balkanization process of the country”. In 2012, J. Peter Pham, then working for the Atlantic Council, made a controversial statement. The later US special envoy to the Great Lakes region – in a 2012 New York Times op-ed entitled “To save Congo, let it fall apart” – endorsed the balkanization of the DRC. After presenting the country’s wealth and showing that it has never benefited the people, but only a few individuals, he claimed that

[...] if Congo were permitted to break up into smaller entities, the international community could devote its increasingly scarce resources to humanitarian relief and development, rather than trying, as the United Nations Security Council has pledged, to preserve the “sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity” of a fictional state that is of value only to the political elites who have clawed their way to the top in order to plunder Congo’s resources and fund the patronage networks that ensure that they will remain in power. (Pham 2012)

Pham thus took the opposite view of Aldo Ajello, former European Union representative for the Great Lakes, who stated that “there is no need to move the (Congolese) borders, but to open them up for concerted management of the region’s resources [...]”. This view was later echoed by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and European Commissioner Louis Michel, who then clearly

⁴⁰ Interview No. 19, Goma, 12 July 2021.

expressed their desire to see the DRC share its resources with its neighbours in order to end the recurring conflicts in the “CEPGL zone” (Muzalia 2017). The expressions “open Congolese borders” and “concerted management of the region’s resources” were problematic for many political actors and civil society leaders. They interpreted Aldo Ajello’s claim as a metaphor for subtle balkanization.⁴¹ The DRC would thus be nothing more than an updated version of the International Association of the Congo (1885-1908). In other words, an “international consortium, not a state in the modern sense” (Mwaka et al. 2003). Pham’s pro-balkanization thesis, which goes so far as to call the DRC a fictitious state, was put forward in 2012 in the context of the emergence of the M23 rebellion and has contributed to amplifying not only the rumour of the existence of an “international conspiracy” to balkanize the DRC, but also the rumour of Rwanda’s role in this process through the *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M23). The Rwanda discussed here is that of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front RPF, presented by the conspiracy theory in vogue in eastern DRC as “black Jews”, and therefore associated with the State of Israel (and hence, a state always supported by the US), which is said to be in good relations with Rwanda. Ever since, many Congolese are haunted by the spectre of balkanization, to the point that some territorial decentralization initiatives implemented by Kinshasa – such as establishing Minembwe or Nyabibwe as a “rural commune”⁴² in South Kivu (areas with significant Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda populations) – as well as Rwandan-sponsored rebellions such as the CNDP and then the M23 in North Kivu, are considered by many Congolese as attempts to create either a Tutsiland or a Hutuland, “hubs from which foreign powers with the help of Congolese accomplices are trying to bring their plan for the balkanization of the DRC to fruition.” The Kinyarwanda-speaking populations living in these areas are often equated with Rwandans. A civil society leader put it this way:

The Hutu living here even invented a language, “Kihutu”. But the Kihutu is not a language. These people arrived in the 1930s through the Belgians. They speak Kinyarwanda, they are Rwandans. They conspire with their brothers to annex Greater Kivu.⁴³

⁴¹ Interview No. 20, cited above.

⁴² Decree No. 13/029 of 13 June 2013 conferring the status of city and commune on certain agglomerations in South Kivu province.

⁴³ Interview No. 19, cited above.

This statement is based on the thorny issue of identity and logic of exclusion in the two Kivu provinces. A Tutsi community member from Masisi puts it this way:

Our forefathers fought very hard for the freedom and independence of this country. They were represented in the first governments. For instance, in North Kivu, we were appointed to ministries like any other recognized community in North Kivu. Today, we are labelled “foreigners”. We were even excluded from participating in the *Conférence nationale souveraine*, supposedly because we are foreigners. And we can’t stomach all that. This is why some of us resorted to arms to fight for the rights of the Tutsi.⁴⁴

These identity-based fault lines further reinforce conspiracy discourses. As a result, many people interpret the permanent incursions (real or supposed) of the Rwandan army into North and South Kivu (for security and/or economic reasons) as a move towards balkanization. It would be in reaction to this “initiated process” that in 2017, a Mai-Mai coalition led by William Yakutumba, called *Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo* (CNPSC) called for resistance to the “balkanization plan” of the DRC. Finally, according to supporters of this conspiracy theory, the occupation of Bunagana since 13 June 2022 by the M23 is in line with the logic of “congolising” a process of partitioning the country from abroad. In addition, many Congolese consider all diplomatic efforts to find a lasting solution to the dispute between the Rwandan and Congolese governments over the issue of the M23 and residual FDLR forces in eastern DRC to be a pure distraction. The debate about the balkanization of the DRC thus remains wide open.

⁴⁴ Interview No. 14 Goma, 09 July 2021.

In this report, we examined the discourse about the “balkanization” the DRC, a topic that has been thriving in the context of conspiracy theories. The aim of this report was to understand the dogged persistence of this debate over time. Our analysis shows that the debate around the balkanization of the DRC has survived throughout the country’s history and that political elites have often unearthed the theme of balkanization during crisis periods. It was first expressed when separatist tendencies occurred in the 1960s crises, most notably the secession attempts of Katanga and South Kasai – which in turn prompted the fathers of independence, Lumumba in particular, to denounce the Belgian colonists as “conspirators”. Today, the balkanization discourse mostly builds on the persistence of insecurity in eastern DRC, after three decades of recycled armed violence, a stagnating decentralization process and continued state fragmentation. It should be noted, however, that conflicting views exist on balkanization. While some believe that the time has come to partition the country (reflecting what some see as an existing economic reality), others believe that the Great Lakes region could relapse into lasting chaos because of Rwanda’s “expansionist ambitions” in eastern DRC. This second view supports federalism and believes that granting broad autonomy to provinces could mitigate separatist impulses and minimize a potential “domino effect” across other regions of the DRC, which hardly form a fully homogeneous national bloc. Finally, beyond domestic debate, rumours about the existence of an “international conspiracy against the DRC” stubbornly survive and influence broader theories about the balkanization of the DRC. The US, France and Israel are said to be among the “conspirators” with the regional complicity of Rwanda, and the domestic support of certain Congolese, mainly the Banyamulenge community, who would be the main beneficiaries of a disintegration of the DRC. Meanwhile, Kinshasa seems to remain unwilling, at least for now, to strengthen the autonomy of provinces to counter this “international conspiracy”. Nonetheless, the current crisis demonstrates that despite all this, a large majority of Congolese still prefer to have their remain one and united.

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