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Central Africa Report

Lining up for the presidency in the Central African Republic

David L Smith

Summary

Eighteen months after rebel forces overthrew former president Francois Bozizé, the situation in the Central African Republic remains unstable. Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza is attempting to govern the country with the aid of ministers from various political backgrounds, but little has been accomplished so far. Peace talks have not led to widespread voluntary disarmament, vast areas of the country are under rebel control and violent clashes are common. One of the key tasks of the United Nations peacekeeping mission will be to help organise elections in 2015. Many people are expected to declare their intention to run for president, but will any of them be able to reunite such a divided country? This report analyses the CAR's presidential hopefuls based on field research conducted in Bangui in mid-2014.

THE RUSH TO PREPARE THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR) for elections in 2015 is pushing to the margins efforts to create a functioning country from what is essentially a phantom state. A year and a half since predominantly Séléka rebels entered Bangui, the capital, overthrowing former president François Bozizé, violence continues and the country is more divided than ever. A loosely affiliated band of predominantly Christian, anti-Balaka vigilantes has risen to challenge the Séléka. The country is de facto divided in two, with the fault line being patrolled by international forces.

Séléka, punching above its weight as a result of foreign support, seems to be calling most of the shots and refuses to disarm and cooperate with the interim administration. Anti-Balaka rebels are also holding on to their weapons, arguing that they need to protect themselves from Séléka fighters.

Meanwhile, the clock continues to tick in what appears to be an unstoppable countdown for presidential elections in 2015. The international community has set the agenda, while the National Transitional Council of the CAR, a non-elected body that was established to operate as a caretaker government in early 2014, is supposed to help prepare the ground for the people to decide who should be in charge.

Following a meeting of regional leaders on 10 January this year, Catherine Samba-Panza, an insurance salesman and the mayor of Bangui for a short while, was named interim president for a one-year period ending in February next year. In this position she is not eligible to run for top office, and no sooner had she taken up what most consider to be a lame-duck position than people started jockeying to replace her as president once the polls close next year. Just half a year into her mandate, Samba-Panza had already replaced her prime minister and reshuffled her cabinet. Predictably, both anti-Balaka and Séléka claim that the other is being favoured by presidential appointments.

Will elections be held in February 2015? At the time of writing there had been no official word on a postponement, but there has been talk within the international community that the vote could be delayed by several months. Whatever the case, the CAR is almost certain to go to the polls sometime in 2015. The United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), France, the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) all have too much at stake to delay the election. Between them they are providing the boots on the ground and the finance for the peacekeeping effort.

> Will elections be held in February 2015? There has been talk within the international community that the vote could be delayed by several months

The list of likely candidates vying for president is growing fast and will probably become considerably longer as the weeks and months go by. Barring any major surprise, however, it is reasonably clear who the main contenders are likely to be. This report looks at these contenders, assesses their strengths and weaknesses, surveys public opinion and examines the electoral road ahead. The report is based on field research conducted in Bangui in May and June 2014.

Background

Central Africans have been electing members to local representative councils since 1946 – almost a decade and a half before they won independence from France. The man they elected to become the country's first post-independence president, Barthélémy Boganda, was killed in a plane crash only three months before the country's new flag was raised for the first time. Although he never presided over an independent state, Boganda is arguably the only politician who is held in high regard by most Central Africans.

BOZIZÉ LED AN ARMED REVOLT AGAINST PATASSÉ, AND 10 YEARS LATER HE HIMSELF WAS TOPPLED BY A REBEL GROUPING CALLED SÉLÉKA

The list of presidents since independence is short – David Dacko, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, André Kolingba, Ange-Félix Patassé, François Bozizé, Michel Djotodia and Catherine Samba-Panza. Dacko occupied the position of president twice, once before and once after Bokassa, who ended Dacko's first reign by overthrowing him. The second time round it was Kolingba who used the army to take control from Dacko. The same fates awaited Patassé and Bozizé; Bozizé led an armed revolt against Patassé and 10 years later he himself was toppled by a rebel grouping called Séléka, headed by Michel Djotodia.

The track records of the CAR's leaders have been marred by corruption, inefficiency, nepotism and violence, leaving the country at the bottom of human development rankings. As a result of successive coups and counter-coups, regional and ethnic favouritism, and large-scale corruption, the CAR today has few functional

Figure 1: Map of ethnic groups in the Central African Republic
Source: Atlas de la République Centrafricaine



institutions and a deeply impoverished political class that has lost credibility with the population. Fifty-four years after independence it is common to hear Central Africans refer to any and all politicians as *aventuriers*[1] ('adventurers').

Only rarely do voters support a candidate or his party because of the party platform. Voting takes place along ethnic lines. Figure 1 shows where the main ethnic groups are found. Where possible, the ethnicity of each potential candidate discussed here has been noted.

Organising the vote – National Electoral Authority

The responsibility for organising and running the 2015 election rests with *l'Autorité National des Elections* (ANE), the national elections body. This Bangui-based body must carry out the following tasks:

- Hold an electoral census
- Create a digitised electoral list
- Provide for the establishment of voting stations and counting centres at least two months before the start of the electoral campaign
- Appoint and train voting-station and counting-centre officials
- Attend to pre-election voter education
- Accredit national and international observers[2]
- Count the votes and publish the results

The ANE estimates that it needs 40 million FCA francs (FCFA)[3] to organise the elections, a figure that seems far too low given the work that still needs to be done and the conditions under which the tasks must be carried out. Possibly the biggest challenge is the voters' list. Nobody knows how many people live in the CAR, nor does anybody know where they all live. An estimated third of the population is either displaced internally or living as refugees in other countries (see Figure 2, showing population density in the CAR).

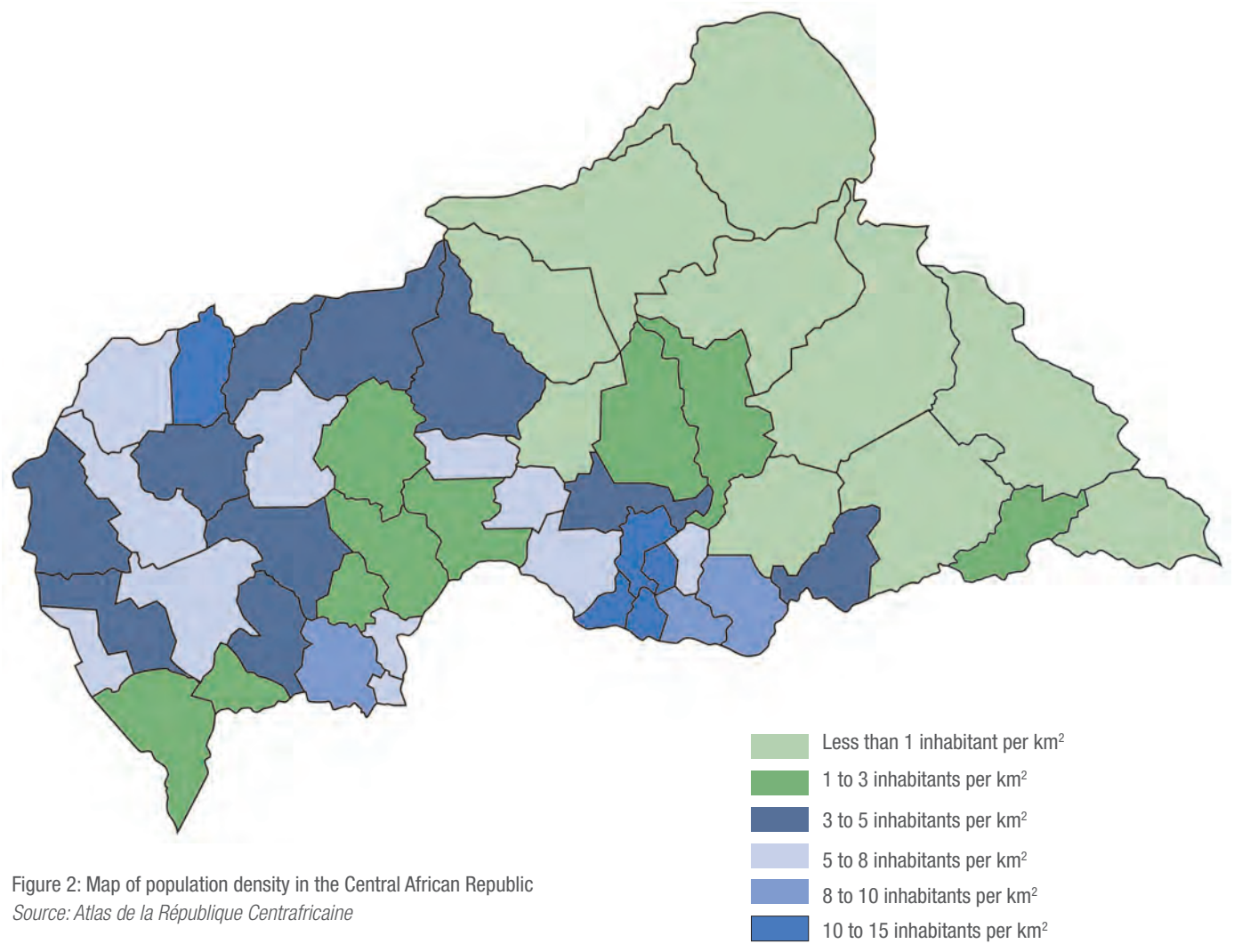


Figure 2: Map of population density in the Central African Republic
Source: Atlas de la République Centrafricaine

The last time a census was carried out in the CAR was in 2003. This was only the third since independence. The first census in 1975 put the population at 2 056 000; the second, in 1988, at 2 688 426, and the third in 2003 at 3 895 139.[4] Today's population is generally estimated as being in the region of 4,5 million.[5] When Séléka rebels destroyed most of the administrative infrastructure on their way to Bangui in 2012/13, this included most of the birth and death registries across the country.[6]

2003

THE LAST TIME A CENSUS WAS CARRIED OUT IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The electoral list drawn up for the January 2009 poll won by François Bozizé was criticised at the time by both the opposition and observers as being biased towards regions dominated by the same ethnic group as the incumbent. However, until a new list is produced, this is the only document authorities have at their disposal.

The ANE is not the only one facing almost insurmountable challenges. In a country with a virtually empty treasury, and a weak and in many areas almost non-existent transport infrastructure, it will be virtually impossible for local authorities to prepare for credible and transparent elections in the timeframe on offer.

The UN peacekeeping mission set to deploy in September 2015 has electoral support built into its mandate, as follows:

> To devise, facilitate and provide technical assistance to the electoral process and make all necessary preparations in support of the Transitional Authorities and, working on an urgent basis with the National Electoral Authority, for the holding of free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections, including the full and effective participation of women at all levels and at an early stage, and the participation of CAR IDPs and refugees no later than February 2015.[7]

The EU is another major player in the election preparations. Brussels is providing around ZAR300 million to help defray the costs of voter registration, printing, training, equipment, staff and voter education.[8]

Pretenders to the throne

The number of potential candidates for the office of president will remain fluid until 30 days before the vote.[9] Roughly halfway through the current transitional government period, eight persons had officially announced their candidacy, registering with the electoral commission and paying the required fee of 5 million FCFA.[10]

Research in June 2014 on the potential total number of presidential hopefuls came up with a list of 42 candidates. It is entirely possible, of course, that a number of the persons on the list may choose not to run, either because they are not able to raise the required deposit, or because they decide to form an alliance with another potential candidate, or they are not chosen as the representative of their party. These possibilities are noted in the profiles of the potential candidates.

If election precedents are anything to go by, and there is no reason to believe that 2015 will be any different, few of the people who present themselves as presidential candidates expect to win.

It is common practice in the CAR for an unsuccessful presidential candidate to ask the winner for compensation in the form of a cabinet post or some other senior position, a strategy that is sometimes successful.[11]

> It is common practice in the CAR for an unsuccessful presidential candidate to ask the winner for compensation in the form of a cabinet post

Profiles

The following thumbnail sketches of potential candidates for the presidency are based on interviews with the principles themselves, with prominent civil society leaders, with members of the National Transitional Council, the judiciary and the National Electoral Authority, and with academics, clerics, senior diplomats and journalists. In most cases, those interviewed requested that their quotes not to be attributed to them so that they could speak frankly.

Bangui has the reputation of being a rumour mill. Few Central Africans have confidence in the political class and many believe that their country's political strings are pulled by outside forces.

> Candidates are often identified by the general public, whether correctly or not, as 'France's choice', 'Washington's man' or 'Chad's candidate'

Anicet Georges Dologuélé

(born 1957, ethnicity: Kaba)

Anicet Georges Dologuélé was one of the first to declare his candidacy for the presidency officially, possibly because he needs more time than the frontrunners to organise himself.

His party, *Union pour le Renouveau Centrafricain* (URCA), is a splinter group from the older, more dominant and well-established *Mouvement du Libération du Peuple Centrafricain* (MLPC). Dologuélé was finance minister under prime minister Michel Gbezera-Bria, and was then prime minister himself from 1999 until he was fired by former president Patassé in 2001. He left politics that same year to take up a post as president of the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC), a post he retained until 2010. Dologuélé returned home to form the URCA in 2013.

While part of the Patassé administration, Dologuélé became known as *Monsieur 10%* (Mister 10%), an unflattering title that accompanied accusations of money laundering. His term at the bank was generally viewed more favourably, although it was not without controversy and accusations of embezzlement.

While not seen as a likely winner, it is expected that any votes captured by Dologuélé will come from support for the MLPC. The URCA is too new and has had too little time to organise to be well represented throughout the country. In any contest between the two parties, the MLPC will come out ahead.

Marie-Reine Hassen (born 1954)

Marie-Reine Hassen is the candidate of the *Mouvement pour Rassemblement et le Changement en Centrafrique* (MRC). She is a former wife of Jean-Bedel Bokassa and a former ambassador to Senegal, and held the positions of deputy minister for foreign affairs (2006 to 2007), deputy minister for economics, planning and international cooperation (2007 to 2008), and deputy minister for regional integration and the Francophonie (2008 to 2009) under Bozizé. Since then she has pursued business interests in France, where she has spent most of her time since resigning from government in 2009.

Hassen is seen as a candidate with little chance of success. Her father was Chadian, a factor that is not likely to add to the minimal support she's likely to receive on voting day.

Fidèle Gouandjika (born 1955, ethnicity: Mandja)

Fidèle Gouandjika is running as an independent candidate. He is not new to politics, having held the following positions in the Bozizé administration:

- 2005 to 2008: minister of posts and telecommunications and new technology
- From January 2009: minister of rural development and agriculture

Hailing from the Sibut-Damara area, a former Kwa na Kwa (Bozizé) stronghold, Gouandjika is not regarded as a serious candidate on his own. His chances of success would possibly increase if he formed an alliance, although this is considered unlikely. Gouandjika is best remembered for allegedly having stolen large amounts of money destined for peasant farmers while he was minister of agriculture, thereby contributing to the overwhelming lack of confidence or respect Central Africans have for politicians.

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Magloire Lamine (born 1958)

Magloire Lamine is running as an independent candidate. An economist based in France, he is best known in the CAR as a writer for the online *Agence Centrafricaine de Presse* (www.lanouvellecentrafrique.info/tag/magloire-lamine). His writing, usually very critical of the way the country has been run, is not accessible to the majority of Central Africans since they do not have Internet access. He enters the race as a relative unknown without a party machine for support.

Xavier Sylvestre Yangongo (born 1946, ethnicity: Ngbaka)

General Xavier Yangongo is running as an independent candidate. His entire professional career has been within the army and he has held numerous senior government positions, namely:

- Patassé administration of August 2001: minister responsible for disarmament
- Patassé administration of January 2003: state president's advisor on the restructuring of the armed forces
- Bozizé administration of April 2011: minister in charge of disarmament, demobilisation and reinsertion (DDR)

Yangongo is a nephew of founding father Barthélémy Boganda, a pedigree not remotely strong enough to propel him to power. One of the key attributes candidates must demonstrate to the electorate is a desire and an ability to create a secure and stable environment, something Yangongo has not been able to deliver during his long military career. He is not on record as ever having spoken out against any action taken by leadership. He has been described as 'a sheep that Bozizé led by the nose – end of story. He doesn't know how to talk'.[12]

> Yangongo is a nephew of founding father Barthélémy Boganda, a pedigree not remotely strong enough to propel him to power

Jean Willybiro Sacko (born 1946, ethnicity: Bofi)

Jean Willybiro Sacko is running as an independent candidate. A magistrate, former police officer and ambassador to France, Sacko has a remarkably positive history in the government, serving as Bozizé's minister of higher education and scientific research from April 2011 to 2013. However, his most recent success was the skilfully negotiated Libreville Agreement of 2013 that led to the short-lived government of national unity in the CAR that preceded the toppling of Bozizé. Originally from Boda, a small town northwest of Mbaiki, he is better known in the Berberati area, one of the country's largest urban centres.

Sacko evoked an almost exceptional string of positive comments from a wide cross-section of society.[13] But because of his advanced age and no backing from a political machine, Sacko has virtually no chance of being elected president. He is nevertheless considered a serious candidate with a clean record – a rare occurrence in local politics. Political observers see the importance of his candidacy lying in the links he may develop with other contenders. One observer says: 'I respect him, I'd even vote for him, he hasn't been infected by dirty business.'[14]

Théodore Kapou (born 1964, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Théodore Kapou is running as an independent candidate. He is the former president of the Community of Apostolic Churches of the CAR and a newcomer to the political scene. Unlike most of the presidential hopefuls, has not served in government. Kapou has worked with the UN peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire as an electoral observer. He is not considered to have any chance of success.

Sylvain Sami (born 1971)

Sylvain Sami is running as an independent candidate. Sami announced his candidacy from Paris in June, outlining his campaign platform online (www.presidencerepublique.sitew.fr/#Programme_Politique). While the platform appears comprehensive, Sami is neither backed by a party-political machine nor does he have a widely recognisable profile. Reaching the electorate through the Internet in the CAR is a non-starter. Sami's hopes are regarded as being misplaced.

> Reaching the electorate in the CAR through the Internet is a non-starter. Sami's hopes are regarded as misplaced

Martin Ziguélé (born 1957, ethnicity: Kaba)

Martin Ziguélé is one of the frontrunners in the race for the presidency. Although he has yet to officially inform the electoral commission, there is little doubt that the head of the *Mouvement de Libération du Peuple Centrafricain* (MLPC) will embrace the strong chance he has of winning the top job. He was prime minister under Patassé from 2001 to 2003 and also held the post of finance minister just prior to the Bozizé coup.

Ziguélé is regarded as a frontrunner not because of his popularity, but because of his well-established MLPC political machine. The MLPC is the only party to have a relatively extensive infrastructure. Its establishment in all of the CAR's 16 prefectures permits it to promote itself in a country where poor infrastructure and communications networks make it difficult to effectively pass on information.

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Ziguélé's biggest handicap is a widespread perception that he is partially responsible for the arrival of the Séléka in Bangui last year. He is considered as not having reacted quickly enough to condemn their advance. His opponents see his lack of action as aimed at disposing his main adversary, François Bozizé. Also working against Ziguélé is the fact that former MLPC member Anicet Dologuélé comes from the same region, namely northwest CAR, and this is likely to split the vote.

Memories of the recent MLPC administration include disappointment over the lack of development in the heartland of the party's support base during its time in office. Ziguélé could also struggle to find support from voters in the south, where the perception is that northerners have held power for too long, to the detriment of the rest of the country. 'The MLPC machine is too strong and holds the country hostage through its profound corruption – they only want power at any price and will seek brutal revenge if they get it back'.[15]

IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, POOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO EFFECTIVELY PASS ON INFORMATION

Charles Armel Doubane (born 1966, ethnicity: Zandé)

Charles Armel Doubane has done everything except submit his papers to the National Electoral Commission. From his temporary office and residence at the upmarket Ledger Hotel in Bangui, he canvasses support through media coverage, NGOs and potential funders. Although a relatively young member of the stable of candidates,[16] Doubane brings considerable political experience to the table:

- Patassé administration of February 1997: minister in charge of parliamentary relations
- Bozizé administration of September 2006: minister of national education
- Bozizé administration from 2011: ambassador to the UN[17]
- Djotodia administration: Doubane turned down the post of foreign minister offered to him in 2013, opting to remain in his post as ambassador to the UN.

> Doubane is a rare breed in CAR politics – a man deemed to have integrity

The son of a sultan in Zemio (south-eastern CAR), a Freemason, a former banker and a professor of law, Doubane is said to have the support of external backers, including Congolese President Denis Sassou-Nguesso and elements of the Obama administration.[18] More generally, Doubane is perceived as the candidate of choice of Anglo-Saxon interests.[19] He is also believed to have the support of the current Sultan of Bangassou, Maxime Mbringa, a former senior administrator of the UN Development Programme in Bangui.

While he is not expected to win, Doubane could use the election campaign to make a name for himself in order to improve his prospects in the following round. Improving education is the main pillar of his platform.[20] Referred to by one senior civil servant as *'le petit piment qui fait mal',* (the little chilli pepper that causes pain).[21] Doubane is a rare breed in CAR politics – a man deemed to have integrity.

Guy Moskit (born around 1968)

Guy Moskit is one of the numerous potential candidates tarred with the unflattering label of *aventurier* (adventurer). One of the younger group of pretenders to the throne, Moskit rose to minor prominence in the various administrations of François Bozizé, holding the positions of deputy minister of foreign affairs in charge of regional integration and the Francophonie from December 2003, and deputy minister of foreign affairs from September 2004.

Hailing from Mongoumba in the Lobaye, close to the border with Congo-Brazzaville, Moskit has been described as 'more Congolese than Central African … Bozizé picked him to get support from the southwest, while Moskit used his position to bring Bozizé closer to [president of the Republic of Congo] Denis Sassou-Nguesso by using his contacts in the Freemasons. The man has no vision and has no chance of winning; nobody knows him except the French, and even within French political circles it's only the right-wing Front National who give him any time'.[22]

> Guy Moskit is one of the numerous potential candidates tarred with the unflattering label of (adventurer)

DOUBANE CANVASSES SUPPORT THROUGH MEDIA COVERAGE, NGOS AND POTENTIAL FUNDERS

> In Bangui at least she is seen as a woman of integrity. Apart from her extensive political career, she is perhaps best known as the founder/director of a local NGO

Béatrice Epaye (ethnicity: Kaba)

Béatrice Epaye has yet to publically pronounce her candidature. There are few who would oppose her decision to do so, but in Bangui at least she is seen as a woman of integrity. Apart from her extensive political career, she is perhaps best known as the founder/director of a local NGO called *La Voix du Coeur*, a shelter and school for homeless street children in the capital. Currently serving on the National Transitional Council, Epaye's political life under the Bozizé administration included thrice serving as minister of commerce and industry and small and medium enterprises (2005, 2006 and 2008), and minister of commerce and industry from January 2009.

In parliament, Epaye represented Markounda, a town in the northwest near the border with Chad. She is a former member of the MLPC and will, if she decides to run, almost certainly take some votes away from Martin Ziguélé. In the National Transitional Council, Epaye represents the Bossangoa area, a region that bore much of the brunt of sectarian violence between Séléka and Anti-Balaka rebels last year.

In my meeting with her, Epaye identified one of the greatest weaknesses of the current and previous administrations as the lack of a presence at local levels. Administrators have yet to be posted to most municipalities, resulting in a situation of minimal law and order. In what sounded like an election campaign speech, Epaye outlined the security and humanitarian pillars that she believes should be put in place at the local level to demonstrate to the local population that the state exists and the electorate has at least some degree of power.[23]

Jean-Baptiste Koba (ethnicity: Mbati)

Jean-Baptiste Koba's biggest constituency appears to be the French media. He manages to get considerable coverage on international broadcasters RFI, TV5 and France 24, but in Bangui it is difficult to obtain any opinion on his potential candidacy.

Koba is the president of what once was a prestigious party in the CAR, *le Mouvement de l'Evolution Sociale de l'Afrique Noire* (MESAN), the party of Barthélemy Boganda. However, MESAN's standing was diminished dramatically following Boganda's death just months before independence and David Dacko became the first president of the newly independent state. Under the MESAN banner, Dacko turned the country into a one-party state, curtailed most liberties, including freedom of expression, and began a tradition of looting the national treasury, a tradition that continues to this day.

The MESAN label is unlikely to help garner support for Koba. He does, however, make use of social media more than most of his potential competitors, although social media has limited impact in the CAR outside of Bangui.

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Colonel Anicet Saulet

(born 1959, ethnicity: Yakoma)

Anicet Saulet is a military man from the south-eastern CAR (Mobaye). He is seen as someone who takes state security seriously and could attract support from those who see the need to have a strong national army to defend the country's borders and ensure domestic stability.[24] A former director of the state telephone company, SOCATEL, he is best known as a rebel leader at the time of the inter-African force in the Central African Republic (MISAB)[25] in 1997, a period lodged in the collective memory, which would work in his favour during elections. At the time, he staged a rebellion against the Patassé administration claiming that the president was using nepotism and tribalism to weaken the national army.

Saulet's relatively young age also works to his advantage. However, most of his support is likely to come from the same base as that of Desiré Kolingba who, in the likely event that he decides to run, will split the vote.

At time of writing, Saulet had been removed from his position as the CAR's ambassador to Egypt and his attempt to register as a presidential candidate was rejected. Reasons for the rejection have not been made public, and he has reportedly written to Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza to express outrage at the decision.[26]

> Saulet's relatively young age also works to his advantage. However, most of his support is likely to come from the same base as that of Desiré Kolingba

Pasteur Josué Binoua (ethnicity: Mandja)

Josué Binoua falls into the category of *aventurier* (adventurer). While his religious followers may view him in a good light, it is difficult to canvass any favourable opinion concerning his political aspirations. His membership of the National Transitional Council is viewed as a compromise placement since he replaced a Séléka Muslim in order to give the appearance of adding to the number of Christians in the administration. He has been described as 'a dreamer, he talks too much, he has no vision … he wants to be a minister at any price and will align himself with whoever offers to give him a post.'[27]

Binoua served the Bozizé administration as minister of territorial administration and decentralisation from April 2011, and as minister of security, emigration, immigration, and public order from January 2013.

> While his religious followers may view him in a good light, it is difficult to canvass any favourable opinion concerning his political aspirations

Desiré Kolingba (ethnicity: Yakoma)

Desiré Kolingba, the son of former president André Kolingba,[28] was the runner-up for the post of interim president in the National Transitional Council. Catherine Samba-Panza beat Kolingba by 75 votes to 53. Although not yet the head of the party, *Rassemblement Démocratique Centrafricain* (RDC), founded by his father, he is expected to take over from its infirm leader Louis-Pierre Gamba.

Desiré Kolingba served in the Bozizé administration from December 2003, first as minister of youth, sport, art and culture, and then as minister of youth and sport for four terms (2004 to 2007). In January 2008 the portfolio of art and culture was added back to his duties. A year later he was appointed minister for government extra relations with institutions.

Kolingba, who converted to Islam from Christianity several years ago, is generally considered Chadian president Idris Déby's choice to lead the CAR. One observer says: 'Kolingba was Deby's choice to lead the CNT and he still has a chance if Déby decides to back him financially … Déby wants a president he can control.'[29]

> Kolingba, who converted to Islam from Christianity several years ago, is generally considered Chadian president Idris Déby's choice to lead the CAR

Emile Nakombo (ethnicity: Gbaya)

Emile Nakombo was formerly with the RDC and unless he returns to the fold and manages to secure leadership of the party, an unlikely scenario as long as Desiré Kolingba expresses an interest, this potential presidential candidate does not stand much chance of success. Another difficulty Nakombo faces is that the RDC is primarily supported by the Yakomo from the Mobaye area. As Nakombo is neither a Yakoma nor from the party's heartland, his chances are virtually nil.[30]

Nakombo is seen as being in the *aventurier* category. One observer says: 'At the time of Kolingba-father, Nakombo was known as somebody who stole government funds; all he wants now is to become a minister and have an important name.' [31]

75
VOTES

THE NUMBER OF VOTES RECEIVED BY CATHERINE SAMBA-PANZA FOR THE POST OF INTERIM PRESIDENT

35
VOTES

THE NUMBER OF VOTES RECEIVED BY DESIRÉ KOLINGBA

Dr Bevara Lala (ethnicity: Gbaya)

Bevara Lala is best known for his unsuccessful attempt to assassinate former president David Dacko by placing a bomb at the Cinéma Club in Bangui. At the time he was believed to have received support from the former Soviet Union. Today he keeps a relatively low profile. Apart from several foreign diplomats placing him on the list of potential candidates for the presidency, little else is known. Lala was the minister of national education, literacy, higher education and research in Bozizé administration of March 2003.

> Bevara Lala is best known for his unsuccessful attempt to assassinate former president David Dacko

Elie Doté (born 1947, ethnicity: Mandja)

Elie Doté has been quietly making his intention to eventually run for president known since he resigned from the post of prime minister in 2008. Originally from Bossangoa, Doté returned to Bangui earlier this year after an extended absence overseas, much of it with the African Development Bank in Tunis, where he specialised in agricultural matters. He is generally regarded as too old and too out of touch with the current situation in the CAR. Civil society representatives also see him as somebody who places ethnicity above party platform.

Doté is considered to be a Bozizé man in whose administration of June 2005 he held the position as prime minister. In September 2006 he took on the portfolio of minister of finance as well.

Enoch Derant Lakoué (born 1945, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Enoch Lakoué served briefly as prime minister at the end of the Kolingba and at the beginning of the Patassé administrations. He held the post of minister of economy, planning and international cooperation in the Bozizé administration from February 2013. His attempts to return to power have been unsuccessful, although he did serve in the short-lived national unity government of François Bozizé last year. 'Lakoué is old and tired and all he wants is a post as minister.' 'He's a good friend of Sassou-Nguesso, who looks after him; Sassou even stays at his house when he's in Bangui.'32

> Elie Doté has been quietly making his intention to eventually run for president known since he resigned from the post of prime minister in 2008

Clément Belibanga (born 1952, ethnicity: Yakoma)

Clément Belibanga, who is based in France, is the president of a small party called *l'Alliance pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (ADP). He was minister of housing and urbanism in the Patassé administration of February 1997. This potential candidate falls squarely into the category of *aventurier.* Public opinion canvassed in Bangui sees this former professor of economics as just one of many angling for a post as minister.

Henri-Marie Dondra
(born around 1960, ethnicity: Yakoma)

Henri-Marie Dondra appears on several diplomatic lists as a potential candidate but is seen as one with virtually no chance of success. Dondra has little if any political experience. The closest he came to politics was as the director-general of the *Fonds Africain de Garantie et de Coopération Economique*, based in Cotonou. He also runs an NGO based in Libreville.

Maître Mathias Morouba (ethnicity: Mbati)

Mathias Morouba is a respected Bangui-based lawyer and human rights activist. Outside that community, however, he is not well known. A senior legal official in government provided the writer with this advice for Morouba: 'He would be better off trying to occupy the former position of Tiangaye than to get mixed up in politics.'[33]

Joseph Bendounga (born around 1950, ethnicity: Kaba)

Joseph Bendounga is a consummate opposition politician. His reputation in government is as someone constantly swimming against the current. In and out of office through several administrations, his main area of focus was agriculture. He served as deputy minister of rural development and agriculture in the Bozizé administration of January 2013 and as minister of agriculture in the Djotodia administration of March 2013.

Bendounga is not a diplomat and that is probably what will prevent him from rising too high in the ranks. He spends considerable energy writing confrontational letters to all those he believes are responsible for the plight of the CAR.[34] Bendounga's opponents do not appear to take him seriously but he could possibly form an alliance to strengthen his chances.[35]

Jean-Barkes Ngombe-Kette
(born 1953, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Jean-Barkes Ngombe-Kette was mayor of Bangui during the early years of the Bozizé administration. Perhaps best known for introducing traffic lights to the capital,[36] he is not well known beyond the city limits. Most of his formative years were spent in France, where he worked in IT as well as insurance. Those who do remember his name beyond Bangui may do so because of the allegations of theft of public funds from his home town area of Bossangoa.[37]

Jean-Serge Bokassa (born 1972, ethnicity: Ngbaka)

Jean-Serge Bokassa is trading on a name – he is the son of former president and 'Emperor' Jean-Bedel Bokassa. Most Central Africans are too young to recall those days, but there is a certain nostalgia for that period.[38] Bokassa, if he does run, is not expected to win, but he would probably split the vote in his south-western home region of Lobaye.[39] Bokassa served in the Bozizé administration as minister of youth, sport, art and culture from April 2011. He was removed from his position before completing his mandate.

> Jean-Serge Bokassa is trading on a name – he is the son of former president and 'Emperor' Jean-Bedel Bokassa

Ngere Kata (ethnicity: Gbaya)

Ngere Kata is an intellectual from the Bambari area. Kata has spent much of his life outside the CAR, primarily in the USA. He returned home recently and has been criss-crossing the country in an effort to make himself known.[40] He is perceived as a humanitarian rather than a politician.

François Passema (born 1954)

François Passema, while on the list of potential candidates kept by several ranking diplomats in Bangui, is not seen as a serious contender. The general consensus is that his profile is considerably higher in France, where he lives and works, than in the CAR.

General Moussa Dhaffane (ethnicity: Goula)

Moussa Dhaffane might have a chance of making a successful run for president were he not involved in Séléka, which is hated by the majority of people in the CAR. The Patriotic Convention for the Salvation of the Country (CPSK), founded by Moussa in 2012, became part of the Séléka coalition. Nevertheless, while doing fieldwork for this report, Dhaffane looked well placed to become Séléka's candidate for the presidency should the organisation decide to contest the elections. Since then, however, ousted CAR president, Michel Djotodia, and his second in command, Noureddine Adam, allegedly once again occupied the top two spots in Séléka. It is no longer clear where Dhaffane fits into this mix. One observer says: 'He's a good guy, he grew up in Km5.'[41]

Moussa (briefly) served in the cabinet of François Bozizé in early 2013 as minister of water, forests, hunting and fishing, but then helped to overthrow him.

Emmanuel Touaboy (born 1951, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Emmanuel Touaboye was the CAR's ambassador to the USA under former president Patassé. He retained the position after François Bozizé came to power in 2003. Bozizé later redeployed him to China. As was the case with many in the Patassé and Bozizé regimes, Touaboy comes from the Bossangoa area. He is not regarded as a serious candidate. Should he decide to run, there are many contenders from his home region who have more support and are backed by a party machine.

Fernand Sylvio Mande Djapou (born around 1980)

Fernand Djapou, coordinator for the National Human Rights Youth Network, is the youngest on the list of potential candidates. He has no political experience, but his keenness to make his mark during the forthcoming election campaign is obvious. He is one of two on the list who believe that they have the backing of the US in their bid for the presidency.[42] However, Djapou has neither a party machine nor a national profile that he can rely on come election day.

Pascal Koyagbélé (born around 1970, ethnicity: Yakoma)

Pascal Koyagbélé does most of his campaigning from South Africa. Head of a group called the Peasants Association of the CAR (APC), he is attempting to convince the South African government that he is the green and non-French alternative. Koyagbélé is from the south-eastern heartland that supported former president André Kolingba, a region dominated by the Yakoma ethnic group.[43] In an effort to widen his support, Koyagbélé appears to have forged an alliance with ousted president François Bozizé and other KnK supporters.[44] Koyagbélé may have found a sympathetic ear within South Africa's African National Congress (ANC).[45] In the CAR, however, few know of him. His father, a retired banker still living in Bangui, has a much higher and more positive profile.[46]

> Pascal Koyagbélé does most of his campaigning from South Africa. He is attempting to convince the South African government that he is the green and non-French alternative

Henri Pouzère (ethnicity: Banda)

Henri Pouzère is the current minister of posts, telecommunications and new technologies, a post he has held since the national unity administration under François Bozizé in 2013. Pouzère's director of cabinet has been trying to drum up support for an eventual attempt to run for the presidency, but without a party machine and a national profile, Pouzère's chances of success are virtually nil.

Colonel Parfait Mbaye (ethnicity: Yakoma)

Parfait Mbaye is a colonel in the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) and supported ousted President Bozizé since he first began his campaign to topple Ange-Felix Patassé. It is unlikely that Mbaye could expect to muster much support at the polls. Senior military officers close to Bozizé are viewed by most Central Africans as responsible for the violence, killings and looting carried out during the 10 years he was in power. During those years, Mbaye held numerous government posts:

- Minister of communication, national reconciliation and democratic culture from December 2003
- Minister of agriculture from September 2004
- Minister of agriculture and rural development from June 2005
- Minister of transport and civil aviation from September 2006
- Minister of transport from April 2011 to 2012
- Second vice-prime minister in charge of foreign affairs, integration, the Francophonie and Central Africans Overseas from January 2013

> Senior military officers close to Bozizé are viewed by most Central Africans as responsible for the violence, killings and looting carried out during the 10 years he was in power

Jean-Jacques Demafouth (born 1959, ethnicity: Banda)

Jean-Jacques Demafouth is one of the more controversial characters in CAR politics. There has rarely been a period during his political career when he has not been accused or suspected of involvement in a coup attempt or the arming of rebels. A defence minister during the Patassé presidency, he has been in and out of government since then, usually playing a role in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes. Demafouth has little support amongst the electorate. His detractors claim that any support he may have comes from France. Demafouth is alleged to be in exile in France at present.

Marie-Madeleine N'Kouet (ethnicity: Yakoma)

Marie-Madeleine N'Kouet briefly held two ministerial posts, namely minister of public health, population and the fight against HIV-AIDS in the Bozizé administration from January 2013, and minister of housing and habitat under the Djotodia administration from March 2013. The general consensus is that N'Kouet has virtually no chance of becoming president should she enter the race. She has no party machine behind her and is generally unknown in the CAR. She falls into the category of *aventurier.*

Lieutenant Colonel Sylvain Ndoutingaï (born 1972, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Sylvain Ndoutingaï is another of Bozizé's people expected to go for the top job in the country. A nephew of the former president and coming from the same town, Bossangoa, Ndoutingaï has held numerous posts in his uncle's administration:

- Minister of energy and mines from march 2003 to 2004, and again from January 2006 to 2007
- Minister of mines, energy and electricity from September 2004 and again from January 2008
- Minister of finance from January 2013

Ndoutingaï's chances of winning a free and fair election are virtually nil given his association with the ousted regime of François Bozizé.

Cyriaque Gonda (born 1968, ethnicity: Gbaya)

Cyriaque Gonda's name appeared on only one diplomat's list. A former minister in the Bozizé government (minister of communication, dialogue and national reconciliation from January 2008), Gonda gets attention at the moment by leading a group of small organisations calling for the CAR's future to be discussed at home rather than in foreign capitals.[47] While minister, Gonda faced allegations of misappropriation of government funds. Newspaper reports at the time accused him of building a real-estate empire in a number of countries using ill-gotten gains. He denied the allegations.

> Gonda gets attention at the moment by leading a group of small organisations calling for the CAR's future to be discussed at home rather than in foreign capitals

Jean-Serge Wafio (ethnicity: Gbaya)

Jean-Serge Wafio has had the dubious distinction of being fired from numerous government posts during successive administrations, namely as minister of mines and energy by Patassé, as head of the state energy monopoly Enerca by Bozizé, and again by Bozizé as director-general of the public treasury in 2007. In January 2008 he returned to public life

as minister of reconstruction of public buildings. Wafio's name appears on only one list of potential candidates viewed by the writer and is not seen as a serious option, falling, as many others do, into the category of *aventurier.*

Jean-Michel Mandaba (ethnicity: Banda)

Jean-Michel Mandaba heads a little-known party called Parti pour la Gouvernance Démocratique (PGD). He entered the government of François Bozizé in April 2011 as minister of health. In the Djotodia administration he represented the prefecture of Bamingui-Bangoram. He is generally considered an *aventurier* and political commentator Wilfrid Maurice Sebiro, in an extremely unflattering profile of Mandaba, concluded with the words: 'Central Africans hope one day ... to ask for the annulment of all persons of doubtful mentality from posts of responsibility.'[48]

Karim Mekassoua (ethnicity: Ronga)

Karim Mekassoua was hoping to replace Michel Djotodia as interim president. He was on the list, but received far fewer votes than Catherine Samba-Panza. Mekassoua was head of the political branch of the rebel group that brought François Bozizé to power in 2003 and was rewarded with senior government posts, including minister of foreign affairs from March 2003 and minister of education from December 2003 and September 2004.

Mekassoua is a Muslim from the south-western part of the CAR with neither a strong political base nor popular support. This fact, combined with his relatively long absence from high office, makes him one of the less-likely presidential candidates.

Yvon Kamach (born 1972, ethnicity: Syrian/Gbaya)

Yvon Kamach is a Bangui-based businessman running the largest private enterprise in the CAR. He has no background in politics but his family-run operations have survived and thrived since the time of Bokassa. Following discussions with several well-placed sources, I have come to the conclusion that Yvon Kamach:

- Will enter the race for the presidency
- Has the support of a foreign government influential in the affairs of the CAR
- Will be offered the support of several other candidates already in the race or expected to join the race

While not directly involved in politics, Kamach has quietly been organising a team of young activists who have been travelling throughout the country generating interest and canvassing support for him. He has also established a think tank – Fini Sese – that specialises in strategic political thought. It has invited prominent Central Africans to share their insights on how to move the country forward based on ideas first put forward by Barthélémy Boganda.[49]

Yvon Kamach is the person to watch over the next few months and, in my opinion, one of a small number of leaders who could (finally) make a positive difference in the CAR.

Conclusion

Elections will be held in 2015, whether the country is prepared for them or not. The elections must take place in order for the CAR to exit from the state of purgatory it currently finds itself in. It is almost impossible for Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza to move the country forward and build virtually from scratch the institutions that any government needs to carry out the work of a functioning state.

Only once there is a sense of political longevity, in which elected politicians, even if they are not considered the strongest crop of leaders, have a legitimate mandate to govern, is it likely that concrete actions will be taken.

The inherent weakness in the forthcoming election process is the relative absence of new blood and ideas in the list of likely candidates for the job of president. Once the ballots have been counted, the results announced and the new president has formed his or her cabinet, it is almost certain that many of the faces from the Patassé, Bozizé and Djotodia administrations will be back in ministerial offices. At the time, most were at best ineffectual and at worst criminal, stealing state resources and in some instances being responsible for extreme acts of violence.

In the time that is left for the interim administration, the international community could help to try remove the culture of impunity that dominates almost all aspects of life in the CAR, in particular in political life. The list of potential candidates for the presidency would be considerably shorter if those known to have been involved in illegal activity were held to account. The situation that has developed over a long time has encouraged *aventurier* candidates.

Expunging the culture of impunity will not occur overnight. The CAR's biggest challenge on the other side of elections will be how to craft an effective government using many ineffective parts. The challenge is not impossible but will require two important factors, namely a new, forward-thinking leadership in the CAR's government, and support from the international community to build the institutions the new government will need to survive and succeed.

Notes

1 Adventurers; persons without scruples. A term used most often by the politicians, civil servants, human rights activists and members of youth groups interviewed.

2 It is not yet clear who will be observing the elections, although by the time they are held the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSCA will be in place. It will certainly have an electoral unit that will should form part of the observer team.

3 ZAR 886 000, a figure far too low to be effective.

4 Refer to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) at http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/car/2011/06/06/3381/rgph_2013.

5 UNFPA, http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/car.

6 *Jeune Afrique,* http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20140218121237.

7 MINUSCA mandate taken from UN Security Council Resolution 2149.

8 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-96_fr.htm.

9 The cut-off day for registering as a candidate is 30 days before the election is held.

10 ZAR 111 313.

11 A majority of candidates on the list have had cabinet positions in previous governments, dating to as far back as the Bokassa administration.

12 Senior political analyst and member of the National Transitional Council.

13 Bangui-based human rights non-government organisations (NGOs), electoral officials, opposition politicians and members of the legal fraternity.

14 A member of the National Transitional Council with personal political ambitions.

15 A southern member of the National Transitional Council expressing the widespread fear southerners have of the MLPC returning to power.

16 Doubane is the only person born after independence to become a government minister.

17 During this time Doubane also served as spokesperson for the African Group of ambassadors to the UN.

18 Assertions of members of the National Transitional Council, as well as senior UN functionaries.

19 Most candidates or prospective candidates claim to have the support of either the French or the Americans, and, to a lesser extent, the South Africans, as a means of adding gravitas to their intentions.

20 Political platforms tend to have little sway on election day in the CAR as voting is generally along ethnic lines in the hope of being in the right place at the right time when *one of their own* wins.

21 The little chili pepper that causes pain.

22 A veteran CAR politician.

23 Local mayoral elections have not been held since the presidency of David Dacko. Since then mayors have been appointed.

24 Comment from a member of the Transitional Government.

25 MISAB was a regional peacekeeping mission supported financially and logistically by France.

26 See http://www.lanouvellecentrafrique.info/egypte-le-colonel-anicet-saulet-rompt-le-silence for further details.

27 Some of the less harsh observations concerning Josué Binoua made by political observers in Bangui. Most people canvassed had no opinion on this potential presidential candidate.

28 General Kolingba took power in a military coup in 1981, replacing David Dacko. He remained in power until 1993, when he was replaced following presidential elections by Ange-Félix Patassé.

29 Comments made by a senior civil servant.

30 Nakombo is from Berberati in the south-west.

31 Comment made by a senior civil servant.

32 Comments by a senior civil servant, as well as a member of the National Transitional Council.

33 Tiangaye, a former human rights lawyer, became prime minister in the short-lived government of Michel Djotodia, a position which perhaps irreparably damaged his reputation as a defender of the voiceless.

34 Bendounga was drafting a letter to the French ambassador to the CAR when I interviewed him on his presidential ambitions. The letter contained none of the diplomatic language commonly used in such an exchange and, not surprisingly, drew a curt reply from the French embassy.

35 There are indications that Joseph Bendounga may form an alliance with Jean-Serge Bokassa, son of former president Jean-Bedel Bokassa, and Marcel Mokwapi, a human rights activist and former journalist with political aspirations.

36 The traffic lights, a novelty that most drivers looked upon with curiosity rather than respect, stopped functioning not long after their installation.

37 Allegations made by a senior civil servant.

38 There is a popular belief, especially in Bangui, that the last time any considerable investment was made in infrastructure was during the Bokassa period. There appears to be a collective amnesia about the numerous atrocities for which Bokassa was responsible and for which he was eventually removed from power.

39 There are indications that Bokassa may form and alliance with Joseph Bendounga and Marcel Mokwapi.

40 Comments made by a senior elections official.

41 The comments of a former member of the Bozizé administration, referring to Bangui's majority-Muslim KM5 neighbourhood.

42 The other is Charles Armel Doubane. With regard to both Doubane and Djapou, a senior US government official insisted that I spend time with them for reasons one can only speculate.

43 And may continue to support his son, Desiré.

44 KnK, Kwa na Kwa, is Bozizé's political party. One of its founders and a former mentor to Bozizé, Henri Grothe, has recently been spending time in South Africa to help Koyagbélé shore up support.

45 A Bozizé-Koyagbélé partnership would likely offer South African government officials an opportunity to return to the CAR with mineral, oil and other business concessions in exchange for supporting their electoral bid.

46 Joseph Koyagbélé met with me and expressed concern over the political path his son had chosen. Koyagbélé senior, like many from the Mobaye area, is a supporter of the RDC party.

47 Cyriaque Gonda led a group of 49 political parties calling for a boycott of the Brazzaville Forum on the CAR, held between July 21 and 23.

48 Wilfrid Sebiro, Jean-Michel Mandaba: A traitor caught by fighters for democracy. http://www.centrafriquelibre.info/?p=773

49 http://www.paix-democratie.org.

About the author

David Smith's involvement in the Central African Republic (CAR) began with his deployment to Bangui in 1998 by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. As part of the MINURCA mission, he established Radio MINURCA (now Radio Ndeke Luka), the first independent national radio service in the CAR. He continues to write and do research on the CAR for the ISS, the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper and other organisations.

About the ISS

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