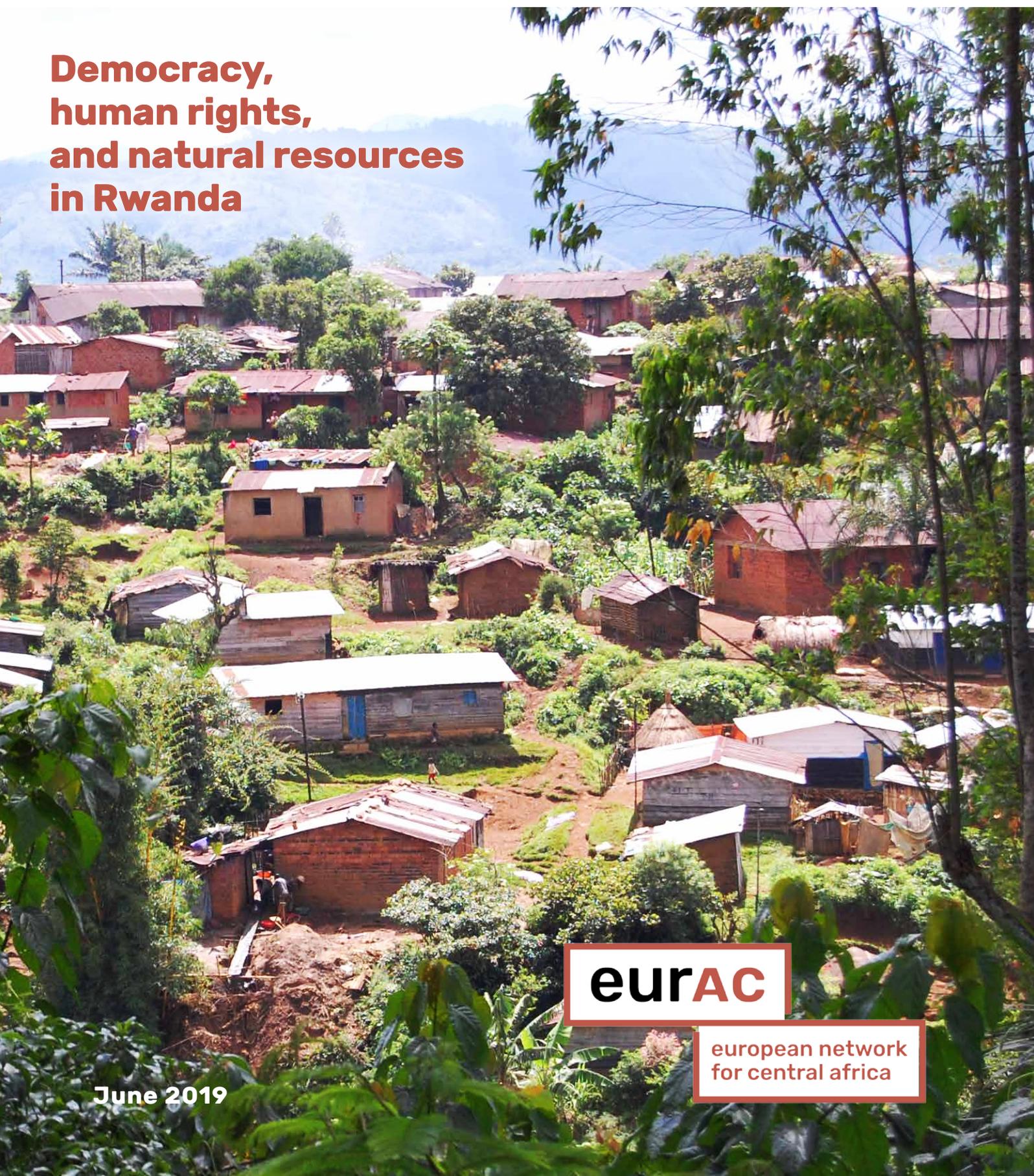


# MEMORANDUM 2019

EU LEGISLATURE 2019 – 2024

## Democracy, human rights, and natural resources in Rwanda



**eurAC**

European network  
for central africa

June 2019

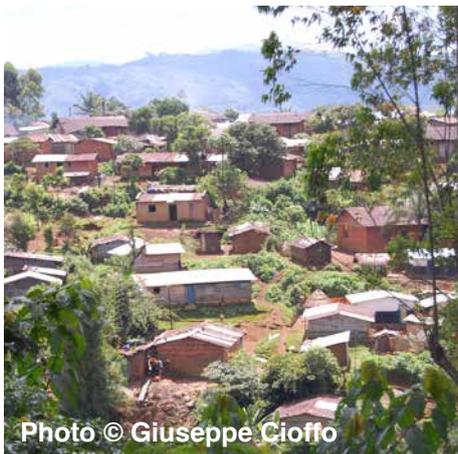


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#### DISCLAIMER

- The information in this document was gathered up to 27 May 2019. Consequently, any major event happening after this date will not be featured. We advise that you make use of the contents accordingly.
- The analysis and recommendations in this memorandum were elaborated by EurAc's secretariat with the approval and collaboration of its membership. However, the position of individual member organisations on specific points may differ from the position of the network.

# MEMORANDUM 2019

EU LEGISLATURE 2019 – 2024

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**Democracy,  
human rights,  
and natural resources  
in Rwanda**

**eurAC**

european network  
for central africa

**June 2019**

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## List of abbreviations

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<b>3TG</b>	Tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Company
<b>CIP</b>	Crop Intensification Programme
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUTF</b>	EU Emergency Trust Fund
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>LDGL</b>	<i>Ligue des droits de l'homme dans les Grands Lacs</i> , League for Human Rights in the Great Lakes
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament
<b>NEC</b>	National Electoral Commission
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NISR</b>	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
<b>RGB</b>	Rwanda Governance Board
<b>RMC</b>	Rwanda Media Commission
<b>RNC</b>	Rwanda National Congress
<b>RPF</b>	Rwanda Patriotic Front
<b>RURA</b>	Rwanda Regulatory Utilities Authority
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SPAT</b>	Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation

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## The European Union and the Great Lakes region

The Great Lakes region, namely Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has experienced recurrent internal and regional conflicts and an instability marked by humanitarian crises and generalised poverty for many decades. These interlinked conflicts emanate from post-colonial challenges to state- and nation-building and from the high levels of interdependence in security matters affecting each country separately, while also impacting on the stability and development of the entire region. These conflicts are dynamic and complex but they share common issues related to the **exploitation of ethnic tensions, centralisation of power**, to the **shrinking of civic and political space**, to **state repression** and to the incessant **violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms**.

This is coupled with **rampant corruption** and an increasing degree of structural violence often directed towards political opponents, human rights defenders and civil society actors. The degradation in political governance also benefits from and contributes to the unfair **exploitation of the region's natural resources**, as powerful state and non-state actors scramble over land and the mineral wealth of the region.

On the political level, each of these three countries in the Great Lakes region is struggling with **a crisis of institutional governance**, as leaders often wield excessively centralised power, refusing to respect the democratic principle of political alternation. To this crisis of governance is

added a crisis of democratic principles: the civic space is locked down and attacks upon fundamental freedoms and human rights are persistent. Citizens' political participation in the region is severely hampered by the violent and systematic repression of dissenting voices by state forces, which feeds into a larger trend of rampant impunity for crimes and human rights violations, in countries where the legal system and security services are seriously dysfunctional, often corrupt, and lack independence.

These governance issues may degenerate into large scale **security crisis** where frustrations, armed groups and ethnic identities are often manipulated and fuelled by the different regimes. This has dramatic humanitarian consequences that cause a great deal of suffering to the people in the region, often leading to important movements of population within the countries and the region. In turn, such dynamics may lead to a vicious cycle of insecurity resulting in inter-community tensions and violence as well as increased armed groups activities.

Finally, the region is dealing with a crisis of regional governance embodied by the failure of different initiatives carried out by regional actors - such as the East African Community (EAC) in Burundi since the 2015 crisis and by the African Union (AU) in 2016 in the DRC - seeking to mediate between opposed parties.

Given its substantial investment in the development of the region (e.g. the 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund 2014-2020

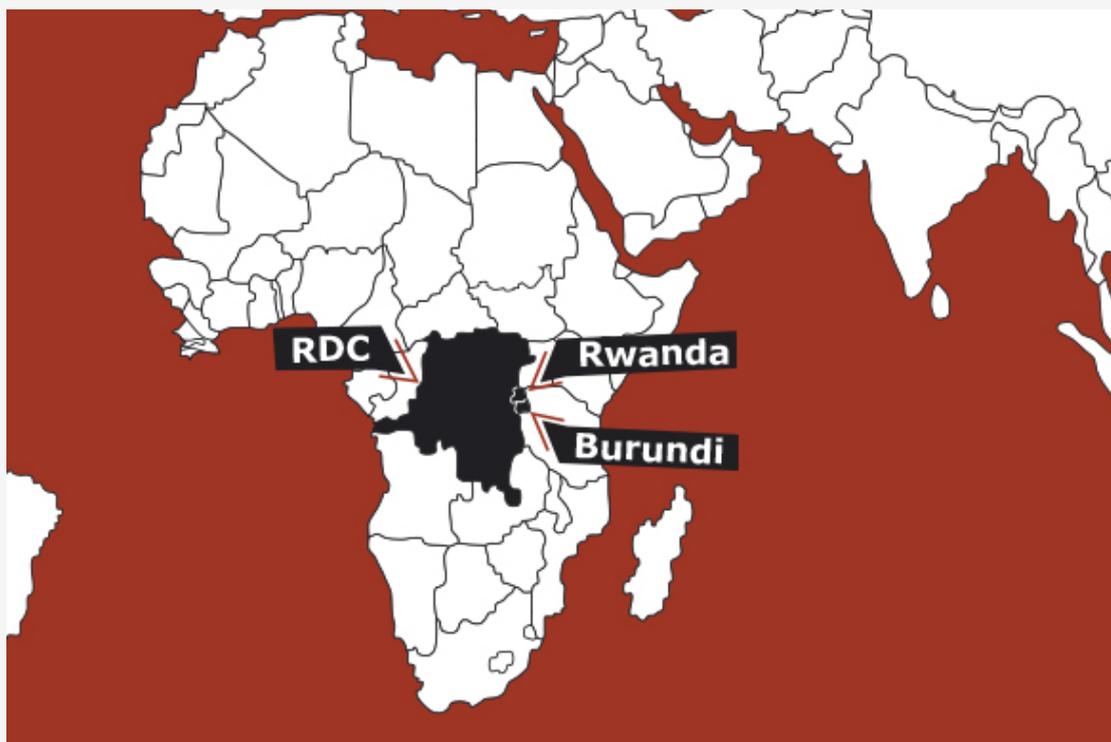
provides to €432 million for Burundi, €620 million to the DRC and €460 million to Rwanda), the **EU remains one of the most influential international diplomatic actors in the region** as well as largest development donor in the region. However, EU Foreign Policy in the region has shown various signs of weakness and there is a fear that the EU's political interest and attention for the Great Lakes region may decrease in the coming years.

As a matter of fact, we have been able to observe for several years now a **shift in priorities of EU Foreign Policy** at the global level in favour of the fight against terrorism and migration management, **at the expense of peace, development and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms**. This global trend could impact countries in the Great Lakes region. The adoption of the EU

Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa), in November 2015, is the most emblematic example of this worrying drift. The EUTF was developed to address the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons; it is funded through the European Development Fund. This implies that development aid is not put at the service of African countries' development plans, but of the short-term objectives of the European Union's migration policy. This is contrary to the Lisbon Treaty and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to its relations with the African continent, **EU diplomacy has been increasingly geared towards strengthening the ties with the African Union** in order to foster a strategic partnership, as illustrated by the name change from the "4th Africa-EU

1. [Working Document on ECA Special Report 32/2018 \(Discharge 2018\): European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: Flexible but lacking focus](#), European Parliament, Committee on Budgetary Control, 24 April 2019.



2. [Questions and answers: New ACP-EU Partnership after 2020](#), European Commission Fact Sheet, 3 May 2019.

3. As per the [Commission's website](#) consulted on 9 May 2019, priorities area for the Africa-EU Partnership from 2018 onwards are: Investing in people – education, science, technology and skills development ; Strengthening Resilience, Peace, Security and Governance; Migration and mobility and Mobilising Investments for African structural sustainable transformation. Previous priorities listed in the Africa- EU Road Map 2014-2017 were Peace and security; Democracy, good governance and human rights; Human development; Sustainable and inclusive development and growth and continental integration; Global and emerging issues.

4. [State of the Union, Strengthening the EU's partnership with Africa: A new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#), European Commission, September 2018.

5. [Private-finance blending for development: risks and opportunities](#), Oxfam International, February 2017.

6. [Accaparement Made in Belgium, le financement de Feronia par la coopération belge](#), CNCD 11.11.11, March 2019. [Accord d'Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi](#), 28 August 2000.

Summit” into the “5th AU-EU Summit” in November 2017. While this position makes sense regarding the principle of subsidiarity, this increasing focus on the AU and the emphasis on African ownership in matters of peace and security on the continent does not necessarily bode well for the near future of the Great Lakes region. In fact, the AU, of which the three countries in question are State Parties, has never communicated nor demonstrated a strong and credible willingness to tackle the different crises in the DRC or Burundi. On the contrary, the AU has sometimes shown indifference or even complacency *vis-à-vis* the regimes' abuses of power. The EU's new partnership with the AU could serve as an excuse to prevent the EU from adopting strong positions in the future regarding these regimes.

Additionally, **2018 marked the beginning of the negotiations of the Post-Cotonou agreement**, an agreement that had human rights and governance at the heart of its dispositions. Unfortunately, the strategic priorities for the Post-Cotonou period are fully in line with the outcome of the AU-EU Summit held in November 2017,<sup>2</sup> which is worrying considering that democracy and human rights disappear from the list of priorities while “migrations and mobility” appeared as a new ones.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the launch of the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs<sup>4</sup> perfectly illustrates this trend to prioritise support to the private sector, investments, trade and the exploitation of natural resources above the protection of human rights and good governance. While investments and jobs creation are

key to development, it should be done in a complementary way not prevent the EU to foster human rights and good governance. These latter principles are neither properly nor concretely included in the framework of the new partnership, even though they address key needs of the African people.

The **new trend of private involvement in the development sector** also raises concerns. The European Commission is indeed increasingly pushing for ‘innovative’ modalities of development finance, known as ‘blending’, a promise to raise the funds necessary to financing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although blending mechanisms may vary,<sup>5</sup> the mechanism consists at its core in using public funds for development aid to leverage loans from private financial institutions to be destined to public or private entities in partner countries. This is accompanied by an increased emphasis on the role of the private sector in African development, as the Commission sees this sector as key to the development of African economies. However, with regards to the Great Lakes region, the involvement of the private sector and of European investors and financial institutions have often been at the roots of grave violations of local citizens' rights, while countering the achievement of development objectives more broadly and of the SDGs more specifically.<sup>6</sup>

On **the exploitation of natural resources**, which is of great interest both for the EU and the countries of the Great Lakes region, the EU is also walking an ambiguous path. On the one hand, the EU is being

pro-active in defending and promoting the rights of people to benefit from their countries' natural resources for instance through the adoption in 2017 of a binding regulation on the responsible supply of minerals from conflicted affected and high-risk areas.<sup>7</sup> The regulation compels EU importers of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold (3TG) to carry out due diligence to assess the risk of human rights abuse and financing of illegal armed groups along their production chains. Yet the EU goes **back and forth between an 'economics first' and a 'right-based approach'**. While the binding regulation on the responsible supply of 3TG is an important step towards the creation of a responsible mining sector in the DRC and in the region, its approach still focusses too much on the upstream of the production chain than on the responsibilities of EU importers. The regulation also risks marginalising artisanal miners together with a number of other flaws that call into question its effectiveness.

Dynamics within the EU Council also illustrate this ambivalence between economic interest and human rights promotion and protection as some EU member states seem to put their bilateral business interests before the common EU policy for the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of the Great Lakes region.<sup>8</sup> This is a dangerous path and contradictory to the Lisbon Treaty (Art. 208-1), compelling the EU and its member states to ensure coherence between their economic policies and development policy objectives.

In this context, **the new EU legislature (2019 - 2024) following the recent European elections of 2019 is a great opportunity to instil new European dynamics towards the Great Lakes region**, one in which newly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) should play a crucial role. This report aims to provide newly elected MEPs with an overview of the current situation and the challenges faced in Rwanda and to equip them with specific and actionable recommendations to rememorate the EU institutions to its fundamental values and engagements to promote and strengthen human rights, peace, development and inclusive political participation in the country.

7. [Regulation \(EU\) 2017/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017.](#)

8. [RDC: Répression des chrétiens: la société civile s'en prend à la France](#), La Libre Afrique, 3 January 2018.

## The Great Lakes in numbers

### Population

**12.20 million**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**Density**  
(people per sq. km of land area)

**494.9**

(World Bank, 2017)

### GDP

**9.135 billion USD**

(The World Bank, 2017)

### Growth of GDP

**+6.1%**

(The World Bank, 2017)

### Human Development Index

**0.524 - 158<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

### Gender Inequality Index

**0.381 - 85<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

**Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population)**

**55.5%**

(The World Bank, 2016)

### World Press Freedom Index

**155<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(RSF 2019)

### Democracy Index

**128<sup>th</sup> / 167**

(Economist Intelligence Unit 2018)

### Corruption Perception Index

**48<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(Transparency International, 2018)

## Burundi

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**10.86 million**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**423.1**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**3.17 billion USD**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**+0.5%**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**0.417 - 185<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

**0.471 - 114<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

**71.8%**

(The World Bank, 2013)

**159<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(RSF 2019)

**153<sup>th</sup> / 167**

(Economist Intelligence Unit 2018)

**170<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(Transparency International, 2018)

## DRC

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**81.34 million**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**35.9**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**37.64 billion USD**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**+3.7%**

(The World Bank, 2017)

**0.457 - 176<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

**0.652 - 152<sup>th</sup>/189**

(UNDP, 2018)

**76.6%**

(The World Bank, 2012)

**154<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(RSF 2019)

**165<sup>th</sup> / 167**

(Economist Intelligence Unit 2018)

**161<sup>th</sup> / 180**

(Transparency International, 2018)

## Democracy, human rights, and natural resources in Rwanda



Photo © Giuseppe Cioffo

Rwanda has come a long way since the events of the 1994 genocide. The country has averaged an about 8% economic growth over the past ten years.<sup>9</sup> Indicators in crucial sectors such as maternal health, education, and access to public services have improved. The country is also routinely praised for its achievement in the fight against corruption and for the establishment of effective state institutions. According to the Rwandan government, poverty reduction has also been significant over the past ten years. For these reasons, Rwanda is often praised by the international community and by its development donors as a success story of post-conflict reconstruction and development.

While it is important to acknowledge Rwanda's successes in its post-genocide history, there is more than meets the eye. Effective technocratic governance in the country has been accompanied an ever-more **shrinking civic and political space for CSOs, human rights defenders, the media and any critics of the government, a dead-locked political and electoral system** dominated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and by reiterated harassment, threats, imprisonment and disposition of political opponents.

### **Deadlocked state institutions and electoral process.**

In 2015 – two years before the 2017 presidential elections – the President and the RPF proposed a series of amendments to the constitution that would allow the

president to run for a third mandate in 2017 and possibly rule the country until 2034. The 2017 presidential elections were largely won by the RPF, collecting 98% of the votes – the remaining 2% being split amongst the opponents.<sup>10</sup> The 2017 elections marked 23 years since the beginning of Kagame and the RPF's rule on the country.

From the moment it took power, the RPF focused on tightening its grip on the state and on monopolising political power in the country. The 2017 elections stand as an emblematic moment in this sense as they were marked by a climate of intimidation and fear accompanied by the disappearance and imprisonment of political opponents. In 2017, Jean Damascene Habarugira, member of the opposition party FDU-Inkigi was called by a local authority to participate in a meeting and then disappeared. His dead body was recovered a few days later by his family.<sup>11</sup> Jean Damascene Habarugira was but the latest in a series of disappearances involving members of FDU-Inkigi and other opposition forces.<sup>12</sup> Members of the opposition party Rwanda National Congress (RNC) and other opposition movements have been disappearing or held incommunicado (admittedly, in a few cases) by government forces.<sup>13,14</sup>

These two examples are only the latest cases of government violence against members of the opposition, as according to Amnesty International: “Killings and disappearances in 2017 need to be placed in the context of many years of similar violence for which no one has yet been held

9. [GDP Growth \(annual %\)](#), The World Bank, 2019.

10. [Rwanda : Paul Kagame est élu avec 98 % des voix, sans surprise](#), Le Monde Afrique, 05 August 2017.

11. [Rwanda: Decades of attacks repression and killings set the scene for next month's election](#), Amnesty International, 7 July 2017.

12. [Amnesty International Report 2017/18. The state of the world's human rights](#), Amnesty International, 2018.

13. Ibidem

14. [Rwanda : la citoyenne rwando-britannique Violette Uwamahoro arrêtée](#), RFI, 4 March 2017.

to account. In this chilling atmosphere, it is unsurprising that would-be government critics practice self-censorship and that political debate is limited in advance of the elections.”<sup>15</sup>

Undeniably, politically motivated state violence is a staple of Rwandan public life and should not be seen as limited to electoral cycle. In March 2019, another member of the FDU-Inkigi (who had also been jailed multiple times with accusations of insurgency) disappeared, only to be found dead in a forest in the Western part of the country, allegedly with signs of strangulation on his neck.<sup>16</sup> The FDU-Inkigi has long been denied registration in Rwanda and its leader, Victoire Ingabire, had been arrested in 2010 when she entered Rwanda to participate in the presidential election. She served a 14-year sentence for terrorist activity and was liberated in March 2018 after receiving presidential pardon. The President’s clemency came with a warning: “If you continue on this tone, you will find yourself in prison again.”<sup>17</sup> Ingabire has since continued her political activities.<sup>18</sup>

The **routine disappearances and killings** of members of the opposition are not the only sign of a political system that is cordoned-off by the RPF and its allies. In fact, the 2017 elections have seen for the first time new forms of harassment and discredit of political opponents. For example, shortly after independent political opponent Diane Shima Rwigara announced her intention to run for the presidency, nude pictures of her circulated on social media, risking not only to ruin

her reputation but also to disqualify her from participating, as the Rwandan constitution requires of presidential candidates that they should be “of good morals and great integrity”.<sup>19</sup> When Ms Rwigara eventually decided to take part in the elections, the Rwandan National Electoral Commission (NEC) found faults in the list of signatures she had presented to validate her candidacy.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, following Kagame’s victory at the elections, Ms Rwigara and her mother were accused, imprisoned and tried for inciting insurrection and falsifying documents. The arrest of Ms Rwigara came only after several members of her party had been harassed and jailed by security forces.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, the Rwandan justice would find no evidence proving accusations against her and she was freed from prison in 2018.

The year 2018 seemed to mark a loosening of the RPF grip on power and a progressive opening of the political space. In March 2018, more than 2,000 Rwandan political prisoners received presidential pardon and were freed from jail. However, the relenting of political control was, according to observers, part of a strategy to present the open and democratic face of Rwanda to the international community.<sup>22</sup> In fact, in 2018, Rwanda’s minister of Foreign Affairs Louise Mushikiwabo run a bid for the position of Secretary General of the International Organisation of the Francophonie. After a highly mediatised campaign that managed to gather support from countries previously sceptics of Rwanda (such as France), Ms Mushikiwabo was elected as new Secretary

15. [Rwanda: Decades of attacks repression and killings set the scene for next month’s election](#), Amnesty International, 7 July 2017.

16. [Au Rwanda, un nouveau décès mystérieux d’un opposant](#), Human Rights Watch, 12 March 2019.

17. [Rwanda : l’avertissement de Paul Kagame à Victoire Ingabire](#), RFI, 20 September 2018.

18. [Freed Rwandan opposition leader vows to continue struggle](#), The Guardian, 24 September 2018.

19. Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, 2003

20. [Rwanda disqualifies only female presidential candidate](#), Reuters, 7 July 2017.

21. [Rwanda : 22 ans de prison requis contre l’opposante Diane Rwigara](#), RTBF, 7 November 2018.

22. [Rwanda : La libération surprise de prisonniers politiques pose question](#), La Libre Afrique, 23 September 2018.

General of the organisation. Moreover, during the same year, President Kagame also assumed the position of Chairman of the African Union's Commission, being also responsible for the reform of that organisation. Once more, the carefully crafted image projected by the Rwandan government was bought and paid for by the international community and donors.

### Shrinking civic space and freedom of the press

Space for CSOs and for the independent press in Rwanda is limited, and critics of government politics and of the RPF grip on state institutions and society are often faced with backlash. In fact, non-governmental and CSOs must adhere to strict criteria and are subject to constant reporting to governmental agencies to be allowed to conduct their work. **Legislative and administrative measures are often used to silence dissenters and human rights defenders** as "NGO laws continue to be used to interfere with and undermine the activities of independent human rights organisations."<sup>23</sup> For example, NGOs are required to register with the Rwandan Governance Board (RGB). Registration with the RGB is overly bureaucratic; it does not automatically concede legal personality to organisations and puts NGOs, human rights defenders and CSOs in a position of continuous control by government officials.<sup>24</sup> There is no mechanism to appeal RGB's decision regarding the registration of an organisation.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, independent human rights and civil society organisations that are

critical of government positions may see their representatives and executives harassed and criminalised. For example, in 2015 one of the few independent human rights organisations active in the country, the Ligue des droits de l'homme dans les Grands Lacs (LDGL) saw its director harassed, imprisoned and forced to leave the country while members of LDGL executive board were arrested and detained.<sup>26</sup>

National NGOs in Rwanda also have **limited room for manoeuvre** as to the activities they choose to conduct and the issues they choose to address. For example, NGOs are required to ensure collaboration letters from local authorities when they start working in a new area. Moreover, their action plans and strategies must align with the Rwandan government objectives. In fact, local NGOs are often required to adhere to local authorities' programmes and specific activities, going as far as requiring performance contracts<sup>27</sup> between local authorities and NGOs.<sup>28</sup> Instead of promoting the development of an independent, vibrant civil society that can act as a counterbalance and provide critical feedback to public powers, the Rwandan government tends to see civil society as another implementing arm of the executive.

The situation is hardly better for independent media, which are a rare sight in the country. Despite significant changes to the Rwandan media law in 2013 that seemed to provide a freer space for independent media, both juridical and *de facto* limitations have led to a

23. [Rwanda: Participation and Protection of civil society is crucial to development](#), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), 17 March 2016.

24. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai](#), UN Human Rights Council, 16 September 2014.

25. [Shrinking Civil Society Space in the Horn of Africa: The legal context](#), PAX, August 2017.

26. [Association in Rwanda](#), CIVICUS, 1 June 2016.

27. Performance contracts (imihigo in Kinyarwanda) are tools for evidence-based management largely used in the Rwandan public administration that tie the central government to decentralised authorities, and those to individual households. They set clear, quantifiable policy objectives on which often the salary and the careers of public officials depend. The contracts have been criticised for imposing often unrealistic, top-down objectives.

28. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai](#), UN Human Rights Council, 16 September 2014.

media environment that is homogenous in its positions and that often acts as an ancillary arm of power. For example, the 2013 law introduced a self-regulating body for journalists in the country, the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC). However, its first chair, Fred Muvunyi, left his position citing ‘disagreements with the government about the RMC’s autonomy’.<sup>29</sup> After a diatribe between the RMC and the Rwandan Regulatory Utilities Authority (RURA), also involved in media regulation, the latter decided to suspend the BBC service in Kinyarwanda following the broadcaster’s transmission ‘Rwanda’s Untold Story’, which had been critical of government interventions.<sup>30</sup> The muting of the BBC, amongst the few independent media in the country, greatly impacted the media landscape. In 2016, investigative journalist John William Ntwali was arrested and charged with sexual violence on a minor, just as he was investigating the mysterious death of opposition candidate Diane Rwigara’s father, Assinapol Rwigara. Ntwali was released after ten days, and the charges were eventually dropped.<sup>31</sup> These two cases are emblematic of a **media environment in which government control and self-censorship are defining features**. As a result, most media in Rwanda are so staunchly pro-government that even President Kagame criticised the *de facto* government newspaper, The New Times Rwanda, for being too servile.<sup>32</sup> The situation further deteriorated in 2018, with the adoption of Rwanda’s new Penal Code. In fact, one of the dispositions in the new text of law forbids journalists from ‘humiliating’ state authorities through public writing or cartoons. From then

on, journalists would be held accountable for publishing edited images without declaring they have been altered.

Finally, in a disquieting development, a newly proposed ministerial regulation would impose new limitations of trade unions activities in Rwanda. Up until now, the presence of independent trade unions, although limited, has been allowed in the country. The new project for a ministerial regulation would bring trade unions under the authority of the Ministry of Public Service and Labour, which is in violation of the Rwandan constitution and of the principles of the International Labour Organisation. Furthermore, the Ministry would be in charge of recognising the legal personality of trade unions and of withdrawing it without any judicial process. Finally, the proposed regulation imposes to trade unions an obligation to create a government-recognised self-regulatory body, which is contrary to the principle of the independence of trade unions.

### Unreliable statistics as smokescreen

Although Rwanda is routinely praised for its achievements in terms of economic development and poverty reduction, significant doubts remain on the **validity of the statistics provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR)**. On the blog of the academic journal Review of African Political Economy, a recent debate between numerous researchers highlighted how data provided

29. [Submission to the Human Rights Committee in advance of the fourth periodic review of Rwanda](#), Human Rights Watch, 12 February 2016.

30. [Rwanda: The right of freedom of expression and of free media remains in jeopardy](#), Jambo News, 4 December 2017.

31. Ibidem

32. [President Paul Kagame under scrutiny](#), The Economist, 5 April 2010.

by the NISR are misleading with regards to poverty reduction. In fact, at least two researchers working independently have come to the conclusion that the NISR altered their baseline consumption basket in order to prove that levels of overall poverty had reduced between 2010 and 2016.<sup>33,34,35</sup> When the right consumption basket is used, poverty increased between five and seven percent point over the same period. This investigation also showed that the World Bank was aware of such faults but chose to close eyes.<sup>36</sup> The Bank denied that any manipulation of data had taken place, but it was unable to provide any credible explanations addressing the faulty methodology used by the NISR.<sup>37</sup>

### EU Interventions with regard to human rights and democracy

The EU has consistently held an ambivalent and dangerous position on Rwanda. The European Commission and the EEAS are increasingly **reticent to recognise the serious violations of human rights, political rights and freedom of assembly, expression and association** in Rwanda. In fact, the European Commission and the EEAS have repeatedly ignored such issues, at least in public. This is an unacceptable and dangerous position which goes against the fundamental principles and values of the European Union. The European Commission and the EEAS seem eager to present Rwanda as a success story of economic development and post-conflict reconstruction, overlooking the repression of dissident voices and the closure of political space. This sends a dangerous

message to neighbouring countries and to other EU partner countries: that **European institutions are ready to accept the intimidation of political opponents, muting and criminalisation of dissenting voices, harassment of journalists and killing of political opponents as a fair price to pay for economic development.**

The European Commission and the EEAS' position have shown their inadequacy in occasion of the 2017 presidential elections in Rwanda. In fact, while the United States (although timidly) denounced the grave irregularities witnessed during the elections,<sup>38</sup> the EU limited itself to a statement congratulating the country on the peaceful unfolding of the elections.<sup>39</sup> **EU services should keep in mind that elections are not meant to be a public display of orderly conduct, but an exercise in substantial democracy, in Rwanda as elsewhere.** Such statements not only reduce the credibility of EU institutions in the eyes of Rwandan citizens, often forced to vote according to government and authorities' indications, but also in the eyes of international partners both in Africa and abroad.

Such an approach does nothing but legitimise and encourage further violations by state authorities. The Commission and the EEAS are not wrong in complimenting the Rwandan government on its achievements in terms of economic development, but an approach based on constructive criticism would be more helpful, and much more fitting to EU core principles and values.

33. [Rwandan Poverty Statistics: Exposing the 'Donor Darling'](#), Anonymous authors in the Review of African Political Economy, 31 May 2017.

34. [Faking it: The Rwandan GDP Growth Myth](#), Anonymous authors in the Review of African Political Economy, 26 July 2017.

35. [The Evidence Mounts: Poverty, Inflation and Rwanda](#), Sam Desiere in the Review of African Political Economy, 28 June 2017.

36. [A Straightforward Case of Fake Statistics](#), Anonymous authors in the Review of African Political Economy, 18 April 2019.

37. [Q&A on Rwanda Poverty Statistics](#), The World Bank, 22 April 2019.

38. Press statement: [Presidential Election in Rwanda](#), US Department of State, 5 August 2017.

39. [Statement by the spokesperson following the Presidential elections in Rwanda](#), EEAS, 6 August 2017.

On the contrary, the European Parliament has played a more active and critical role. For example, in 2016 the Parliament adopted a resolution on the case of the imprisonment of Victoire Ingabire. Moreover, a delegation from the Parliament visited Rwanda in 2016 and asked to visit Ms Ingabire but were denied such opportunity. The resolution nonetheless highlighted the situation of repression and human rights violations in the country.

While discourse on Rwanda is often polarised, the EU must find the space to criticise developments in Rwanda that are disrespectful of fundamental freedoms and civil rights.

## Recommendations

**Given the situation described above, EurAc calls on the European Parliament to:**

- Interrogate the EEAS and the European Commission on what steps are being taken to address violations of human rights and civic freedoms in Rwanda, and to clarify its position on the matter.
- Inquire with the European Commission on how they are ensuring that funds devolved to the civil society sector in Rwanda are being used to promote an independent civil society rather than new mechanisms for controlling independent organisations.

- Urge the European Commission and the EEAS to immediately abandon their double standards approach with regards to the respect of democratic principles and human rights in Rwanda, which should not be exempted from criticisms on such matters.
- Conduct a parliamentary visit of the European Parliament to Rwanda to enquire about issues of human rights violations and political freedoms.
- Monitor the evolution of the situation of human rights and political freedom in Rwanda.
- Urge EU member states, the European Commission and EEAS to integrate in a transversal manner the reality of ethnic tensions and associated risks in their analyses as root-causes of instability since the colonial era – and to encourage initiatives promoting dialogue and reconciliation.

**A reform of the agricultural sector that does not serve the interests of the most vulnerable groups**

Rwanda has often been praised for the country's advancements in terms of economic development and poverty reduction. However, despite significant government interventions and foreign donors' support, the country is still one of the poorest in the world, and the majority of the population still struggles to secure enough agricultural production and revenues. More than 80% of the Rwandan population derives their livelihoods from agricultural activities. In 2016, 39.1% of Rwandan households lived below the poverty line, while 36.7%<sup>40</sup> of children between the age of zero and five were stunted – a percentage that reaches 40% in rural areas.<sup>41</sup> Such high levels of stunting are often due to poor nutrition, as only 29% of children between zero and five receive the minimum dietary requirements as per the standards of the World Health Organisation.<sup>42</sup>

The government of Rwanda launched in 2006 an ambitious Crop Intensification Programme (CIP), the first phase of which ended in 2017. The CIP aimed at increasing agricultural productivity through the distribution of improved inputs, the consolidation of individual land plots in collective arrangements. It resulted in significant production gains and in a decline in food insecurity over the past ten years. This was also the result of an ambitious Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (SPAT) which focused

on public subventions to the agricultural sector to foster productivity increase, soil and erosion management as well as price control for agricultural inputs. Nonetheless, **food security remains a crucial problem** and mostly so for the least wealthy in rural settings. This policy is based on the assumption that intensive agriculture using improved inputs, such as improved seeds and chemical fertilisers, represents a solution to problems of low productivity in Rwandan agriculture.

The government set out to achieve agricultural modernisation not only through the subsidised distribution of improved inputs, but also through the consolidation of parcels of land that, up until that moment, had been cultivated individually. In fact, Rwandan farmers traditionally worked on parcels scattered in different parts of the country's hilly countryside. Polyculture was often practiced in these plots, for two reasons. Firstly, associating the growing of different crops within a single parcel may also help to spread the risk involved in agricultural production, as failure of one crop may be compensated by success of another. Secondly, farmers could change the crops they grew according to weather and market signals to optimise production. The switch from the association of crops to monoculture, while intentioned to increase agricultural production, has often had the effects of exposing Rwandan farmers to higher risks. Furthermore, **producers have rarely been involved in the process of choosing what crops to grow in specific areas**, crops were often chosen by government authorities without

40. [Rwanda Country Profile on Nutrition](#), European Commission, July 2017.

41. [Rwanda 2015: Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis](#), MINAGRI, NISR and WFP, March 2016.

42. [Rwanda Country Profile on Nutrition](#), European Commission, July 2017.

regards for local needs and agro-ecological specificities, which often led to crop failure. According to a recent analysis of the CIP by a Rwandan NGO, only 27.8% of the respondents reported that participation in the government programme of land use consolidation increased productivity for targeted crops.<sup>43</sup> In fact, while total crop yields for government targeted crops have increased, the FAO reported that between 2015 and 2017 about 4.3 million of Rwandans were malnourished.<sup>44</sup>

Failings in food security are not exclusively the consequence of government policy: climate patterns and farmers' capacity to react to them; soil erosion and farmers' access to input that can maintain and regenerate soil fertility, and the protection of local biodiversity, are crucial issues for Rwanda. Despite that the Rwandan government has introduced the concept of sustainability in its Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (SPAT) 2018-2024, and in the previous SPAT 2012-2017, few measures have been taken to tackle land degradation at the national level. In fact, for farmers to respond effectively to the challenges of a changing climate, they must be able to rely on a variety food-security crops and of agricultural strategies that maximise land productivity. Chemical and organic fertilisers are pivotal in this context: as monocultural practices tend to reduce the biomass available for the production of organic fertiliser, and as prices for chemical fertilisers increase, the rural poor may find it nearly impossible to access improved inputs (i.e. fertiliser and improved seeds). In turn, this dynamic makes it harder

and harder for these farmers to restore soil fertility and to fight the advancing erosion of land, their most important productive asset. In short, **the protection of farms from land degradation should be mainstreamed** within the agricultural practices promoted by the government, and not as a fix to be applied after the soil has been damaged. Government should increase the availability of organic fertilisers to the poorest farmers, especially to those who are not able to produce it themselves and who depend on market access for purchasing it.

Finally, one of the main pitfalls of the Rwandan programme for agricultural modernisation, and of the past SPATs, is the exclusion of the main stakeholders, Rwandan farmers, from the process of programme design and implementation. Farmers' participation is neglected when crops are chosen to be regionalised in a specific area. "Farmers are generally not involved, or only marginally so, in the design of agricultural policies" as "[T]he government chooses the crop to plant for the farmers instead of farmers being the ones to choose and propose the crop to local authorities [...] government efforts are mainly oriented towards production of maize crop [...] if there was enough involvement of farmers in planning, they would have chosen to plant other crops other than maize."<sup>45</sup> Government representatives often present local-level meetings discussing agricultural policy as part of a participatory mechanism. In reality, these only serve the purpose of informing the rural population concerned of the government's choice regarding crops

43. [Crop Intensification Programme \(CIP\) Satisfaction Survey-2017](#), Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), 7 September 2018.

44. [Country Profile Rwanda](#), FAOstat, 2019.

45. [Crop Intensification Programme \(CIP\) Satisfaction Survey-2017](#) (p.60), Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), 7 September 2018.

to be grown in a given area. However, farmers' participation may provide virtuous mechanisms of feeding into existing policy initiatives, if only producers and their organisations were more consistently involved in policy design and implementation<sup>46,47</sup> while local authorities have been known to use coercive means to force compliance with policy.

### European interventions in agriculture

The EU is Rwanda's most important development donor in the field of agriculture. Through one of the most substantial aid disbursements for agriculture in Rwanda, the EU has shown its commitment and support to Rwandan farmers.<sup>48</sup> The EU just funded a 900 million Rwf project to enhance farmers' participation in agricultural policy formulation, and to strengthen their capacity to negotiate prices.<sup>49</sup> However, the EU roadmap for engagement with Rwandan civil society lacks a specific component for agricultural and rural actors.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in the context of increasing climate variability and change, it is essential that EU support to the agricultural sector in Rwanda challenges current models of monoculture and export-oriented agriculture to **focus on systems that can promote and sustain agricultural production** while minimising negative impact on soil fertility and resource depletions. The European Commission has already financed programmes supporting agro-forestry, and the Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture

is currently engaged in pilot projects to experiment with agro-ecological models of production. Such efforts should be supported.

### Other relevant issues

Although less important than in the neighbouring DRC, Rwanda has a dynamic artisanal mining sector. The sector is growing and offers means of livelihoods to many Rwandans but has a strong negative impact on the environment.<sup>51</sup> More than that, while the country is relatively rich in 3TG, a number of observers have noted that at least a portion of the minerals exported through Rwanda are extracted in the DRC. Such dynamics of illegal smuggling in the region are often at the bases of important grievances in neighbouring countries and may potentially destabilise the regional political context.

46. [Assessing the value of diverse cropping systems under a new agricultural policy environment in Rwanda](#) (p.491-506), Isaacs et al., June 2016.

47. [Farmer knowledge identifies a competitive bean ideotype for maize-bean intercrop systems in Rwanda](#) (p.17), Isaacs, K., S.S. Snapp, J. D. Kelly, K. R. Chung, December 2016.

48. [EU grants 200 budget support to Rwanda agriculture](#), EEAS, 22 June 2016.

49. [New multimillion project to enhance farmers' role in agricultural policy](#), The New Times Rwanda, 6 November 2018.

50. [EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Rwanda](#), EU Delegation to Kigali, 2018.

51. [Artisanal Mining in Rwanda. The Trade-Off Between Entrepreneurial Activity and Environmental Impact](#), Jan Macháček and Milada Dušková, 13 July 2016.

## Recommendations

**Given the situation described above, EurAc calls on the European Parliament to:**

- Push the European Commission to use its policy dialogue with the Rwandan government to implement an approach to agriculture that puts resources conservation and environmental sustainability first.
- Urge the European Commission to use its policy dialogue with Rwandan government to promote the involvement of farmers and their organisations in the design and implementation of agricultural policy.
- Call on the European Commission to use its policy dialogue with the Rwandan government to ensure that agricultural programmes meet the needs of the most vulnerable rural actors who do not have enough capital and resources to engage with input-intensive agriculture.
- Interrogate the European Commission with regard to the food security outlook of the country, and on how they intend to address the problem with other donors.



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