

# **Transregional Conflicts and the Re-spatialization of Regions “at Sea”: The Yaoundé Process in the Gulf of Guinea**

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## **ABSTRACTS**

Seit den 2000er Jahren haben regionale und internationale Akteure in West- und Zentralafrika den Golf von Guinea zunehmend als einen Raum von strategischer Bedeutung angesehen, geplagt von „maritimer Unsicherheit“, die sich über etablierte regionale Grenzen erstreckt. Als Reaktion darauf haben ECOWAS, ECCAS und die Gulf of Guinea Commission sowie deren Mitgliedsstaaten und „internationale Partner“ neue Formen der transregionalen Kooperation gesucht. Dies hat im Juni 2013 zur Gründung des Yaoundé-Prozesses geführt. Da maritime Themen bzw. Räume in den Security Studies wie auch der Regionalismusforschung wenig Beachtung gefunden haben, befasst sich der vorliegende Beitrag mit dem Ursprung, den Hauptakteuren sowie den globalen Verflechtungen des Yaoundé-Prozesses und argumentiert, dass all dies eng mit Versuchen verknüpft ist, trans- und interregionale Räume zu gestalten und zu ordnen, sowohl „auf See“ als auch „an Land“.

Since the 2000s, actors in but also beyond West and Central Africa have increasingly identified the Gulf of Guinea as a space of strategic importance, beset by “maritime insecurity” reaching across established regional boundaries. Consequently, especially ECOWAS, ECCAS, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, their member states, and “international partners” have sought new ways of transregional cooperation, leading to the creation of the Yaoundé Process in June 2013. Responding to a lack of attention to maritime issues/ sea space in security studies and regionalism literature, this article analyzes the Yaoundé Process. Applying a spatial perspective, the article traces its origins/ emergence, main actors and entanglement in trans-more global dynamics. It argues that this process has intimately linked to the formatting and ordering of trans- and inter-regional space(s) both “at sea” and “on land”.

## 1. Introduction

As Africa’s “new danger zone”<sup>1</sup> – “waiting to explode”<sup>2</sup> – the Gulf of Guinea has gained increasing attention since the early 2010s, named in the same breath together with the developing crisis in the Sahel as a major international security challenge.<sup>3</sup> Identified as a region of increasing strategic importance,<sup>4</sup> various actors and initiatives have sought to secure the vast stretch of water spanning Central and West Africa, however with limited results. Therefore, the Yaoundé Summit in June 2013 and the complete operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Center (ICC) for the Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, in Yaoundé in February 2017 (after considerable delays) have met with keen anticipation by regional and international actors – moving ahead what some now call the Yaoundé Process.<sup>5</sup> This process brings together member states of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) to jointly tackle insecurity in their maritime domains.<sup>6</sup>

According to practitioners and the limited literature that touches upon the issue, two related developments have triggered the Yaoundé Process. On the one hand, increasing attacks on ships in the waters of ECCAS and ECOWAS member states (most often referred to as “piracy”) have caused regional heads of state to look for help and new strategies to increase their capacity and capability to monitor and patrol their maritime domain – by also transcending state borders just as the threats they face. On the other hand, concerns raised by regional stakeholders have also caused the UN Secretariat and the UN Security Council (UNSC) to get involved, calling for cooperation and a joint approach to confront common challenges – by also transcending regional borders.<sup>7</sup>

- 1 International Crisis Group (ICG), *The Gulf of Guinea: The New Danger Zone*, Africa Report 195 (2012), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/guinea/gulf-guinea-new-danger-zone> (accessed 4 April 2019).
- 2 P. K. Gosh, *Waiting to Explode: Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*, in: Observer Research Foundation Occasional Paper 46, September 2013, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/waiting-to-explode-piracy-in-the-gulf-of-guinea/> (accessed 4 April 2019).
- 3 UN Security Council, Record of the 6723rd meeting (S/PV.6723), 27 February 2012, pp. 2, 4–5.
- 4 In fact, the Gulf of Guinea has been of strategic importance since colonial times (cf. K. Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea: Prospects and Challenges*, University of Wollongong Thesis Collection, 2014, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/> (accessed 11 December 2018) K. Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea: Prospects and Challenges*, University of Wollongong Thesis Collection, 2014, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/> (accessed 11 December 2018).
- 5 Whereas sometimes Yaoundé Process refers only to the Code of Conduct, in this article, the phrase refers to the entire dynamic ensuing from the Yaoundé Summit in June 2013 (similar to the understanding expressed in UN Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2016/4 (2016), pp. 2–3, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_prst\\_2016\\_4.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2016_4.pdf) [accessed 16 April 2019]).
- 6 ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC, *Final Communiqué: The Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on Maritime Security and Safety in the Gulf of Guinea*, 25 June 2013, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/pressreleases/27463-pr-maritime\\_summit\\_final\\_communique.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/pressreleases/27463-pr-maritime_summit_final_communique.pdf) (accessed 4 April 2019).
- 7 C. Ukeje and W. Mvomola, *African approaches to maritime security: The Gulf of Guinea*. Abuja 2013; Cf. interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2018; interview with senior UNODC staff, Dakar, 25 April 2017.

Consequently, while continuing to insist on the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, the Yaoundé Process revolves around finding the right actors (or “partners”), a common strategy and the right kind and degree of inter-regional cooperation (and integration) to confront a threat that is not only transnational, but also trans-regional in nature.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, there are concerns over “transnational organized crime” (TOC), in particular, but not exclusively, trafficking in arms and drugs, human trafficking, piracy, and armed robbery at sea. All of these are considered to pose threats to both socio-economic development of regional countries and international peace and stability.<sup>9</sup> The ICC, therefore, constitutes the top level of a hierarchical structure of inter-regional, regional (multinational), and national maritime coordination and operation centres in West and Central Africa. This structure is supposed to promote joint activities and close partnerships, regular exchange of information and expertise, the harmonization of laws and procedures, as well as the adoption and implementation of common methodology.<sup>10</sup>

As such, the Yaoundé Process presents us with an interesting case of regional cooperation / integration “at sea”, which is relevant to academic debates for two reasons. Firstly, the Yaoundé Process focuses on regional cooperation (or else) *in* the maritime domain – something that so far has received only scant scholarly interest. In that respect, Bueger and Edmunds talk about “sea-blindness” in international security studies, calling for a new research agenda in maritime security studies.<sup>11</sup> Practitioners share the view that maritime security issues so far have been neglected – often failing to receive the attention given to land-based conflicts – although they are of key importance, in many cases also for land-based conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the Yaoundé Process highlights space more generally as a central dimension of political (social, economic, etc.) inter-action that is not quasi-naturally given, but socially constructed and continuously contested, therefore constantly “in the making”. Like “sea space”, “space” more generally has rarely received explicit scholarly interest as an explanatory factor and/or an analytical dimension to include in research (neither in peace and security studies, nor in regionalism literature). Therefore, in this article, I argue that adopting an approach that is sensitive to space allows the Yaoundé Process to be understood as being intimately linked to the (re-)formatting and/or (re-)ordering of regional space(s) as well as inter-regional relations “at sea”. I use quotation marks here

8 ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC, Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in their Common Maritime Domain, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–2.

9 Ibid., p. 1.

10 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

11 Bueger and Edmunds point to the very recent emergence of a broader understanding of “maritime security”, the term being coined only in the 1990s, and receiving more attention since the early 2000s, in particular in the wake of attacks on ships off the coast of Somalia (C. Bueger and T. Edmunds, *Beyond seabindness: a new agenda for maritime security studies*, in: *International Affairs* 93 (2017) 6, pp. 1293–1311, at 1296–1297). Before that, interest had mainly been in states’ military power and competition, as well as legal structures to avoid warfare at sea (i.e. international order at sea), *ibid.*, pp. 1295–1296.

12 Interview with ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 26 October 2018; interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 26 September 2018.

to point to the simultaneous processes of integrating the sea into regional space(s) and at the same time contributing to the construction of (inter-)regional space “on land”.

In order to substantiate these points further, while filling in a fundamental gap in our knowledge of the Yaoundé Process and its origins, this article proceeds as follows: The first section analyses the nature and main themes that help to identify the Gulf of Guinea as a transregional conflict complex. It also delves in more depth into the different ways in which space matters when imagining, talking about, and acting upon maritime (in) security in the Gulf of Guinea. The second section retraces the antecedents and major inputs that led up to the Yaoundé Process, before the third section turns to its actual emergence and early stages of implementation. Since the primary interest in this article is with processes of (re-)spatialization, it does not go into detail about the current state of implementation of the ICC and the regional centres. Instead, section four reflects upon the significance of the Yaoundé Process beyond West and Central Africa and how it relates to other agendas pursued and initiatives taken at the continental level – that is to say by the AU – and beyond Africa.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Maritime “Insecurity” in the Gulf of Guinea and Processes of Re-spatialization

Only very few publications directly touch upon the Yaoundé Process in at least some detail,<sup>14</sup> with most only referring to it in passing. So far, none of these contributions has focused on the actual *process* that led to the Yaoundé Summit, and the emergence of the Yaoundé Process. In contrast, a large number of contributions (mostly by think tanks) deal with the various aspects of maritime (in)security in the Gulf of Guinea. These assess causes, historical development, as well as the current security situation and how it seems to affect states in West and Central Africa (especially regarding their socio-economic development). They also identify challenges of those states and international actors in tackling the issue, making recommendations about how to move towards possible solutions.<sup>15</sup> In addition, several publications try to compare and share lessons from experiences in the Indian Ocean, in particular off the coast of Somalia.<sup>16</sup>

13 This article is based on interviews conducted in Addis Ababa (September 2016 and September 2018), Abuja (February 2017 and October 2018), and Dakar (April/May 2017). It also heavily draws on official texts produced by the involved regional organizations as well as secondary literature and media reports.

14 See, e.g., K. Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea: Prospects and Challenges*, University of Wollongong Thesis Collection, 2014, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/> (accessed 11 December 2018); S.M. Hasan and D. Hassan, *Current Arrangements to Combat Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea Region: An Evaluation*, in: *Journal of Maritime Law and Commerce* 47 (2016) 2, pp.171–217; K.L. Jacobsen and J.R. Nordby, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, Copenhagen 2015; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*; F. Vreĵ, *Good Order at Sea off West Africa*, in: F. Vreĵ and T. Mandrup (eds.), *Towards Good Order at Sea*, Stellenbosch 2015, pp. 183–206.

15 Exemplary for a wide range of publications see R. Gilpin, *Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, in: *Strategic Insights* 6 (2007) 1, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/11174> (accessed 11 December 2018); P.K. Gosh, *Waiting to Explode*; A.A. Osinowo, *Combating Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*, Washington D.C 2015; P. Sartre, *Responding to Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea*, New York 2014; T. Walker, *Maritime security in West Africa*, in: *African Security Review* 22 (2013) 2, pp. 85–91.

16 See, e.g., A. Anyimadu, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons Learned from the Indian Ocean*, London 2013;

However, regional (as well as inter- or transregional) cooperation, although frequently referred to, has received little detailed analysis, regarding its (internal) functioning, actors, and dynamics.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, although much of this literature is replete with spatial references, so far it has not explicitly reflected upon the inherent spatial imaginations and related processes of re-spatialization. However, as I argue in this article, the Yaoundé Process needs to be understood in this context and as the result of different actors trying to re-spatialize – that is to say, re-format and re-order space. Consequently, the following section do not aim to give a comprehensive overview of the literature on maritime (in)security in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>18</sup> Instead, it aims to outline briefly its transregional dimension, before analysing how this is intimately linked to particular spatial imaginations, formats, and processes of re-spatialization.

### 3. Identifying the Situation in the Gulf of Guinea as a Transregional Conflict

Although looking back at a longer history of maritime crimes especially off the coast of Nigeria, the issue of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea became a transregional conflict specifically since the mid-2000s, with a first peak in violence around 2007, followed by Nigerian counter-measures pushing piracy first eastward (towards Central Africa) and since about 2011 towards its neighbours in West Africa (first Benin and later Togo and Ghana).<sup>19</sup>

The reasons for the emergence of piracy (etc.) in the Gulf of Guinea, according to a large consensus in the literature, are, firstly, the emergence of the Gulf of Guinea as region of geostrategic importance due to the discovery of vast reserves of natural resources in the early 2000s – mostly oil and gas, but also fish) – and shifts in the global political and economic context, that is to say, the conflict in the Middle East and emergence of new big consumers, such as Brazil, China, and India.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, lacking, “weak” and/or “poor” governance (referring to a lack of interest or awareness as well as lacking or weak policy and physical control)<sup>21</sup> have allowed “criminals” to fill the “vacuum”,<sup>22</sup> resulting in “bad order at sea”.<sup>23</sup> Lastly, various structural factors have left states and populations

M. Fiorelli, Piracy in Africa: The Case of the Gulf of Guinea, in: KAIPTC Occasion paper 37 (August 2014), <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/piracy-in-africa-the-case-of-the-gulf-of-guinea/> (accessed 11 April 2019); J. Piedade, From Politicization to Securitization of Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea, in: *Croatian International Relations Review* 22 (2016) 75, pp. 69–85; F. Vreÿ, Bad order at sea: From the Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Guinea, in: *African Security Review* 18 (2009) 3, pp. 17–30.

17 For example, despite large membership overlaps (e.g. between ECCAS and the GGC, as well as ECOWAS, ECCAS, and MOWCA), authors usually treat these organizations as separate and independent actors.

18 For a good literature review see E.L. Lucia, *Fragility, Violence and Criminality in the Gulf of Guinea: Rapid literature review*, Birmingham 2015.

19 Cf. Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, pp. 185; International Crisis Group, *The Gulf of Guinea*, p. 1.

20 Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 49; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, pp. 13–14.

21 ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, p. 4; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, pp. 17, 19.

22 ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, p. 5.

23 Vreÿ, *Bad order at sea*; F. Vreÿ and T. Mandrup, Introduction, in: F. Vreÿ and T. Mandrup (eds.), *Towards Good Order at Sea: African experiences*, Stellenbosch 2015, pp. 5–18.

in the Gulf of Guinea vulnerable, resulting in dependency on primary resources, poverty, as well as economic and political marginalization or exclusion.<sup>24</sup>

While piracy or variants thereof have been the most common reference,<sup>25</sup> maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea comprises a large array of activities that are considered “illicit/illegal”, “criminal”, or may otherwise affect stability in the region. Many publications propose a broad conceptualization of maritime “security”, along with, for example, violence at sea (e.g. piracy or robbery) as well as the trafficking of illicit goods (e.g. arms or drugs), illegal fishing, and environmental degradation.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, a still widespread, narrow focus on piracy, together with emphasis on military intervention and repression, may distract from more fundamental problems, such as illegal fishing, both to local and European interests,<sup>27</sup> as these pose threats to individual, group, and national livelihoods or development.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, underlying dynamics of maritime insecurity and its results are widely considered as inherently transnational, and consequently cannot be tackled by any single state, instead requiring regional and international cooperation.<sup>29</sup>

From the above mentioned points, it becomes clear that maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is a concern not only for states in the region, but also extends to various non-African regional and global actors. The strategies adopted and support provided by the US, European states (especially France) and the European Union (EU), as well as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) reflect the strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea, making it a space of action linked to the maritime security agendas of these actors. As a result, the international community has shown strong interest in the Yaoundé Process.<sup>30</sup> Since the early 2000s, the goal has been to build some sort of maritime security “architecture” in West and Central Africa in order to produce “good order at sea” in that region.<sup>31</sup> So far, despite various agreements and initiatives, we still only see very few operational results. Not only do states continue to lack even the most basic equipment, such as fuel, not to talk of ships and patrol boats, regional cooperation is also hampered by a long list of factors, including, among others, corruption, border disputes over natural resources, differences in the assessment of impacts and problems, different languages and colonial legacies, “bureaucratic cultures”, (degrees of) regulations and their implementa-

24 This mirrors common themes in land-based debates, reflecting the securitization of various dynamics in and large parts of Africa (see below). Cf. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, pp. 18–19.

25 Vreÿ and Mandrup, *Introduction*, pp. 6–7.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8; Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 96; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, pp. 21–22.

27 Cf. interview with senior UNODC staff, Dakar, 25 April 2017. See also Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 66.

28 For more detailed overviews of the effects of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, see Vreÿ, *Good Order at Sea off West Africa*, pp. 190–192; Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 204.

29 Cf. C. Bueger, *Communities of Security Practice at Work? The Emerging African Maritime Security Regime*, in: *African Security* 6 (2013) 3–4, pp. 297–316, at 298; Vreÿ, *Good Order at Sea off West Africa*, pp. 184, 192–193.

30 Cf. ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, pp. 21–23.

31 Vreÿ and Mandrup, *Introduction*, p. 6. For example, facing a prosecution problem, international actors have sought (creative) solutions (e.g. EU-Seychelles Agreement). Until today, many states in the Gulf of Guinea do not implement or apply international frameworks and agreements (i.e. UN Conventions, such as on Law of the Sea, for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts, and against Illicit Drug Trafficking); Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, pp. 222 and 297.

tion, different capacities, fears of domination, as well as competition for donor funds.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, hopes for the Yaoundé Process have been high.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Spatial Imaginations, Spatial Formats, and Processes of Re-spatialization

The overview of the common understanding and portrayal of the transregional conflict in the Gulf of Guinea shows that space plays an important role in several ways. Based on several spatial imaginations, different actors frame what appear to be problems as well as how best to respond to them.<sup>34</sup> In this way, “space” influences social action. In turn, and often simultaneously, these responses also contribute to the (re-)construction – formatting and ordering – of one or several spaces.<sup>35</sup>

To illustrate this point, the fundamental problem at the basis of the transregional conflict in the Gulf of Guinea, according to academics, practitioners and politicians, is a lack of control and “good governance” of the maritime domain. Similar to debates about African states “on land”, their “statehood” or “stateness”,<sup>36</sup> many authors identify a serious lack or limitation of state capacity and capability as a key concern, warning of “ungoverned spaces” at sea.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the spatial format “nation-state” also extends to the sea, and is organized around a set of (legal) notions, ranging from “territorial waters”, which extend twelve nautical miles from the coastline to a “contiguous zone” of an additional twelve nautical miles to the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), covering 200 nautical miles off the coastline.<sup>38</sup> Much of the discussion about maritime security, in the Gulf of Guinea and elsewhere, revolves around the widely shared assumption that nation-states – and their

32 Ibid., p. 318; ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*; Vreÿ, *Good Order at Sea off West Africa*, p. 200.

33 UN Security Council, Record of the 6723rd meeting, S/PV.6723 (2012), <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.6723> (accessed 15 April 2019).

34 U. Engel, *Regionalism*, Berlin 2018, pp. 3–5; The term “imaginations” does not make any judgements as to whether something is “real” or not. Instead it points to the ideational dimension of space-making, that is how actors see/perceive, frame, and/or communicate “space”.

35 The notion of space as political and continuously constructed through the social interaction and interrelation of different actors (i.e. space as relational), involving different practices and knowledge-power constellations is drawn from critical/post-structuralist geography (see, for instance, J. Allen, *Topologies of power: Beyond territory and networks*, London 2016; D.B. Massey, *For space*, London 2005; G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Minneapolis MN 1996. For a comprehensive overview, see J. Murdoch, *Post-structuralist Geography: A Guide to Relational Space*, London 2006.

36 C. Clapham, *Degrees of Statehood*, in: *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998) 2, pp. 143–157; R.H. Jackson and C.G. Rosberg, *Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood*, in: *World Politics* 35 (1982) 1, pp. 1–24.

37 Vreÿ, *Bad order at sea*, p. 22; For example, until the end of the 1990s many maritime borders of states in the Gulf of Guinea had not been demarcated, leading to border disputes, especially when oil reserves were discovered in the early 2000s, cf. ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, pp. 4–5.

38 Cf. UNCLOS, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, Montego Bay 1982, Part II, sections 2 and 4, [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch\\_XXI\\_06p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/11/19941116%2005-26%20AM/Ch_XXI_06p.pdf) (accessed 15 April 2019).

extension at sea – should be the primary spatial unit to tackle maritime insecurity<sup>39</sup> and to produce “good order at sea”<sup>40</sup> – the maritime pendant of “good governance”.

Furthermore, the imperative need to control and govern the maritime domain, according to many authors, arises from the intimate link between land and sea space. Positively, this relates to the various resources that the sea hosts or provides, which if properly exploited, governed and secured could contribute significantly to the economies and “development” of African states. This realization is most visibly reflected in the emergence of “blue economy” debates and conferences as well as the development of (more or less) comprehensive “integrated maritime strategies”, which go far beyond “security” issues.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, negatively, this speaks to the (potential) threats to security “on land” coming from the sea (e.g. drugs and arms) or, *vice versa*, insecurity “flowing between land and sea”, with the potential to “spill over” into neighbouring territories.<sup>42</sup> In this line of argument, sea space becomes an element that may also connect different land spaces, for good (e.g. key trade routes) or for bad (e.g. smuggling or trafficking networks).

If we accept these aspects as the underlying spatial imaginations that trigger responses by different state and regional actors, we can subsequently observe how these have related to different projects and efforts or processes of re-spatialization. In other words: if we understand the Yaoundé Process as an initiative (or several initiatives) aiming to tackle issues that defy established spatial boundaries and formats (both at sea and on land), we can also see how during this process different actors (e.g. individual, state, and regional) try to re-organize, re-order and thus contribute to the (re-)construction of space(s) in and around the Gulf of Guinea. Here, the term “transregional” alerts us to remain sensitive to space as something that is continuously “in the making”, often going beyond what seem to be “established” spaces.

For example, what constitutes the “Gulf of Guinea” has been subject to multiple definitions (e.g. geographical, economic, and political), relating to different projects and agendas (e.g. GGC and ECCAS-ECOWAS collaboration).<sup>43</sup> The outcome of such processes of re-spatialization, for example, may be the adaptation of existing “regionalisms” as well as the emergence of “inter-regionalism” or “new” regionalisms.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, according to the understanding most commonly adopted, the Gulf of Guinea region comprises almost half of Africa, including both coastal and land-locked states.<sup>45</sup>

39 UN Security Council, Resolution 2018 (2011): Adopted by the Security Council at its 6645th meeting, on 31 October 2011, S/RES/2018 (2011), <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2018> (accessed 15 April 2019); UN Security Council, Resolution 2039: Adopted by the Security Council at its 6727th meeting, on 29 February 2012, S/RES/2039 (2012), <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2039> (accessed 15 April 2019).

40 Vreĳ and Mandrup, Introduction.

41 U. Engel, The African Union, the African Peace and Security Architecture, and Maritime Security, in: *African Security* 7 (2014) 3, pp. 207–227.

42 Vreĳ, *Bad order at sea*, p. 20; Vreĳ, *Good Order at Sea off West Africa*, p. 184. Some have described this such descriptions as subsequent processes of politicization and securitization (e.g. Piedade, *From Politicization to Securitization of Maritime Security*).

43 Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 19; ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, p. 2, fn 7.

44 Here understood in the double meaning of more of the “old” or with new characteristics / qualities.

45 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 29 October 2018. See also Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 1.



## 5. The Antecedents of the Yaoundé Process

The Yaoundé Process has its origins in the emergence since the mid-2000s of increased activities commonly termed “piracy” in the extended maritime space known as the Gulf of Guinea. Around that time, observers in both academia and politics started to become aware of a situation similar to the one that had emerged previously along the East Africa coast, especially at the Horn of Africa. ECCAS was the first regional organization to react. Later, facilitated by support from US Africa Command (AFRICOM), ECOWAS joined in an effort to come up with a joint approach. The remainder of this section briefly outlines the origins and initial efforts of ECCAS and ECOWAS regarding maritime security.

### Economic Community of Central African States

Within ECCAS, cooperation regarding maritime security became an issue during the mid-2000s after all of the coastal countries had discovered oil in their respective maritime domains.<sup>46</sup> Among other things, Central African heads of states were concerned about their access to offshore oil facilities, illicit trafficking of arms and drugs, illegal fishing, and migration. However, it was only after piracy had started to spread eastwards from Nigeria (around 2007/08), in particular after attacks on banks in coastal areas of Cameroon, as well as the seaborne attack on the presidential palace in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea) that these countries gave more serious concern to the issue.<sup>47</sup>

Reacting to these developments, in February 2008, the Central African Peace and Security Council (French: COPAX) at its second ministerial meeting, in Libreville, tasked the ECCAS Secretariat with preparing a draft for a “strategy to secure the vital maritime interests of ECCAS member states in the Gulf of Guinea”, based on COPAX decisions and remarkably already showing an interest in developing synergies with ECOWAS and the GGC.<sup>48</sup> In May 2008, the ECCAS Defense and Security Commission at its 8<sup>th</sup> session, in Yaoundé, approved the terms of reference before approving the strategy in December 2008 at its 9<sup>th</sup> session, in Kinshasa. Subsequently, COPAX validated the document in February 2009 and adopted a draft protocol relating to the strategy at its 3<sup>rd</sup> ministerial session, in Brazzaville.<sup>49</sup> In October 2009, the ECCAS heads of state and government at their 14<sup>th</sup> ordinary summit, in Kinshasa, adopted the strategy and signed the related

46 For more information on ECCAS in general, see <http://ceeac-eccas.org/index.php/fr/> (accessed 13 November 2018).

47 ICG, Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (I): Central Africa, Africa report 181 (2011), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/implementing-peace-and-security-architecture-i-central-africa> (accessed 15 April 2019); ICG, The Gulf of Guinea; J. V. Ntuda Ebodé (ed.), *Terrorisme et piraterie: De nouveaux enjeux sécuritaires en Afrique Centrale*, Yaoundé 2010.

48 ECCAS, *Protocole relatif à la Stratégie de Sécurisation des Inérêts Vitaux en Mer des Etats de la CEEAC du Golfe de Guinée*, Kinshasa, 24 October 2009, p. 10.

49 C. S. Atonfack Guemo, *La mutualisation des moyens de lutte contre les actes de piraterie dans la sous région CEEAC*, in: J.V. Ntuda Ebodé (ed.), *Terrorisme et piraterie: De nouveaux enjeux sécuritaires en Afrique Centrale*, Yaoundé 2010, pp. 123–149, at 140.

protocol, creating a Regional Center for Maritime Security in Central Africa (French: CRESMAC) at Pointe Noire (Congo), working under the ECCAS Secretariat.<sup>50</sup>

The protocol divides ECCAS into three “zones”, each with a Multinational Coordination Center in the lead state, linking national maritime operational centres.<sup>51</sup> Zone A was supposed to comprise Angola (lead) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Zone B with Angola, Congo (lead), and Gabon; and Zone D with Cameroon (lead), Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>52</sup> An earlier draft, apparently, had foreseen four zones, explaining why Zone C was missing in the protocol. Originally, Gabon was supposed to lead Zone C.<sup>53</sup> However, it appears that struggles over maritime boundaries between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon led to the latter joining Zones C and D. Similarly, seeking to maintain control over its Cabinda enclave, Angola joined Zones A and B.<sup>54</sup> During the process, then, first Zone C and more recently Zone B have merged into Zones A and D, apparently to save costs.<sup>55</sup> These dynamics are indicative of the processes and efforts of spatialization within ECCAS, showing how different heads of state have sought to establish or maintain control over specific spaces.

Already before the final adoption of the Protocol, Zone D took up its collaboration, as it found itself as most affected by maritime insecurity. Thus, following a recommendation by COPAX, ministers of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe met in Yaoundé in May 2009, and signed a technical cooperation agreement on the maritime surveillance of Zone D, followed by a first “symbolic” joint patrol (from Douala). In the same month, they inaugurated the multinational coordination centre in Douala (Cameroon). In August 2009, the staff of the chiefs of defense of Zone D signed a joint surveillance plan (SECMAR1) in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), and in September 2009, joint patrols started from Malabo (although with very few boats). Deemed a success, a follow-up plan (SECMAR2) was adopted in January 2011, this time aspiring (but not yet succeeding) to also include air surveillance.<sup>56</sup>

Simultaneously, first attempts to approach ECOWAS and the GGC emerged. To this end, the US (AFRICOM, etc.), which had heavily supported the maritime security process within ECCAS, was again instrumental (e.g. inviting Nigeria to its “Obangame Express” exercise; for more detail see below).<sup>57</sup> The main target of these efforts was to

50 ECCAS, *Protocole relatif à la Stratégie de Sécurisation*, Art. 4–5; The Protocol also refers to and establishes several additional maritime “mechanisms”, less known and unclear regarding their state of implementation (e.g. maritime sessions at the levels of COPAX and DSC), *ibid.*, Art. 3, 10.

51 *Ibid.*, Art. 5, 7.

52 *Ibid.*, Art. 7.

53 *Ibid.*, Art. 5.

54 Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, pp. 316–317.

55 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 29 October 2018; see also <http://cresmacpointenoire.org/?lang=en> (accessed 11 December 2018).

56 Atonfack Guemo, *La mutualisation des moyens*, p. 142; Ntuda Ebodé, *La nouvelle posture géopolitique du Cameroun*, pp. 83–85.

57 The whole evolution of maritime security efforts and initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea cannot be understood without the involvement of international actors, such as France and the US, who have actively sought to influence processes of (re-)spatialization in the region(s) (e.g. through big naval exercises, Obangame Express and Nemo).

engage Nigeria, because of its crucial role regarding both the problem of maritime insecurity and its solution. However, at the same time, many Central African states, and Cameroon in particular, regarded Nigeria with a lot of suspicion.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the challenge was trying to find the right spatial and organizational framework to involve, but also check Nigeria (see below).

### Economic Community of West African States

Around the same time that ECCAS started implementing its maritime security strategy, operationalizing Zone D and the regional centre (CRESMAC), staff at the ECOWAS Commission (Department for Political Affairs Peace and Security, DPAPS) also took up the issue to start to discuss an ECOWAS policy of its own, and to draft respective documents.<sup>59</sup> With support from France, they travelled to ECCAS' Zone D in late 2009, to see what they were doing and to learn from it.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, they sought to generate attention and awareness among ECOWAS member states, increase the respective capacity at the DPAPS, and get donor support. A first draft for an ECOWAS maritime strategy was already discussed internally in 2009.<sup>61</sup> However, it was only with the spread of piracy activity from Nigeria into neighbouring West African waters that the process within ECOWAS gained more momentum.<sup>62</sup>

Around 2011, increased efforts by the Nigerian navy to tackle piracy in its territorial waters appear to have pushed the problem westwards, first into the waters of Benin and later towards Togo and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, reacting to a significant drop in revenue of the Benin Port Authority and a threat to the economic livelihood of its population, President Boni Yayi of Benin called on his Nigerian counterpart, Goodluck Jonathan at the time, for help. Both presidents agreed to cooperate and launched Operation Prosperity in September 2011, starting joint patrols in the waters of Benin.<sup>64</sup> Later,

However, due to the limited scope, this article primarily focuses on the agency of African actors, and their efforts to re-spatialize.

58 ICG, Implementing Peace and Security Architecture, at 14–15; ICG, The Gulf of Guinea, p. 21.

59 For more general information on ECOWAS, see <http://ecowas.int> (accessed 13 November 2018).

60 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2017.

61 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja 29 October 2018. This draft was subsequently further developed with the help of a consultant from the Institute of Security Studies (based in Pretoria). West African heads of state ultimately adopted the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy in 2014.

62 ECOWAS, West African Defence Chiefs intensify efforts on maritime security, Press Release 188/2011, 5 October 2011, <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=188&lang=en&annee=2011> (accessed 16 April 2019); ECOWAS, ECOWAS urged to arrest rising spate of piracy, terrorism in the region, Press Release 228/2011, 16 November 2011, <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=228&lang=en&annee=2011> (accessed 16 April 2019); ECOWAS, ECOWAS summit for integrated response against piracy, Press Release 230/2011, 18 November 2011, <http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=230&lang=en&annee=2011> (accessed 16 April 2019); ECOWAS, Final Communiqué: 40th ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, ECW/HOSG/ABJ/40, 16–17 February 2012, at 4, <http://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/40th-ECOWAS-Summit-Abuja-16-17-Feb-20121.pdf> (accessed 16 April 2019).

63 Ali, Maritime Security Cooperation, p. 185; ICG, The Gulf of Guinea, p. 15.

64 Hasan and Hassan, Current Arrangements to Combat Piracy, p. 203; Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Benin's maritime security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa Report 12 (2015), pp. 1–10, at 4–5.

in February 2012, Nigeria, Benin, and Togo signed an agreement to tackle the issue together; in September 2012, Ghana signed a similar cooperation agreement with Benin.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, Nigeria developed an interest to join the mechanism for maritime security of ECCAS, in particular Zone D. However, it was rejected on formal grounds, namely that as an individual state it could not join what was conceived of as a regional mechanism. Apparently, feeling threatened by Nigerian dominance, Central African states, Cameroon in particular, suggested as a solution that Nigeria should bring in ECOWAS.<sup>66</sup> Thus, mobilizing “ECOWAS/West Africa” has allowed Nigeria to re-scale – and thereby re-spatialize – its action.

### Early ECOWAS-ECCAS Cooperation

Triggered by mutual interests, an AFRICOM consultant invited staff from the commissions and secretariats of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the African Union to Stuttgart in early 2011 for a brainstorming session on possibilities for future collaboration. During this meeting, the representatives of the three organizations agreed that effective cooperation would require formal agreements on three levels. The first would be political, meaning a document that would signal the commitment of member states and provide a general “political umbrella” for the process. The second would be of a technical nature, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) organizing the relationship between the two regional organizations. The third document, a multilateral agreement, would provide the legal basis for joint operations. This idea was further pursued during a follow-up seminar in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in July 2011, which, again facilitated by AFRICOM, brought together representatives of ECCAS and ECOWAS. The result of this seminar were three draft documents reflecting three inter-related dimensions (that is to say, political, technical, and operational).<sup>67</sup>

After these initial meetings, ECOWAS Commission staff continued working on these drafts, supported by technical and legal experts from the US (e.g. from the US State Department, coast guard, and navy). Progress was continuously discussed in a series of meetings between ECCAS and ECOWAS, supported by the US between August 2011 and March 2013 (e.g. in Accra, Dakar, Washington, D.C., and Lomé). During these meetings, the experts involved in the drafting process worked towards reaching a consensus on the technical level before bringing it to the political level.<sup>68</sup>

However, despite all preparation efforts, it was at the political level that fundamental differences threatened the progress already achieved. At the inter-ministerial meeting in Cotonou (March 2013),<sup>69</sup> disagreement emerged especially between Nigeria and Camer-

65 Hasan and Hassan, *Current Arrangements to Combat Piracy*, p. 208.

66 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2017.

67 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja 29 October 2018.

68 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja 29 October 2018.

69 See [http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=24739:eccas-and-eco-](http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24739:eccas-and-eco-)

oun. The strong role of ECOWAS staff in drafting the three key documents had already raised suspicion about West African hegemonic ambitions.<sup>70</sup> In particular the prospect of Nigerian navy ships being allowed to sail into Cameroonian waters (as foreseen in the multilateral agreement) caused strong resistance from the representatives of Cameroon, further exacerbating already existing tensions over the Bakassi Peninsula<sup>71</sup> as well as the Nigerian role in the internal divisions between the anglophone and francophone parts of Cameroon.<sup>72</sup> In the end, it was only the persistent interventions by the technical staff that saved the third element (the operational document), which would otherwise have been discarded entirely, by transforming it into a “code of conduct”. Similar to the Djibouti Code of Conduct, this document, while not being legally binding on signatories, nevertheless could provide operational guidance.<sup>73</sup>

## 6. The Emergence and Evolution of the Yaoundé Process to Date

In parallel but independent of the process described so far, feeling increased pressure from attacks in its waters, the president of Benin, Boni Yayi, also called on the UN Secretariat and the Security Council for an intervention. This subsequently led to two resolutions by the UNSC, which, in turn, would ultimately lead to the Summit of Heads of State and Government of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission in Yaoundé, on 25 June 2013 – setting off the Yaoundé Process. This section retraces the main dynamics related to that process and outlines the institutional structure that has emerged (or is yet to emerge) from it.

### Benin, the UN Secretariat, and the UNSC

As mentioned above, the increase and spatial shifts of pirate, or other illegal, activity in the Gulf of Guinea, especially around 2011/12, triggered several actors to reconsider their approach towards maritime (in)security – to this end, also looking beyond their own state borders. It was against this backdrop that Boni Yayi also turned to the UN in July 2011, requesting assistance from the UN Secretary-General (SG), Ban Ki-moon. Based on that request, the Under-SG for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe briefed, on 23 August 2011 (during the monthly horizon scanning), the UN Security Council on the issue of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>74</sup> As a result, the UNSC issued a press statement,

was-take-steps-to-improve-maritime-security&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111 (accessed 5 December 2018).

70 Interview with UNODC staff, Dakar, 25 April 2017.

71 ICG, Cameroon: Fragile State? Africa Report 160 (2010), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-fragile-state> (accessed 16 April 2019); ICG, The Gulf of Guinea, pp. 13–14.

72 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2017.

73 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 29 October 2018.

74 UN Security Council, Report of the UN assessment mission on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (7 to 24 November 2011), S/2012/45 (2012), pp. 1–20, at 2, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/AUUN%20S%202012%2045.pdf> (accessed 16 April 2019).

on 30 August 2011, expressing its concern “over the increase in piracy, maritime armed robbery and reports of hostage-taking in the Gulf of Guinea and its damaging impact on security, trade and economic activities in the subregion”.<sup>75</sup>

This was followed by an open UNSC debate on “Peace and Security in Africa: Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea”, convened by Nigeria on 19 October 2011 (then the UNSC president). During the debate, the SG appealed to ECOWAS, ECCAS, and interestingly also to the GGC and the Maritime Organization for West and Central Africa (MOWCA) to “work together to develop a comprehensive and integrated regional anti-piracy strategy”.<sup>76</sup> Their cooperation would build on the existing MoU between MOWCA and the International Maritime Organization on the creation of a “subregional”-integrated coastguard network in West and Central Africa.<sup>77</sup> These calls were subsequently underlined in Resolution 2018, adopted by the UNSC on 31 October 2011.<sup>78</sup> The resolution not only repeated the concerns about the impact of piracy and armed robbery at sea on “international navigation, security and the economic development of states in the region”.<sup>79</sup> It also called upon states of ECOWAS, ECCAS and the GGC (mentioning these three regional organizations specifically but not MOWCA) to consult, coordinate, and develop a “comprehensive” response strategy “in the region” / “at the regional level” (apparently referring to the “Gulf of Guinea”) and with international support.<sup>80</sup>

In the resolution, the UNSC also welcomed the SG’s intention (already expressed in August) to dispatch a UN assessment mission, which thereafter deployed from 7 to 24 November 2011 and submitted a 19-pages report to the UNSC president on 18 January 2012. Half of this report dealt with the situation in Benin: the other half dealt with piracy in the Gulf of Guinea more broadly, outlining counter-measures taken by the IMO and MOWCA, ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC respectively. Overall, the report identified five major shortcomings (or requirements, put more positively), namely the lack of collective surveillance, sustainable funding for equipment and activities, systematic information gathering and exchange, adequate legal frameworks, and maritime awareness.<sup>81</sup> Based on this assessment it recommended to overcome these obstacles, suggesting, among other things, to quickly follow through on the proposed inter-regional

75 UN Security Council, Press Statement on Piracy, Maritime Armed Robbery in Gulf of Guinea, SC/10372-AFR/2236 (2011), <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10372.doc.htm> (accessed 16 April 2019).

76 UN Security Council, Report of the UN assessment mission, p. 2.

77 Ibid., p. 2; MOWCA and the IMO have tried since 2003 to increase cooperation / integration among regional coast guards (cf. Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, pp. 303–305). However, implementation has stalled due to a lack of commitment by members states, and because cooperation has emerged on the level of transport ministries. Apparently, these have been less influential with regard to maritime security than their military counter parts.

78 Apparently, Nigeria has pushed the issue within the UNSC, supported by the US. Moreover, France, the UK, China, and Gabon have also shown a “robust interest”, UN Security Council 2011, p. 14.

79 UN Security Council, Resolution 2018, p. 1.

80 Ibid., p. 2.

81 UN Security Council, Report of the UN assessment mission, pp. 16–17.

summit, to set up a joint coordinating centre for ECOWAS (following the ECCAS example), to coordinate with the AU, and to support existing IMO / MOWCA initiative.<sup>82</sup> The assessment report crucially fed into Resolution 2039, adopted by the UNSC on 29 February 2012.<sup>83</sup> In this resolution, the UNSC once more put its weight behind the call for a collaborative approach among states of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC, working towards a comprehensive regional anti-piracy strategy, in cooperation with the African Union (MOWCA is no longer mentioned at this point).<sup>84</sup> This call was later reiterated in November 2012, in a more general statement by the UNSC president.<sup>85</sup>

### Completing the ECCAS / ECOWAS Initiative: Enter the GGC

The core group of individuals from ECCAS and ECOWAS that had been involved in the drafting of the key documents outlining the cooperation between the two organizations suddenly faced the UN taking on some leadership of the cooperation process in the Gulf of Guinea. This brought in more actors that so far had not been involved, thereby creating confusion and competition. ECOWAS and ECCAS insisted on the continuation of their ongoing efforts, in particular on maintaining the three key documents already developed, and eventually succeeded to prevail, and on having the UN pursue their approach.<sup>86</sup>

In the meantime, as hinted at above, disagreement had emerged at the political level, affecting the relations between ECOWAS and ECCAS and threatening the process. Leading up to the Yaoundé Summit, ECCAS staff started another round of drafting, adjusting the documents, without consulting their counterparts at ECOWAS. This led to intense last-minute negotiations and changes, just before the summit.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, in June 2013, the heads of state and government of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC adopted the Yaoundé Declaration, the heads of the three regional organizations signed the MoU, and the maritime or foreign affairs ministers of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and GGC member states signed the Code of Conduct.<sup>88</sup>

82 Ibid., pp. 17–19.

83 UN Security Council, Resolution 2039, p. 2.

84 Ibid., p. 3.

85 UN Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2012/24 (2012), [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_prst\\_2012\\_24.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2012_24.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2019).

86 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja 29 October 2018.

87 Ibid.

88 At the summit, 25 states were represented including thirteen heads of state; Cf. ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC, Declaration of the Heads of State and Government; ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC, Memorandum of Understanding among the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa, 25 June 2013, [http://cicyaounde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Yaounde%20C3%A9-MoU\\_EN.pdf](http://cicyaounde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Yaounde%20C3%A9-MoU_EN.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2019); ECCAS, ECOWAS, and GGC, Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa, 25 June 2013, <http://cicyaounde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CodeofConduct-EN.pdf> (accessed 16 April 2019).



What is interesting at this point, are the roles played by the two existing regional organizations that already (try to) bridge the gap between Central and West Africa. Whereas the inclusion of MOWCA<sup>89</sup> seems intuitive, considering its pioneering maritime security work, the addition of the GGC<sup>90</sup> does not appear as straight forward, since it only comprises member states already included in ECCAS and ECOWAS,<sup>91</sup> and so far it has not been able to implement any of its declared objectives. Since the beginning, disputes between Nigeria and Cameroon (as well as Equatorial Guinea)<sup>92</sup> have hampered the creation and functioning of the GGC.<sup>93</sup> In addition, fear of domination held by smaller member states towards Nigeria and Angola has also negatively affected intra-regional collaboration.<sup>94</sup> Remarkably, against this backdrop, the GGC eventually joined the Yaoundé Process, whereas MOWCA refused to. While it appears that joining has been a matter of survival for the GGC, for MOWCA it might have meant a loss of relevance, as it was not clear how the new initiative would relate to its existing efforts.<sup>95</sup>

### Implementing the (Inter-)regional Structure

In the wake of the emerging Yaoundé Process, ECOWAS has begun to set up a structure for West Africa, mirroring the one of ECCAS described above. In this line, ECOWAS decided to create three “zones”, called E, F, and G (continuing the counting of the ECCAS zones). Each of these zones shall eventually have one multilateral maritime coordination centre (MMCC). The coordination of these three MMCCs, in turn, con-

89 For more information on MOWCA, see <http://www.amssa.net/framework/MOWCA.aspx> (accessed 5 December 2018).

90 For more information on the GGC, see <https://cggrps.com/en/> (accessed 13 November 2018).

91 Pushed for by Gabon's president, then Omar Bongo, the GGC was founded in 2001 by Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria, and Sao Tome and Principe, Equatorial Guinea joining soon after (cf. WikiLeaks, Gulf of Guinea Commission SecGen Ready to Assume Responsibilities (07Libreville49\_a), 29 January 2007, Par. 2, 4, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07LIBREVILLE49\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07LIBREVILLE49_a.html)). However, the founding treaty entered into force only in 2006 (after ratification, and deposit by two-thirds of the parties). Subsequently, Cameroon and the DRC joined the organization in 2008. More recently, several West African states have showed an interest or already joined the GGC (e.g. Ghana applied in 2013 and was accepted in 2015). To date, scientific analysis of the actual purpose and functioning of the GGC is still wanting.

92 Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 335.

93 WikiLeaks, Gulf of Guinea Commission.

94 Atonfack Guemo, *La mutualisation des moyens*, p. 139; ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, at 21. We need to understand the GGC as an ambiguous effort to bridge the gap between Central and West Africa: potential gains vs. threats. Ultimately, the GGC has remained paralysed by mutual suspicions and seeming disinterest even by its founding states, despite more recent efforts to revive the organization (cf. A. Ebo'o, *Can the Gulf of Guinea Commission step up to maritime threats?* Enact Observers, 22 March 2018, <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/can-the-gulf-of-guinea-commission-step-up-to-maritime-threats> (accessed 12 November 2018); C. Udeh and O.H. Obaze, *Imperatives of Nigeria's Leadership in the Gulf of Guinea By Chiagozie Udeh And Oseloka H. Obaze*, Sahara Reporters, 16 May 2018, <http://saharareporters.com/2018/05/16/imperatives-nigeria%E2%80%99s-leadership-gulf-guinea-chiagozie-udeh-and-oseloka-h-obaze> (accessed 11 December 2018). The overlap with SADC membership (i.e. Angola and the DRC), so far, has been completely ignored (for very limited info see E.A. Penha, *Angola's Geopolitical Dilemma: Between the African „Heartland“ and the South Atlantic*, in: *Tensões Mundiais* 12 (2016) 22, pp. 177–202). In maritime security literature on SADC, Angola is hardly mentioned; South Africa dominates, see M. Blaine and J. Sinovich, *Ensuring the SADC Maritime Interest through Good Order at Sea*, in: F. Vreij and T. Mandrup (eds.), *Towards Good Order at Sea: African Experiences*, Stellenbosch 2015, pp. 207–287.

95 Cf. interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2017.



stitutes the objective of a Regional Center for Maritime Security in West Africa (French: CRESMAO).<sup>96</sup> Upon full operationalization, CRESMAO will become the counterpart of CRESMAC, both of which are supposed to operate under the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé.

Several considerations have been important in the delimitation of the ECOWAS zones. For Zone E, the existing interaction and cooperation between Benin and Nigeria has become the core, which was then complemented by Togo and Niger (as landlocked country). The MMCC for Zone E has taken up operations in Cotonou. Concerns about competition between Nigeria and Ghana led the technical staff to include Ghana in Zone F as the lead state and Accra as the seat of the zone's MMCC.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it was grouped together with the states of the Mano River Union (Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire), three of which were post-conflict states and Côte d'Ivoire being under a UN arms embargo. Burkina-Faso joined the group as the only landlocked country. Consequently, Zone G comprises Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau (the "Senegambia" area), Cabo Verde, and Mali (landlocked). Praia in Cabo Verde will become the seat of the MMCC of Zone G.<sup>98</sup>

This delimitation of the ECOWAS zone presents us with an interesting case of space-making and ordering within the ECOWAS region, as it is at the same time based on existing spatial imaginations and regional bodies, as well as on very practical considerations regarding state capacities. Moreover, the decision to include landlocked countries reflects new thinking (e.g. not yet reflected in ECCAS) that sees security "at sea" and "on land" as intimately connected, and threats as transnational (i.e. not stopping at borders).<sup>99</sup>

Currently, the maritime zones and centres in West and Central Africa are at very different stages of implementation and operationalization. As mentioned above, within ECCAS, the pilot zone (Zone D) is the only one that is currently operational. The status of Zone A is still unclear.<sup>100</sup> At the regional level, CRESMAC has taken up its operations in October 2014.<sup>101</sup> Within ECOWAS, Zone E has been chosen as the pilot zone, and at the time of writing, it was the only one fully operational, meaning that it has been fully equipped and staffed. Zones F and G both have signed headquarter agreements with the host countries (Ghana and Cabo Verde) and are in the process of staff pledging. Ghana has provided interim staff for the MMCC in Accra. Full operationalization of Zones F and G is expected for 2019. The same goes for CRESMAO, which is currently set up in

96 ECOWAS, ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS), Draft, para. 84–87, <http://www.edup.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ECOWAS-INTEGRATED-MARITIME-STRATEGY-.docx> (accessed 16 April 2019)/ or ECOWAS, *Strategie Maritime Integree (SMI) De La CEDEAO*, Yamoussoukro, 29 March 2014, para. 84–87, [http://cicyaounde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ECOWASstrategy\\_FR.pdf](http://cicyaounde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ECOWASstrategy_FR.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2019).

97 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 23 February 2017.

98 Ibid. See also ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy, Par. 84.

99 Interview with ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 26 October 2018; interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 26 September 2018.

100 The MMCC of Zone A will be hosted by Angola, but it appears that there is still no hosting agreement and no specific location assigned (cf. <http://cresmacpointnoire.org/?lang=en>, accessed 11 December 2018).

101 ULR: <http://cresmacpointnoire.org/?lang=en> (accessed: 11 December 2018).

Abidjan.<sup>102</sup> The ICC in Yaoundé itself, as mentioned in the introduction, became fully operational in February 2017, after tumultuous years and varying implementation efforts since its initial inauguration in September 2014.<sup>103</sup>

In this way, despite delays in implementation, regional and inter-regional interaction, coordination and cooperation has increased, thereby contributing to the construction of regional and inter-regional space(s), both at sea and on land. More recently, this has been visible in coordination and cooperation efforts by ECOWAS and ECCAS moving beyond (and to some extent away from) maritime security.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, commission staff continues working towards increasing awareness of maritime security issues and related regional policies, trying to create more expertise and capacity within the involved organizations. Moreover, efforts are underway aiming to make the Yaoundé Code of Conduct binding on member states.<sup>105</sup>

However, despite these achievements, challenges continue to hamper implementation, putting the high hopes for the Yaoundé Process into question. Especially the ICC has suffered from a lack of buy in by ECOWAS and ECCAS member states. Until recently, this has resulted in a lack of support and resources. Moreover, a corruption scandal involving the head of Cameroon's Navy (diverting some FCFA 300 million) has challenged the viability of the ICC, which has put off donors.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the UNSC (and others, e.g. the IMO), led by African members with the support from the Security Council's Permant 5 member states, has continued to push for full implementation.<sup>107</sup>

102 Interview with ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 26 October 2018.

103 Despite its official inauguration in September 2014 (staffed ad interim), it has been only with the assumption of office of the first round of statutory appointees and the adoption of a four-year work programme (2017–2020) that the decision taken at the Yaoundé Summit in June 2013 came to full fruition, URL: <http://cicyaounde.org/> (accessed: 14 December 2018).

104 ECOWAS, and ECCAS, Final Communiqué: Joint Summit of ECOWAS and ECCAS Heads of State and Government on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, 30 July 2018, <http://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final-communique%C3%A9-ECOWAS-ECCAS-Joint-Summit-in-Lome.doc> (accessed 16 April 2019).

105 Interview with ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 26 October 2018.

106 E.g. CamerounWeb, 310 millions détournés au ministère de la Défense, 10 December 2015, <https://www.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/NewsArchive/310-millions-détournés-au-ministère-de-la-Défense-347956> (accessed: 14 December 2018).

107 UN Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2016/4; What's in Blue, Open Debate and Presidential Statement on Gulf of Guinea Piracy, 22 April 2016, <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2016/04/open-debate-and-presidential-statement-on-gulf-of-guinea-piracy.php> (accessed 11 December 2018); What's in Blue, Maritime Crime as a Threat to International Peace and Security: Arria-formula Meeting, 12 June 2018, <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2018/06/maritime-crime-as-a-threat-to-international-peace-and-security-arria-formula-meeting.php> (accessed 11 December 2018). However, maritime security has not been and continues not to be strong within the UN Secretariat, showing little political dynamic and hardly any technical expertise or responsibility. In contrast, the regional offices in West Africa (UNOWAS) and Central Africa (UNOCA) have been more involved (Personal communication with UN Secretariat staff, 28 November and 4 December 2018).

## Beyond Yaoundé and beyond Africa

If we understand the Yaoundé Process as a joint effort to coordinate and bring together different actors and initiatives across regional boundaries, the question arises why to stop at an extended definition of the Gulf of Guinea (covering the entire coastline from Senegal down to Angola)? How does the cooperation and integration process of Yaoundé relate to other initiatives around the African continent and beyond? Therefore, this section very briefly embeds the West and Central African initiative in larger continental and international/global efforts aiming at maritime security and ordering sea space.

## The African Union as a Critical Link?

At the continental level within the African Union, maritime security became an issue around 2008/09 as well, triggered by increased numbers of piracy incidents around the continent. Then, the AU Commission (AUC) took up the issue, convincing member states of the need for a common strategic approach. Based on a commissioned paper (undertaken by the Brenthurst Foundation collaborating with the African Center for Strategic Studies), the AU Assembly subsequently tasked the AUC in August 2009 to develop a comprehensive strategic document. This would eventually become the AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) 2050, adopted in January 2014 along with a Strategic Plan of Action.<sup>108</sup> The AIMS 2050, however, embeds maritime security within a more general concern about managing the maritime domain, effectively prioritizing economic over security issues.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, only one year after its adoption, Togo began to push for the drafting and eventually the adoption of what came to be the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (that is to say, the Lomé Charter). However, similar to AIMS 2050, the charter only includes "security" (in the more conventional sense) as one issue among many.<sup>110</sup> What is more ongoing negotiations among member states seem to indicate a prioritizing of economic issues, with maritime security cooperation, once more, falling by the wayside.<sup>111</sup>

108 Engel, *The African Union*; J. Potgieter and T. Walker, *The 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS): Content and Progress*, in: F. Vrey and T. Mandrup, *Towards Good Order at Sea: African Experiences*, Stellenbosch 2015, pp. 97–113, at 102. For more details on the origins and drafting process of the AIMS 2050 as well as the role of consultants therein, see Engel, *The African Union*; Potgieter and Walker, *The 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy*, p. 103.

109 Engel, *The African Union*. This is also reflected in the AUC's main point person for maritime (security) affairs moving from the PSD to the Office of the Deputy Chairperson. Later, the AIMS portfolio was attached to the Office of the Chairperson, where it now resides with the Legal Counsel (and the STC on Legal Affairs) (cf. interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 19 September 2018).

110 African Union, *African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa*, 15 October 2016, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/33128-treaty-0060\\_-\\_lome\\_charter\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/33128-treaty-0060_-_lome_charter_e.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2019).

111 Most clearly, this is visible in the drafting of the so-called Annexes of the Lomé Charter, which are supposed to provide the legal framework to the otherwise "technical" charter (cf. interview with UNODC staff, Dakar, 25 April 2017; interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 19 September 2018). Initially, AU PSD staff was tasked to draft an Annex on maritime security but is no longer required to do so, apparently because member states do not want to touch the issue. Overall, the entire process appears to be stuck, due to a lack of maritime expertise at the AU's Legal Counsel, and because of political difficulties surrounding the Annexes in general (cf. interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 19 September 2018; interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa 24 September 2018).

While the RECs have been involved in the drafting process of AIMS 2050 and the Lomé Charter, most of them have not been very active. Although ECOWAS, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and especially the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been among those more involved, overall, coordination between the AU and the RECs has been limited. Thus, the challenge remains to integrate the many different, parallel initiatives and processes taking shape around the continent. In principle, the AU has demonstrated its aspiration to guide and lead on the issue.<sup>112</sup> However, despite the proclaimed strategic importance of maritime security, and many claims to the contrary,<sup>113</sup> the AUC and AU member states still only pay limited attention to maritime issues, as land-based conflicts continue to eclipse them.<sup>114</sup> In the meantime, despite the absence of clear political guidance on maritime security, (individual) staff at the AU Commission has continued efforts to assume at least some leadership and assist RECs. Thus, they have tried to position the AU somehow as an intermediary between different actors and processes, continuously travelling the continent and talking about the need for coordination. At the AU Commission, they are in the process of setting up an information centre on maritime security within the Peace and Security Department (PSD), which is supposed to provide information about ongoing efforts around the continent, working towards interoperability and to monitor the security situation in African waters.<sup>115</sup> Although the RECs will continue to pursue their own agendas, the AUC receives reports and tries to coordinate activities. While such a view is shared for example by staff at the ECOWAS Commission, it is also apparent that the ambition of the AU is yet to be realized. In the Yaoundé Process, the AU has tried to position itself at its centre.<sup>116</sup> However, to date this has been mainly rhetorical, with little or no actual contribution. In fact, some have criticized recent AU efforts (that is to say, the Lomé Charter) as competing with the Yaoundé Process.<sup>117</sup>

### The Yaoundé Process as Part of Larger Maritime Security Agendas and Spaces

Although this article has focused on the agency of African actors (both states and regional organizations) and their efforts to re-spatialize their action around transregional conflict in the Gulf of Guinea, neither the build-up to the Yaoundé Summit nor the (limited) implementation of the Yaoundé Process thereafter would have been possible without support from the “outside”. Most importantly, the US and France, as well as other European countries (e.g. Germany, Spain and Portugal), China, and Brazil, together with

112 African Union, Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, 24–25 June 2013, <https://au.int/en/newsevents/20130624> (accessed 11 December 2018); see also Potgieter and Walker, *The 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy*, pp. 105–106.

113 Vreij, *Good Order at Sea Off West Africa*, pp. 183–184.

114 Interview with ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 26 October 2018; Interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 26 September 2018.

115 Interview with AU staff, Addis Ababa, 26 September 2018. The centre is supposed to collaborate with the AU Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), using some of its tools.

116 African Union, Summit of Heads of State and Government.

117 Interview with senior ECOWAS staff, Abuja, 29 October 2018.

regional and international organizations (e.g. the EU, the IMO, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]) have played critical roles, providing technical guidance and material support.<sup>118</sup>

This involvement powerfully drives home the key importance of “external” actors in processes of (re-)spatialization, that is to say the (re-)construction and (re-)ordering of space(s) in and beyond the Gulf of Guinea. In that regard, their role and spatializing effects have been twofold. First, their interventions and support provided, on the one hand, has aimed to strengthen established spatial formats, that is to say nation-states (bordering the Gulf of Guinea) and regions (in particular those organized through EC-CAS, ECOWAS, the GGC, and MOWCA). On the other hand, they have contributed to constructing the inter-regional platform, and potential new region linked to the Yaoundé Process.

Second, in the attempt to support maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, more or less directly attached to the Yaoundé Process, regional and international actors have also created new, innovative forms of coordination and cooperation. For Somalia, Bueger and Edmunds have described the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CG-PCS) as “a process-driven, informal organization that work[s] on principles of inclusivity rather than representation”, instead of rule enforcement focusing “on problem solving and policy learning”.<sup>119</sup> The outcome of these processes may be new communities (“communities of practice” as Bueger has conceptualized them elsewhere),<sup>120</sup> bringing together a vast array of actors, some of which may even be antagonistic.<sup>121</sup>

For the Gulf of Guinea, such a flexible, process-driven approach has manifested in the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G7++ FOGG). This grouping, extends cooperation beyond West and Central African states, as well as ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC while including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US (the G7) as well as Australia, Belgium, South Korea, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland (++) . The main objectives of the G7++FOGG are to share information, coordinate efforts, and increase consistency in their “political messaging”.<sup>122</sup> Facilitated by regular meetings of the group as well as an online coordination and communication platform, this group has started to contribute to the emergence of a community of practice with the potential of creating a (new) transregional space centreing on the Gulf of Guinea but reaching far beyond West and Central Africa.

118 Ali, *Maritime Security Cooperation*, p. 359; ICG, *The Gulf of Guinea*, pp. 21–23; Jacobsen and Nordby, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, p. 40; Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, p. 25; Vreij, *Good Order at Sea Off West Africa*, p. 198.

119 Bueger and Edmunds, *Beyond seablindness*, p. 1304.

120 Bueger, *Communities of Security Practice at Work*.

121 Ibid.

122 M. Massoni, *The G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea Rome Declaration*, in: *Osservatorio Strategico* (2017) 4, pp. 25–33, [https://www.difesa.it/SMD/CASD/IM/CeMiSS/Documenti/Vis/OS\\_Pubb\\_File\\_Singoli\\_per\\_Area/Sahel\\_e\\_Africa\\_SubSahariana/2017/05\\_Massoni\\_OS\\_04\\_2017\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.difesa.it/SMD/CASD/IM/CeMiSS/Documenti/Vis/OS_Pubb_File_Singoli_per_Area/Sahel_e_Africa_SubSahariana/2017/05_Massoni_OS_04_2017_ENG.pdf) (accessed 16 April 2019); Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *African approaches to maritime security*, pp. 27–28.

## 7. Conclusion

Taking a closer look at the developments leading up to and emerging from the Yaoundé Summit in June 2013, the article has described the Yaoundé Process as a process of re-spatialization around transregional conflict in the Gulf of Guinea. It has argued that member states and secretariat staff of ECCAS and ECOWAS as well as “outside” actors, such as the US, France, and the EU, have sought to (re-)construct – format and order – regional space(s) at sea. Responding to piracy and maritime insecurity more largely, spreading from Nigerian waters not only across state but also across regional boundaries, they have both tried to stabilize existing spatial formats such as the nation-state and the region, while enhancing inter-regional coordination and cooperation. It is the latter that this article has focused on in particular, showing how ECCAS and ECOWAS (and to a much lesser extent the GGC) have interacted and, at the same time, have worked towards organizing their own respective regional spaces “at sea”, thereby constructing a new inter-regional space and ordering relations among them. Through the involvement of “outside” actors, the Yaoundé Process has also related to larger efforts to regionalize and order sea space.

With a strong emphasis on flexibility and inclusivity, allowinging confidence to be established among otherwise unlikely partners, the character of process of the developments described in this article reflects more general developments around the African continent (and beyond?). Similar dynamics can be observed, for example, around the Nouakchott Process and the Djibouti Process. Studying these and similar phenomena will further contribute to a better understanding of the diverse and complex (multi-actor and multi-dimensional) processes of (re-)spatialization around (transregional) conflict in and beyond Africa.