Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
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German Africa Foundation

Summary

DAS Talk – One on One with Timo Roujean, Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Moderation

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In Conversation

Timo Roujean
Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Background

Copper, cobalt, lithium and other strategic raw materials are central to the global energy and industrial transformation. For the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia, the question is therefore not only one of efficient export routes, but also of how these raw materials can contribute to economic development, industrialisation and regional integration. The Lobito Corridor, which links the Copperbelt region to the Angolan Atlantic port of Lobito via the Benguela Railway, plays a special role. It is at once an infrastructure project, a development promise, and part of the international competition for strategic supply chains.

In "DAS Talk", Sabine Odhiambo spoke with Timo Roujean, head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) office in the DRC, about the political, economic and geopolitical dimensions of the corridor. One of the starting points for the discussion was the KAS-supported study *Corridor de Lobito: La reconfiguration géopolitique des flux de transport des minerais de la RDC et de la Zambie* by Jean-Pierre Mpiana Tshitenge, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kinshasa.

Highlights

- The path from a transport corridor to a development corridor depends on local value creation, employment, industrial structures and regional integration.
- Angola, the DRC and Zambia associate different interests with the corridor; the DRC in particular needs to align it with its own national infrastructure plans.
- On the international stage, the Lobito Corridor is part of a growing competition for critical raw materials and strategic supply chains, involving, among others, the EU, the US and China.
- It is not funding alone, but political coordination, clear priorities and viable operating models that are crucial to success.
- Germany and the EU can contribute by taking an integrated approach to infrastructure funding, regulation, training and local value creation.

Conversation

Strategic significance and interests of the states involved

During the discussion, it became clear that the Lobito Corridor touches on different priorities for Angola, the DRC and Zambia. According to Timo Roujean, the corridor enables Angola to strengthen its role as a transit and logistics hub. For Zambia, it opens up an additional export option alongside existing routes such as the TAZARA link to Dar es Salaam. The DRC, for its part, needs to align the Lobito Corridor with its own national infrastructure plans, for example with regard to a possible Sakania-Banana Corridor to the Congolese Atlantic coast. In Roujean's view, the corridor is therefore not merely a technical or logistical issue. It also touches on questions of national sovereignty, economic development and international influence. Its development impact depends, in particular, on whether it does more than simply facilitate the faster export of unprocessed raw materials.

The Lobito Corridor is part of a wider international competition for strategic supply chains, Roujean explained. While the US and the EU support the corridor, China is heavily involved in alternative transport links, particularly the rehabilitation of the TAZARA railway line between Zambia and Tanzania. The example of the lithium deposit near Manono also highlighted that, in addition to existing corridors, further transport options – such as routes towards Kalemie and Lake Tanganyika – could become relevant in future for raw materials from the east and south-east of the DRC.

From an export corridor to a development corridor

For Roujean, a key issue was how the Lobito Corridor can evolve beyond the transport of unprocessed raw materials into a development corridor. He emphasised that industrial structures, local processing and employment need to be created along the corridor. This requires investment in energy and water infrastructure, the establishment of industrial facilities, training, and more efficient customs and administrative procedures. In this way, jobs, technological skills and regional value creation can be generated.

Political challenges and options for European action

With regard to the implementation of the Lobito Corridor, it became clear that funding alone is not the main problem. Rather, the decisive factor is whether existing commitments can be effectively implemented and whether political, institutional and operational issues can be resolved. The challenges identified included coordination between the states involved, unclear priorities within the Congolese government, and unresolved issues regarding the operating model for the Congolese section of the route. Germany and the EU could contribute by taking an integrated approach to infrastructure funding, standards, training and local value creation. Roujean highlighted areas in which German providers could contribute, such as mechanical engineering, water management, infrastructure, energy and training. At the same time, compliance requirements, banking risks and regulatory hurdles in Europe could complicate involvement.

Roujean identified clarifying the Congolese position and the implementation model as the most important political priority for the next two to three years. In his view, the focus should be on aligning investments more closely with regional integration, local value creation and economic sovereignty.