

# Advocacy for the Economic Diplomacy of Big Congo in a World Engaged in Economic Warfare

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**How to cite this paper:** Assina Keza, D., Bokombe Kola, J., & Kambale Tsongo, E. (2025). Advocacy for the Economic Diplomacy of Big Congo in a World Engaged in Economic Warfare. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 15, 386-393.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2025.152021>

**Received:** August 28, 2024

**Accepted:** April 4, 2025

**Published:** April 7, 2025

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## Abstract

Thus, improving states' economic conditions becomes a priority, no matter the cost. Economic diplomacy is, therefore, the instrument for implementing the foreign economic policy of states. At its best, economic diplomacy is how states secure and defend their interests outside their territories. States are increasingly shifting from the arms race to the quest for economic stability, which explains the complexity and dynamism of the international system. It is high time for the Greater Congo to highlight and publicize the assets and opportunities it can offer the world. Economic diplomacy, therefore, needs to play its true role, that of seducing the business world to turn its attention to and take an interest in the Greater Congo.

## Keywords

Economic Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, National Interests, Economic Stability, Economic Opportunities, Foreign Investment, The Big Congo

## 1. Introduction

It must be recognized that the execution of foreign policy through its best means, diplomacy, has undergone a major transformation in recent decades, with its objectives increasingly focusing on the economy, trade, investments, private sector interests, and economic influence.

The idea is to shed light on why Big Congo should invest more in economic diplomacy and how to go about it in a world undergoing significant geopolitical changes.

Taking into account the transformations brought about by globalization, economic diplomacy is increasingly moving away from the principles of traditional

sovereign diplomacy. These transformations undermine the “unity of time and place” of classical diplomacy, operating both from the top, with the inclusion of economic and trade negotiations in a multilateral framework, and from the bottom, with the emergence of non-governmental diplomacy, known as track II or track III diplomacy, according to Anglo-Saxon terminology. The latter is characterized by the involvement of various interest groups (large companies, business lobbies, NGOs, diasporas, and local authorities) in the field of international negotiation. The recognition of NGOs’ status at the UN and in most multilateral agencies in the 2000s indicates this evolution.

The ability to project externally, what Joseph Nye calls soft power, is much more dependent on financial power and the attractiveness of an economy than on vain political gestures. In this regard, the iron laws of the economy always prevail over ideological constructions. This is demonstrated by the failure of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) project, advocated by the countries of the South in the 1970s, and the success, on the contrary, of variable geometry coalitions among several emerging countries in the 2000s.

First of all, let’s point out that the notion of economic diplomacy is less known because it is almost not taught, thus leaving room for teachings on the notion of traditional diplomacy, except in Anglo-Saxon circles where the two notions are clearly separated.

The economic diplomacy of emerging powers, therefore, relies, in part, on means that are significantly similar to those used by the major economies of the Triad.

The effectiveness of this diplomacy lies in the ability of public actors to coordinate their actions with the decisions of private actors, who escape, in whole or in part, the logic of state control and influence. This is undoubtedly truer today than it has ever been due to the powerful dynamics of integration and homogenization at work on a global scale. But the Ricardian theory of comparative advantage, which constitutes the justification for international trade and ultimately that of globalization, also finds its counterpart in the diplomatic field.

Indeed, we observe a certain form of “specialization” in this field, according to *modi operandi* that allows the maximization of national competitive advantage while reflecting the politico-administrative culture of the country, whether large or small, emerging or emerged, and its effective capacity to integrate the “key success factors” that underpin optimal insertion into the global production chain (Kateb, 2011).

## 2. What Is Economic Diplomacy?

As a preamble, it should be noted that the notion of diplomacy is inseparable from that of the State. Diplomacy is a broad term, but it is essentially concerned with international relations. In the Larousse Encyclopedia, we find several variations of the term.

Diplomacy refers, firstly, to the action and manner of representing one’s country

to a foreign nation and in international negotiations; secondly, it refers to the foreign policy of a country or government; thirdly, diplomacy is the branch of political science concerned with international relations. It, therefore, refers to at least three distinct realities: it is at once a particular activity, a sector of state intervention, and a sub-specialization of political science. But the word can also be used to designate, within the civil service, the career devoted to representing a country or all the people... (Balzacq, Charillon, & Ramel, 2018)

Economic diplomacy is a way for a state to strengthen its influence and power by using economic means such as international trade negotiations (GATT/WTO type), supporting the international expansion of national companies, and attracting foreign investment. It focuses on international decision-making methods and cross-border economic activities, including trade, investment, international markets, migration, aid, economic security, and the institutions that shape international environments (Bergeijk, 2008). Today, all these fields fall at least partly within the multilateral sphere, which has also expanded to include other subjects, as we shall see.

### **What's the Difference between Traditional and Economic Diplomacy?**

Traditional and economic diplomacy are distinct forms of international relations, often conflicting in their applicability in the field of practice with actors and interests to defend. However, both forms of diplomacy converge while remaining divergent interests to defend.

#### **Traditional Diplomacy**

It is the science and practice of political relations between states and consists primarily of representing a country's interests abroad. It is a practice reserved for international players, with the state taking precedence over other actors (French National Center for Textual and Lexical Resources).

#### **Economic Diplomacy**

On the other hand, focuses on economic interests. Berridge and James (2001) propose two definitions: one concerns economic policies, such as delegations to conferences and reports on economic policies in other countries, and the other focuses on the use of economic resources for specific foreign policy objectives.

The distinction between traditional diplomacy and economic diplomacy is sometimes complex, but the origins of diplomacy go back to the Middle Ages, with the merger of the foreign and trade departments in several countries, as mentioned by Lee, Hocking, and Denmark (2010).

A characteristic that is just as valid today: as proof, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Trade have been merged in several countries, such as Australia, Canada, and Belgium, testifying to the convergence of the missions of these two entities and the blurring of the boundaries between traditional diplomacy and economic diplomacy.

#### **The Current State of Big Congo's Economic Diplomacy**

The history reveals that Congolese economic diplomacy was based on two axes

Labanna (2013):

The survival of the regime means keeping it in power for as long as possible; the 32 years in power of President Joseph Desire MOBUTU and 18 years of President Joseph KABILA are eloquent testimony to this. There is every reason to believe that Mzee Laurent Desire KABILA would take another 15 to 20 years if he were not assassinated.

Technical and financial assistance from the Breton Wood institutions, the European Union, and the United States of America.

From its independence in 1960 until 2011, Congolese diplomacy was very passive, devoid of risk-taking, audacity, and courageous initiatives aimed at improving the country's economic situation. It was diplomacy without a clear economic vision commensurate with the size of the country. Diplomacy was present but truly absent on the international stage. Little changed during this period. There was no significant impact on the life of the nation. The only tangible and verifiable result of this period of economic diplomacy by the Big Congo is the accumulation of public debt.

Passive economic diplomacy evokes a context in which the DRC has not implemented any large-scale initiatives likely to shape the international environment in its favor, nor has it promoted Congolese companies in the international arena. Throughout this period, the DRC's passive economic diplomacy put it in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis its Western partners. A monopolistic relationship had developed between the DRC and its Western backers (Mutombo & Ngolo, 2021).

It must be acknowledged that it was only after 2011 that the economic diplomacy of the Big Congo gradually began to enter the international economic scene, an entry that has become increasingly entrenched with the current President, Félix Tshisekedi. His many trips, which were poorly perceived by the Congolese, seem to prove him right in that Congolese diplomacy, once seen as a poor relation, now has a guardian. It is with this in mind that we are writing this article, which calls on the guardian to fulfill his responsibilities to the full, relying above all on this all-important lever to lift the Big Congo out of its current precarious state of comfort.

### **The Necessity to Invest in Economic Diplomacy**

Diplomacy is a multi-faceted concept. In the collective imagination, the term commonly refers to negotiation, compromise, and conflict avoidance. But economic diplomacy is a completely different matter, as it can be both a vehicle for cooperation and a formidable tool for influence or coercion.

This branch of international relations, often neglected by academics, is a powerful tool for outreach and soft power—an influence that does not involve punitive means. However, the trade wars of recent years, as well as the current incandescent events in Ukraine, give the expression of martial coloration. Economic diplomacy is of paramount importance in that the economy tends to become one of the main determinants of any foreign policy. How can this be explained? At the root

of this phenomenon lies the ability of the economy to spread culture and progress, to strengthen ties between peoples, but also to transform itself into a weapon to bring down a competitor or adversary.

Economics is more than just the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. It is permanently interwoven with a multitude of other social sciences and is profoundly impacted by elements that are difficult to observe, measure, or quantify. As a result, it needs to be approached from a much broader angle, going beyond the framework of macro and micro-economic indicators and taking into account factors such as psychology, history, and culture.

It's vital for the DRC to focus on economic diplomacy, as the geopolitical mutation of the era, with the rise in power of China, is forcing an upheaval of systems and major changes in the visions of the foreign policies of States, each seeking a more or less serious positioning in order to have or keep the status of an important State on the international scene. Faced with this complexity, the DRC needs to make a name for itself through its economic diplomacy.

The Big Congo has over 100 types of mineral, but only 29 are known (Bussa, 2022). "Demographically and geopolitically, with its 100 million inhabitants, most of whom are young, the DRC is a major consumer market for itself and for other countries, while at the same time offering a significant resource to be allocated to wealth-creating work. For any potential investor, the DRC is the 3rd largest market in Africa in terms of size and population".

Addressing the Chamber of Commerce in Dubai, Minister Jean LUCIEN BUSSA did exactly what we expect of Congolese economic diplomacy: highlighting all the assets and opportunities for investing in Congo-Kinshasa. "The DRC offers immense opportunities in clearly identified economic sectors, such as mining, hydrocarbons, infrastructure, agriculture, industry, tourism, fisheries and the environment. All of this goes to show that the DRC remains one of the world's most attractive investment destinations in the short, medium, and long term".

#### **Economic Diplomacy and Armed Conflict in Eastern Big Congo**

Armed conflicts in the east of the country remain a major source of concern insofar as they hinder the economic development of the Big Congo region.

If economic diplomacy is of singular importance these days, it's also because, in the absence of conventional warfare, conflicts are being settled more than ever by commercial warfare. Customs duties, embargoes, and financial sanctions are the weapons used. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict at the beginning of 2022 offers a flamboyant example. Determined not to let the invasion of Ukraine go unpunished, but cautious about the idea of using force because of the risk of escalation, the Western bloc placed its riposte on the economic field to combat Russia.

The terrain of confrontation has shifted from the military to the economic, relegating traditional armed conflicts to the background (Jeandat, 2022).

The phenomenon has a long history, as evidenced by Napoleon's famous embargo against England's trading power in 1806. Nevertheless, in a world where armed confrontation can lead to nuclear war, economic warfare appears more

relevant than ever as a means of weakening the adversary without risking complete annihilation in return.

In this paradigm, where the economy is at the heart of the balance of power, economic diplomacy is essential. Beyond the framework of sanctions and trade wars, its role is to help companies conquer world markets, coordinate the strategies of economic players based abroad, and promote the attractiveness of the country to attract foreign investment. All essential missions are in the context of fierce global competition.

#### **How Should Economic Diplomacy Work?**

Given the multiplicity of players and the porous nature of the DRC's borders in its eastern part, the armed conflict in the east of the DRC is problematizing the whole content of economic diplomacy. The Mai-Mai, the Raiya Mutomboki, and the FDLR are just the most prominent players. The question of how they obtain supplies of arms, especially AK45s and small-caliber weapons that claim many victims on agricultural feeder roads and in villages, must be answered. In fact, Rwanda and Uganda are nothing more than puppets of foreign powers taking advantage of the political context in North and South Kivu to illegally exploit natural resources (Muzalia, 2015).

It seems to us, however, that these two countries are strategic players in the resolution of the conflict in this part of the DRC. As the object of intentions to illegally exploit natural resources, economic diplomacy must reach out to the real sponsors of the conflicts in the DRC, in order to cooperate in a spirit of win-win, legal and exemplary exploitation of natural resources, guaranteeing peace in the east of the country and sparing the lives of the innocent population.

Pierre Cappelaere could say that we are facing another Brazil, just as richly endowed with the most diverse resources. It has everything. It has water and, therefore, energy (the Congo River, 4700 kilometers long, is the most powerful in Africa). It has land (forty million hectares of arable land, not counting the immense cattle savannahs). It has forests. It has all the raw materials imaginable: copper, coltan, cassiterite, diamonds, gold... And perhaps most importantly, it has a population that, with rare valour and formidable inventiveness, is coping with living conditions that are often difficult and sometimes appalling as a result of a conflict. He asks himself: how can a country where everything is superlative find itself in the category of the world's poorest?

Our editorial is not an answer to his question but rather a series of reflections, a plea for the economic diplomacy of Big Congo to address this question, which remains relevant today.

Economic diplomacy must be a priority: It is possible for every Congolese with a certain notoriety to take on a diplomatic role and speak to the world about the assets and opportunities that Big Congo can offer. Today, Congolese music is making a comeback on the international scene. It is possible to use it to promote the image of Big Congo and advertise it. This requires proper support for this sector and good communication from the actors (musicians, singers, composers,

lyricists, etc.).

It is important to redefine the vision and orientations of Congolese economic diplomacy with security as the keyword: Big Congo lives in total insecurity: food, social, territorial, health, etc., thus keeping the Congolese people in the darkest and most total misery. Therefore, every diplomatic action or approach must be a response to one of these enumerated insecurity problems.

It is necessary to redefine memberships, axes, and partnerships: History shows the cruel weaknesses of many hypocritical memberships and partnerships without any profit or responsibility. Taking historical lessons into account, it is better to carefully choose memberships and act as a player rather than being everywhere as a mere figurehead.

### **3. Conclusion**

It is high time for economic diplomacy to be seen as a tool of influence and a strategy of war; thus, we advocate for an ambitious and responsible Congolese economic diplomacy that can help resurrect the Congolese state, declared dead a few years ago by its current president.

Big Congo must rise as the natural leader it is supposed to be in Africa and become aware of its size and responsibilities to be feared and respected. Its economic diplomacy must be revived to achieve this.

The DRC has more than 100 types of minerals, but only 29 are known. With its 100 million inhabitants, mostly young, the DRC constitutes a large consumer market for itself and for other countries while having a significant resource to allocate to wealth-creating work.

It is, therefore, the responsibility of economic diplomacy to promote this beautiful young lady (DRC), making her attractive and appealing for the good of her people.

It is necessary to reactivate the organs that drive Congolese diplomacy and to hold other public figures accountable so that everyone contributes to the resurrection of Big Congo.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editorial team of the Open Journal of Political Science for their valuable and constructive comments.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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