

The “Northern Corridor Transport System”: Kenya and Rwanda join hands

By [Global Research](#)

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Kenya and Rwanda have agreed to accelerate the removal of all non-tariff barriers so as to enhance the existing bilateral cooperation and promote trade. The bilateral initiative comes after the East African Community (EAC) failed to agree on deepening regional economic integration.

In a communiqué issued in Kigali today at the end of Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki's three-day state visit to Rwanda, Rwandan President Paul Kagame and his Kenyan counterpart agreed to count on deepening bilateral economic ties.

The two Presidents also directed respective ministries of both countries to work out “speedy implementation” of the agreed enhanced bilateral and technical cooperation by supporting each other through exchange programs, capacity building and skills development.

The two Heads of State underscored the importance of the so-called “Northern Corridor Transport System” to the economic transformation of the region. The corridor connects Rwanda and Burundi with the coast through Uganda and Kenya, instead of the shorter but very poorly developed connexion through Tanzania.

In this regard Kenya invited Rwanda to join a ministerial commission on the construction of a new standard gauge railway, alongside the existing Kenya-Uganda Railway, with the intention of extending it to Kigali and beyond. If realised, this would become Rwanda's first-ever railway connection. For the Rwandan government, this is believed to represent an irresistible temptation.

At the regional level, President Kagame and Kibaki acknowledged the importance of an integrated regional market and expressed their “support for fast-tracking” the East African Community (EAC) integration process by expediting negotiations for the establishment of an East African Common Market.

For the Kenyan President, it was an important task to get the new EAC member Rwanda to go along with his fast-tracking demand. The Kenyan government is at loggerheads with its Tanzanian neighbours after the failure of an EAC ministerial meeting to agree on the terms for the establishment of a common market. Kenya has outrightly blamed Tanzania for the stalemate in negotiations, while Tanzania maintains cautionary steps must be followed, forcing for outstanding issues to be deferred to a March meeting next year.

The Kenyan Minister responsible for EAC, Amason Jeffah Kingi, thus yesterday proposed a new meeting in Uganda next year which will at least look into amend the 1999 Treaty, establishing EAC, that could see decisions made by a mere majority vote within regional

membership. The proposal has been met with a cold shoulder by Tanzanian officials.

But President Kibaki is now rallying for regional support to pressure Tanzanians to give up on their stances. Rwanda, which borders Tanzania but not Kenya, is already drifting towards the Kenyan viewpoint on EAC integration.

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