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Agence Ecofin June 16, 2021

DRC: Parliament refuses to lift the immunity of Augustin Matata Ponyo cited in the agro-industrial scandal of Bukanga-Lonzo

(Agence Ecofin) - On the African continent, many countries have significant agricultural potential. While there is no doubt about the need to add value to untapped arable land, the approaches adopted sometimes give rise to controversy and may end in failure.



In the DRC, the Upper House of Parliament did not give the green light to the lifting of the immunity of Senator and former Prime Minister, Augustin Matata Ponyo (photo) suspected of embezzlement of public funds and criminal conspiracy in within the framework of the Bukanga-Lonzo agro-industrial project.

As part of a public-private partnership between the government and the South African company Africom Commodities, the initiative which aimed to create one of the most important agricultural poles in the country was definitively suspended in 2018 due to of the financial hemorrhage.

Of the 96 senators present at the plenary session of Parliament on June 15, 49 rejected the request against 46 votes in favor and a void ballot.

The request was made by the Attorney General to the Constitutional Court, which was based on a report by the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) published in November 2020.

According to the public body, the former head of government of Joseph Kabila would be the main "intellectual author" of the debacle of the said project launched in 2014 on an area of 80,000 hectares 220 km south-east of the capital Kinshasa.

As part of a public-private partnership between the government and the South African company Africom Commodities, the initiative which aimed to create one of the most important agricultural poles in the country was definitively suspended in 2018 due to of the financial hemorrhage.

Of the \$ 285 million injected into the project by the Treasury, the IGP estimates that \$ 205 million were misappropriated with the responsibility of Mr. Matata Ponyo. This decision constitutes a new twist in this affair which has caused much ink to flow and shows, according to some observers, the limits of the large agro-industrial projects deployed with slogans on food self-sufficiency on the African continent.

RD Congo, LE PARC AGRO-INDUSTRIEL DE BUKANGA LON...



Already last May, the Senate refused to proceed with the planned vote on the request for the lifting of immunity introduced by the Constitutional Court, considering that it was not competent to indict a parliamentarian. As a

reminder, the DRC has 80 million hectares of arable land, which is the second largest potential in the world

behind Brazil, but of which only 10% of this area is exploited.

Hope Olodo

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