Rwanda announced Saturday it is withdrawing from the Economic Community of Central African States, accusing the Democratic Republic of Congo for politicizing the regional bloc with backing from other member states.

The announcement followed the 26th Ordinary Session of ECCAS Heads of State and Government in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. Rwanda was represented at the summit by Prime Minister Édouard Ngirente.

In a statement, Rwanda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said the summit highlighted what it called a continued erosion of ECCAS's founding principles. The ministry said Rwanda was unjustly denied the right to assume the rotating chairmanship of the bloc, as outlined in Article 6 of the ECCAS treaty.

"The summit was used to impose the DRC's diktat," the statement said. "Rwanda sees no justification for remaining in an organization whose current functioning runs counter to its founding principles and intended purpose."

History of Tensions

This is not the first time Rwanda has accused ECCAS of bias. In 2023, Rwanda was excluded from the 22nd summit hosted by the DRC in Kinshasa, which Kigali formally protested to the African Union. Rwandan officials said the AU and ECCAS failed to respond to the protest.

"The silence and inaction that followed confirm the organization's failure to enforce its own rules," the Foreign Ministry said.

Rwanda also accused the DRC of "instrumentalizing" ECCAS for political purposes, with the support of unnamed member states.

Rift With the DRC

The withdrawal comes despite recent diplomatic efforts between Rwanda and the DRC. Presidents Paul Kagame and Félix Tshisekedi held talks in Doha, Qatar, on March 18, and on April 25, both countries signed a Declaration of Principles in Washington as part of a broader peace process.

Still, Rwandan officials say the DRC continues to undermine trust by involving regional organizations in the countries' bilateral dispute. Kigali maintains ECCAS has no mandate over the security crisis in eastern Congo.

About ECCAS

Founded in 1983 and based in Gabon, ECCAS includes 11 member countries: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Rwanda’s exit raises new questions about the unity and role of the regional bloc amid growing political tensions in Central Africa.