

Monday, 4 September 2006 - Strasbourg

Situation in DR Congo (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) I took part in Parliament's Electoral Observation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I visited more than 40 polling stations in various parts of Kinshasa and I had the opportunity to observe the work of one of these polling stations in Dima, just one of the 250 000-plus around the country, until the last vote had been counted. I admired the patient dedication of the Congolese people - men and women, people working in polling stations and voters. They all said to me, with moving seriousness, that the authenticity of the people's choice - the choice of the 25 million-plus registered voters in a logistical operation of epic proportions - would depend on their commitment and vigilance in carrying out their electoral duties and that, in turn, peace, democracy and the country's development would depend on that choice.

This operation, and indeed the entire transitional process in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 2003, could not have come this far were it not for the European Union. The election should therefore be a source of pride not only for the Congolese people, but also for Europe, which provided 80% of the funding for the presidential and legislative elections, with the European Commission contributing EUR 165 million. The EU's involvement in the DRC since the terrible war that devastated the country has been the best example of the implementation on the ground of Europe's security doctrine: humanitarian and development aid, technical support for demobilising and disarming militias, the maintenance of the political process and use of the instruments of European security and defence policy, with any additional resources used coherently to achieve a single goal, namely a democratic, peaceful and prosperous Congo, in control of its resources for the people's benefit.

As regards EUFOR, the European military force which, since the 30 July election, has played a key role in reducing tensions between the forces of the two presidential candidates, Mr Kabila and Mr Bemba, consideration should be given to the idea of extending its tour of duty until the new government takes office towards the end of January, in order to guarantee that the electoral process is carried through to a successful conclusion. It would be a serious mistake to leave the job only half done, because the transitional process remains poised on a knife-edge. The fighting in the capital in August between the presidential guard and Mr Bemba's militias demonstrates that the main political actors are still prepared to resort to armed violence.

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It also shows up the inability to form a unified national army, which has perhaps been the biggest and most dangerous failure in the transition process. According to the International Crisis Group, the task of integrating the armed forces has been only half completed. It is not only Azarias Ruberwa and Jean-Pierre Bemba who retain private armies. President Kabila himself has failed to submit his presidential guard to the brassage process, and it was his forces who set off the armed hostilities that took place in August.

Whatever the result of the election, the international community's priority should be to demobilise the militias and help set up a single Congolese army viewed by the Congolese people as a force for stability and democratic authority. Right now, however, it is not Congolese or European weapons that will guarantee the ultimate success of the electoral process. That will primarily depend on Congolese men and women, such as the independent candidate for Parliament, Eve Bazaiba Masudi, member of the Kafko NGO, which is made up of women fighting courageously for peace, democracy and human rights, in close coordination with MONUC, the United Nations Mission in the DRC. Eve Bazaiba Masudi and other women representing Congolese civil society are seeking to mediate and to hold the warlords to account. These women deserve the EU's support, and I trust that the Commission's delegation and the committee chaired by General Morillon, whose outstanding work thus far I wish to commend, can support these people who are bringing peace and dialogue.