

Wednesday, 22 March 2006 - Brussels

Criteria for EU peace-keeping operations, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo presents us - by which I mean those who in the EU take seriously the 'responsibility to protect' enshrined in the last high-level UN summit in September 2005 - with enormous challenges.

The conflict that has devastated the Democratic Republic of Congo and the whole of the Great Lakes region is the bloodiest since the Second World War. It has already caused 4 million deaths, the overwhelming majority civilians. Real and lasting peace in the country is a vital prerequisite for peace in the Great Lakes and in Central Africa as a whole. In this context, the UN, which has the largest peace-keeping mission in its history in Congo, has called on the EU to help the elections scheduled for 18 June to pass off peacefully. The election observation team will be led by Mr Morillon, and this is a mission supported by all of us in Parliament.

As far as we in the Socialist Group in the European Parliament are concerned, this election is something of a crunch moment for Congo. Either the institutions born in a context of civil war are replaced by democratically elected institutions, or, more likely, Congo will remain at the mercy of bloody militias.

Yet these elections and the challenge laid down by the United Nations also constitute a moment of truth for the European Union. Will European security and defence policy prove credible? Can we count on the Member States to implement the European security strategy?

I should like to highlight three points from the joint resolution that we tabled. This intervention should be viewed as one part of a temporary solution to the problem of the country's internal stability, which will only be resolved when the Congolese army becomes a stabilising factor. It became clear during recent Congolese operations in the Katanga region that the population still has reason to doubt the ability of the authorities to protect them from the militias. The international community must channel its efforts into strengthening the integrated military units already in place and speed up the creation of others. Unless rapid improvements are made in the security sector, the EU and the UN may unfortunately be called on to intervene in Congo many more times in the future.

Secondly, the political legitimacy of this mission must be a decisive factor in its success. Accordingly, it must be a genuinely European mission, and as such we welcome the news of the solid participation of various Member States led by Germany and including my country, Portugal. It must also be fully backed by the United Nations Security Council. All internal and external actors must be made aware that the current Congolese Government welcomes this mission. As part of the concept of this mission, the EU must be genuinely prepared to support the election process, despite the inherent risks.

The primary objective of the presence of European forces is to make a visible and credible contribution to the stability of the Congolese election process. This is what the people of Congo and Africa expect of us.