

Thursday, 15 June 2006 - Strasbourg

East Timor

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE), author . - (PT) I was recently in Dili at the start of the recent period of violence among the Timorese. Tragic confrontations took place between elements of the police and the military. I also witnessed the poignant, dramatic moment of institutional unity, when the President, Prime Minister and the President of Parliament were forced to ask for help from foreign forces to restore order and political stability to the country.

I should like to point out that the Timorese people gave an enthusiastic welcome to the National Republican Guard, a branch of the Portuguese, and as such European, police. The Timorese authorities also demonstrated unity and convergence when two days ago they submitted to the United Nations Security Council requests to strengthen and extend the remit of the United Nations Office in East Timor (UNOTIL) from being a police mission under UN supervision to being a peace-keeping mission under the mandate and leadership of the UN, should the need arise. This European Parliament motion for a resolution supports these requests and demonstrates the concern of Parliament and the EU about the situation. It also demonstrates confidence that, with help from friends, East Timor will be able to overcome this serious crisis.

As European Socialists, we remain convinced that the people of East Timor will overcome this crisis associated with the difficulties of a growing democracy, just as it has overcome previous, more serious crises that have threatened their very existence. We also know that a great deal depends on us as Europeans and on the international community as a whole. The international community has a particular responsibility to guarantee that the State of East Timor and its people, who have fought against oppression for the independence and sovereignty of their country, have the future they deserve.

As Kofi Annan said this week, what is happening in East Timor is especially painful because the country is, and I quote, 'a child of the international community'. The fragile foundations of the young Timorese democracy have been exposed in this crisis. Mr Annan went on to say: 'both the Timorese and the international community as a whole have important lessons to learn from these events'. Some permanent Members of the Security Council need to examine their consciences. It is impossible to build nations with sound democratic institutions hurriedly in a just a few years. To declare 'mission accomplished' in order to save money will prove costly, and it is the people who will carry the can.

The situation can be rectified and nobody should question the viability of the independent, sovereign State of East Timor, which also enjoys independence and sovereignty over the country's significant natural resources. Ian Martin, head of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), who helped with the split in 1999 and who was recently the UN Secretary-General's envoy in Dili, explained the day before yesterday that the crux of the matter was not whether East Timor was a failed State; for him, the bottom line was that this is a country that had been in existence for four years, that was learning to deal with the weight of responsibility arising from independence and to address the challenges inherent in a democratic system.

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This is where we in the EU can make all the difference. In this connection, the recommendations in this motion for a resolution to the Commission and the Council are intended to strengthen European assistance for consolidating the democratic institutions, in such a way that human rights and reconciliation are promoted in East Timor. Accordingly, Parliament welcomes the unanimous decision taken by the Timorese authorities to seek an international commission of inquiry to look into recent incidents that have led to a high number of casualties and to thousands of Timorese fleeing their homes.

Parliament will remain vigilant, and is planning to send an ad hoc mission next October. We hope that the efforts of Nobel Peace Prize winners President Xanana Gusmão and government minister Ramos Horta will succeed in overcoming the political crisis, in such a way that the mission can focus on European aid for development in East Timor.