

Why do we need another European operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

article by JAVIER SOLANA

High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

In today's Africa, the major conflicts are steadily dying down; democracy is spreading; civil society is asserting itself; women are becoming ever more involved in politics; and human rights are increasingly respected. A new generation of leaders, committed to good governance in economics and politics, are taking over the reins on a continent where renewed pan-African institutions are coming to the fore.

Of course, none of this should be taken for granted. Africa's economic development needs more support. The fight against pandemics needs more assistance. Moreover, the situation in the Horn of Africa – I am thinking in particular of Somalia – still has to be stabilised. And the tragedy of Darfur must be brought to an end. To this end, the European Union hosted a conference with the African Union, the United Nations and the United States in Brussels on 18 July.

More than ever, Europe is determined to help the countries of Africa face these challenges effectively. Of these, stabilising the Democratic Republic of the Congo is particularly important. As long as the DRC is not firmly set on the path to peace, stability and development, all the progress and all the hopes that have been raised will be under threat.

This is because the DRC lies at the heart of the African continent. Its size, location, and potential wealth all give it a key position. Unfortunately, it has been plundered for too long. Today, we should ensure that the wealth of the DRC benefits all its people. The country could set the pace for the continent. The DRC is also the heart of an exceptional civilisation and its artistic creativity is universally recognised.

For all these reasons, Europe has a major interest in a successful transition of the DRC's to peace and development.

Europe is closely tied to Africa, through bonds of history and geography. And it is playing its part. It responded immediately when a military force was needed in Bunia in the east of the country in August 2003, to stop the peace process from unravelling.

Europe is now devoting considerable sums of money to the transition process. The European Commission alone is financing EUR 700 million worth of projects. On top come the significant contributions of the 25 Member States.

Europe is also encouraging the DRC along the road to good governance. It has funded almost 80 % of the cost of the elections to be held on 30 July this year.

And Europe is making a contribution in the area of peace and security. It is supporting the capabilities of the new, integrated Congolese police force. It is also helping with the reorganisation of the Congolese army, in particular ensuring that the soldiers are paid. These are major, long-term investments.

In the same spirit, the United Nations asked the European Union at the beginning of the year to support the United Nations force (MONUC), which is already on the ground, throughout the election period.

A force of almost 3.000 men, able to support the UN force and to take a stand if need be, is now available. It will be present in Kinshasa, in the region and on standby in Europe.

EN

This operation, launched on 12 June, has a clear European character: it will be led by Germany, and is made up of elements from twenty European Union countries, as well as Turkey. Of course it is not intended that this force should interfere in the DRC's internal affairs. Its aim is simply to provide an additional safeguard, so that the long-awaited elections can take place peacefully.

These are historic elections. Europe, with the United Nations, will be there, alongside the Congolese people. It is for them and their representatives to show responsibility and a desire for reconciliation, so that we can succeed together.
