

ESDP operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2007)

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[Abbot Apollinaire Malu Malu] ‘Having obtained the absolute majority of the votes, the new President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is Mr Joseph Kabange Kabila.’

[Commentator] This is a historic moment. Joseph Kabila is the first Congolese President democratically elected by universal suffrage after 10 war-torn years that caused the deaths of a million people. It’s a real victory for the people of Congo. Its central position, its size, as big as the European Union, and its natural resources make the Congo a pivotal country. Once it has been stabilised, it has the potential to become one of the driving forces of the African continent, a blueprint for peace throughout Central Africa. Europe, whose own history is intimately linked to Africa, has a vested interest in seeing the Democratic Republic of Congo finally returned to peace.

September 11th in Kinshasa. With just 50 days to go to the second round of voting, diplomatic activity is intense. Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Foreign Policy, calls for voting to take place in a climate of peace. The meeting brings together the main protagonists: Abbé Apollinaire Malu Malu, President of the Independent Electoral Commission; Jean-Pierre Bemba, Vice-President and candidate for the presidency; and Joseph Kabila, President and also a candidate for election.

[Javier Solana (EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy)] ‘With the information I have now, as I followed this process from the start of the transition, I have been supporting you. I am certain that the transition era will smoothly lead into a state of democracy.’

[Commentator] Kinshasa, Ndolo Airport — operations headquarters of the European forces. The United Nations has requested that its peacekeeping force — UN Mission in DR Congo — be reinforced by the European Union throughout the four months of the electoral process. The Mission, code-named ‘EUFOR RD Congo’ has deployed 1 200 troops to Kinshasa with 1 200 more on standby in Gabon. Around 20 EU countries are taking part, along with Turkey and Switzerland.

[Javier Solana] ‘You are in a country that needs the help of the European Union. And in the very first days, in which the need was requested, you did it and you did it well. Congratulations!’

[Commentator] This operation is part of the European security and defence policy, which has been operational since 2003 and enables the EU to conduct both civilian and military missions to protect and strengthen peace.

The role of EUFOR is to support UN Mission in DR Congo, should it find itself facing serious difficulty, as happened during events that shook Kinshasa when the results of the first round were announced. On a daily basis, EUFOR helps to protect civilians in the zones where it is deployed. European troops regularly carry out vehicle and foot patrols, whose aim is to make their presence felt and reassure the people.

EUFOR Commander, Major General Christian Damay.

[Major General Christian Damay (EUFOR Commander)] ‘Every day, we work alongside the UN Mission in DR Congo. We also work with the bodies put in place by the EU, in particular EUPOL, the police unit whose job is to support the Congolese national police force. We work very closely together, exchanging information and data.’

[Commentator] For the past few weeks, strange, unmanned aircraft have been flying over the town 24 hours a day. These are B-Hunter drones collecting images on behalf of EUFOR. In real time, this information is relayed to headquarters and then on to the EUPOL control centre.

Head of EUPOL Mission, Commissioner Adílio Custódio

[Commissioner Adílio Custódio (Head of EUPOL Mission)] ‘What mandate, what mission has the EU given

to EUPOL Kinshasa? First of all, to assist, support, monitor and follow the integrated police unit in all its security tasks. Both in the transition and during the election period itself.'

[Commentator] The UPI is a unit in the Congolese National Police Force with a complement of 1 000 men. Its role is both to provide an escort for all those involved in the transition process and to protect institutions. It's an entirely neutral force. EUPOL is also responsible for coordinating security operations during the election period, and it is in this capacity that it found itself in the front line during events at the end of August.

On August 20th, tensions were rising in the capital. The Independent Electoral Commission was due to announce the results of the first round of voting.

[Commissioner Adílio Custódio] 'We needed to create security conditions, not only so that the President of the Electoral Commission could appear on the TV channel covering the broadcast, but also to guarantee the security within the Commission and to make sure no trouble follows the announcement.'

[Commentator] On the 21st, shots from heavy weapons were fired at the residence of the Congolese Vice-President, Jean-Pierre Bemba, where members of the International Committee in support of the transition were meeting with UN Special Representative, Mr Swing. At this point, UN Mission in DR Congo requested the support of EUFOR.

[EUFOR General] 'We deployed the Immediate Response Force, a company belonging to the Spanish Foreign Legion. We worked to make the route into Mr Bemba's residence secure. This will allow us to pull the ambassadors out safely and get them into more secure conditions.'

[Journalist] 'Are they pulling them out now?'

[EUFOR General] 'The shots you hear now are most likely sporadic firing. Perhaps people who still haven't understood that it had to stop.'

[Commentator] On the 22nd, clashes continued in Kinshasa. EUFOR strengthened its contingent in the capital. Part of the forces stationed in Gabon had already arrived; others were on their way. By the 23rd, the situation had stabilised.

[Javier Solana] EUFOR's presence was absolutely vital. This was recognised by the President and two Vice-Presidents of the Republic, by the personal representative of the Secretary General, Mr Swing, by MONUC, by everyone. Everybody is glad to have us here.]

[Commentator] Running parallel to the deployment of the EUFOR and EUPOL missions, the EU has another mission, code-named EUSEC RD Congo.

Colonel Marc van Dalem, Deputy Commander of the EUSEC Mission.

[Colonel Marc van Dalem (Deputy Commander of the EUSEC Mission)] 'We have two pillars. One is offering expertise on restructuring the army. The second pillar of the EUSEC mission is to restore order to the general administration within the defence department and be responsible for paying and monitoring the soldiers' wages.'

[Congolese man] 'There is the police force you have trained. Maybe we will trust them. But the real problem is the lack of payment. The police are not well paid. To have security, there have to be wages first. People will do a good job if they are well paid.'

[Colonel Marc van Dalem] 'The goal of restructuring the Congolese army is to bring peace to the country, stabilise it, and turn this new army into a real instrument of defence serving the Congolese people. This is essential. It would be foolish to commit to strategies for economic revival or even vast social programmes

without first ensuring that the country is secure and stable.’

[Commentator] Over and above the electoral changes, the real winners of these elections are the Congolese people, who have shown courage and determination in choosing democracy over violence. It’s essential that their voices be heard now.

Aware of the challenges that lie ahead, the EU will maintain its commitment to ensure peace and prosperity for the people of Congo.