

Brussels,
A(11)394167

25. 05. 2011

Ms Ana Gomes MEP
Mr Alexander Graf Lambsdorff MEP
Mr Elmar Brok MEP
Ms Heidi Hautala MEP

European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of 4 April concerning the next elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the possibility of deploying an EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM).

I take note of the serious concerns you raise and the four main arguments you put forward against the deployment of an EU EOM. I am grateful that you have shared your views on this important electoral process. As I mentioned when we met last January at the Election Coordination Group meeting, I pay particular attention to the European Parliament's views and close cooperation on election observation.

The DRC remains a fragile democracy, and the upcoming elections are crucial to continuing the development of robust democratic foundations for the country. I share your concerns about the constitutional change related to the Presidential elections in the DRC, but I believe we must await the outcome of the debate in parliament on the electoral law in order to fully assess the legal basis for those elections. Without prejudging the conclusions of the Exploratory Mission which is soon to be deployed to the DRC, I would like to stress the positive impact that an EU EOM could have on enhancing confidence in the electoral process, including by deterring fraud or violence. This would be consistent with the substantial EU efforts so far to support the stabilization and the democratic process of the DRC and the Great Lakes region. This position echoes that of local stakeholders such as representatives of civil society and some members of the opposition, who have all indicated that the presence of an EU EOM would enhance credibility in this electoral process.

It is true that the DRC has only implemented a few of the recommendations of the previous EU EOM deployed in 2006. It is worth recognising nevertheless that while the humanitarian situation remains difficult, some progress has been achieved regarding the political and security situation. It is important that the security situation be regularly and carefully assessed, including its potential impact on the preparation of elections.

I share some of your concerns about the operational constraints and the potential high cost of an EU EOM to a country as vast and populous as the DRC. We also do need to take into account the need to react to the evolving political context in North Africa. However, I believe that, jointly with the European Parliament, we should be able to find solutions to adapt to those changes and the unforeseen requests for support. This should not have to mean that we pull out of important countries where we already have a strong commitment, and where our reputation and capacities enable us to contribute significantly to the good conduct of elections.

I can assure you that I will take the decision whether to deploy an EOM to the DRC with great care, on the basis of facts and all relevant arguments. I do share your wish to maintain the full credibility of EU election observation and believe that the mandate of this instrument is to have a positive impact on the electoral process itself and the broader political, security and humanitarian situation of a given country and its neighbourhood. Flawed elections in the DRC would have a destabilizing effect across the Great Lakes region, where we also face challenges in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. We all want to prevent this, and so EU political engagement in the coming months is necessary and crucial.



Catherine Ashton