

# Human Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo The European Union as a Force for Good?

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## Introduction

Human security, defined most simply as individuals' freedom from want and from fear, is a precarious commodity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country still trying to shake off decades of dictatorship and civil war. An estimated 1 200 people are dying daily from illness and malnutrition, aggravated by civil war. The 2005 Human Development Index ranks Congo 167th out of 177 countries, taking into account life expectancy, literacy and education, and GDP per capita. Around 1.6 million Congolese live uprooted from their homes and 71% of the population are undernourished.<sup>1</sup>

In 2006, the European Union invested substantially in Congo's first democratic elections in four decades, as a crucial step towards cementing sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region. That support culminated in the first EU autonomous military mission to Africa to support UN peace-keeping troops during the extended electoral process.

This article examines the contribution made by the EU's presence in DRC – and in particular EUFOR, the military mission which ended in December 2006 – and how it interacted with other initiatives, such as EUPOL and EUSEC, the ESDP police, and the security sector reform missions, as well as flanking measures by the European Commission. The EU presence is evaluated in terms of the five principles of the Human Security doctrine set out in the Barcelona Report on Europe's Security Capabilities.<sup>2</sup> It seeks

1. Source: International Crisis Group. Figures for Internally Displaced Persons are estimates by OCHA and relate to October 2006, »The Human Development Report«, UNDP September 2005.
2. The five principles are: (i) the primacy of human rights, (ii) clear political authority, (ii) effective multilateralism, (iii) a bottom-up approach, and (v) a regional focus. Source: »A Human Security Doctrine for Europe. The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities,« available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/5publications3.htm>

to determine whether a Human Security policy is feasible in the context of an environment such as the DRC, or indeed whether it adds anything to existing EU policies in the country and region.

Of the three ESDP initiatives (plus an earlier military operation to Ituri in 2003), the EUFOR mission has been the most significant for the EU. The decision to send 2 400 European troops to help Congo's democratic transition marked a turning point in the EU's global ambitions: EUFOR was not only the first autonomous ESDP mission to Africa, but it acted alongside rather than in place of the UN, was the first under German operational command, led by a French general on the ground, and looked like a »European army« with 19 different nationalities represented. Its contingent of over 700 German troops and operational headquarters in Potsdam had caused considerable controversy in Berlin about the justification of operating »out of area,« far from Europe, in a country with which German troops had no connection or familiarity. Despite these misgivings, the mission has been deemed a success,<sup>3</sup> and has as a result probably paved the way for further EU military expeditions, including more to crisis regions outside the European neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> EUFOR Congo thus represents an important »acquis« for ESDP, concerning not only what it achieved in terms of stabilization and conflict prevention, but also how it operated.

In terms of its methodology, EUFOR, in both its original design and its eventual implementation, was also Human Security in action: a normative mission, breaking new ground in the way a military force could be used in the context of protecting a civilian population and treating them as if they were citizens rather than an alien population.

## Background

In December 2002 an »All Inclusive« peace accord was signed in South Africa, which formally ended six years of civil war in DRC, during which

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3. Evidence of Lt Gen Jean-Paul Perruche, director-general EU Military Staff to the Security and Defence Committee, European Parliament, Brussels, October 9, 2006.
  4. Javier Solana, »From Cologne to Berlin and Beyond, Operations, Institutions and Capabilities,« Berlin, January 29, 2007. Presentation to UN Security Council, New York, January 9, 2007.

an estimated four million Congolese had died. The casualty toll in this war is frequently cited as indicative of the pervasive and deadly impact of »new wars« in which the majority of deaths are from the secondary effects of conflict. The peace accord led to the withdrawal of foreign troops involved in the conflict, a power-sharing transitional government, and a commitment to draw up a new constitution and hold multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections. The United Nations Security Council had supported a 1999 ceasefire with the despatch of a peacekeeping force: MONUC (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo), comprising 18,000 troops plus civilian personnel and costing over \$1 billion per annum, is the UN's largest peacekeeping mission. One of its key functions was to maintain stability to allow for elections to take place from July–October 2006.

The biggest single contributor to the \$500 million plus cost of the elections was the European Union: the European Commission spent €149 million, including €24 million on security measures, while €65.4 million of bilateral assistance was provided by member states. The DRC also tops the list of recipients for EU development assistance (both Community and member-state), with disbursements of €850 million in 2004, and derives 62% of its total overseas development assistance from Europe.

## **EUFOR: Military Power or Mouse?**

The decision to dispatch an ESDP force to DRC to assist MONUC during the election period and give military weight to the EU's support for transition was approved by the European Council on April 27, 2006, following a UN Security Council Resolution (1671). From the outset EUFOR was a highly political military mission. Although the decision had international legitimacy, including the full backing of the Congolese transitional government, it triggered a lengthy controversy, particularly in Germany, which hosted the mission's operational headquarters (in Potsdam) and supplied its commander, General Karlheinz Viereck. He was supported by a French force commander on the ground, General Christian Damay.

German concerns centered on the risks that German soldiers might run in DRC and the political exposure the mission represented for a country which was still nervous about »out of area« engagements. A heated debate in the Bundestag which had to approve the deployment of Ger-

man soldiers echoed wider questions in the EU about what ESDP was for and what the role and purpose of European soldiers might be in a remote country in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Among those involved in planning the mission, several military and civilian personnel articulated a »nightmare scenario« of (white) »European troops opening fire on African civilians.«<sup>6</sup>

Public perceptions of EUFOR beyond Germany were also lukewarm. In the region, it was criticized for having the majority of its troops based in Gabon, hundreds of miles away from any potential conflict.<sup>7</sup> To observers, it looked like another example of European tokenism – a paper tiger to vaunt the Union’s pretensions as a serious security actor.

Its mandate limited it to operating in Kinshasa and as a backup force, at the request of MONUC. Without a clear standalone mandate to intervene at any time that trouble might arise, EUFOR’s purpose in Kinshasa lacked precision, particularly in the eyes of the Congolese. The split operation, which was the result of a desire to use an existing French troop facility in Gabon, proved to be one of the biggest logistical and tactical handicaps and was all but abandoned halfway through the mission after tensions in Kinshasa increased.

Another serious handicap was the legal duration of the mission: it was kept deliberately short to coincide with the electoral timetable which provided for the first round of presidential elections at the end of July, followed if necessary by a run-off at the end of October. Another factor was the political imperative in Germany to have its troops home by Christmas. EUFOR was programmed to operate until after the second round results were announced and then withdraw from December 1.

While technically this fulfilled the EU’s ambition to assist MONUC in providing a stable environment for the electoral process, it missed the point about supporting a peace process which would alleviate the suffering of the civilian population, and in practice ran into difficulties as the election timetable slipped.<sup>8</sup> EUFOR commanders had to deal with the public relations effect of appearing to »cut and run« as soon as the results

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5. See, for example, S. Amann, »Von Sinn und Unsinn des Kongo-Einsatzes,« FT Deutschland, May 17, 2006; »Kongo-Einsatz. Kein Konzept,« lead article, FT Deutschland, June 1, 2006.

6. Interview, Civ-mil staff, Brussels, November 15, 2006.

7. Telephone interview, Jeff Koinange, CNN South Africa, November 20, 2006.

8. See »ESDP in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Supporting Transition,« ESDP Newsletter, issue 2, (June 2006), p. 15.

were announced, and with the new president not even officially installed. More seriously, the mission had to leave at a time when tensions were still high in the capital between the camps of the victorious and losing presidential candidates. For around a week there was a serious possibility of violence in Kinshasa between militia groups, with EUFOR not authorized to use any kind of force other than limited self-defence on the part of its own troops. It risked being a bystander in the face of conflict or human rights abuses because its mandate had expired.

Although the political and legal mandate agreed by member states was clearly unsatisfactory both for EUFOR and when measured against a commitment to protect the Congolese, on balance the mission's limited duration was probably the best option for both the Europeans and DRC. In Human Security terms, the deployment of European troops succeeded in using military force to achieve a short-term stabilization and create a space in which »normal« peaceable politics could be conducted. An extended mission would have prolonged the war footing of Congolese politics and sent mixed messages about political authority.

Unlike the ESDP's Operation Artemis in 2003, which had been under French command, EUFOR was an integrated European operation, with a combat force from Spain, logisticians from Germany, lawyers from Finland, human rights counsellors from Sweden, and political advisers from France and Germany; all in all, 19 different nationalities were represented. EUFOR commanders had to try to devise standard operating procedures and navigate their way through a blizzard of »national caveats« which restricted what each national troop contingent could do and dictated the working practices to which they adhered.

EUFOR owes a large part of its success to the way it handled the most serious outbreak of violence during the election. On August 20, fighting between militias loyal to the leading candidate (and eventual winner) Joseph Kabila and those of his leading opponent Jean-Pierre Bemba killed at least 23 civilians and soldiers, injured 43, and destroyed Bemba's helicopter.<sup>9</sup> EUFOR was brought in by MONUC to help restore order. The impact of this intervention was to transform perceptions of EUFOR among the Congolese: from being part of a »Western« attempt to promote Kabila, who is unpopular in Kinshasa and regarded as an outsider, the

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9. For a detailed description and analysis, see »Securing Congo's Elections: Lessons from the Kinshasa Showdown,« Policy Briefing No. 42, International Crisis Group, October 2, 2006.

European troops gained a reputation as both a neutral power and a credible force. They were seen to behave differently from MONUC because they patrolled the streets regularly and on foot, in contrast to the UN peacekeepers who went out in tanks. Crucially too, they spoke French. Their action in defending Bemba against an attack which was widely regarded as having been launched by Kabila's personal guard helped persuade the Congolese that they were genuine about securing a fair electoral process.

## **EUFOR and Human Security**

When assessed against the principles of Human Security doctrine,<sup>10</sup> the EUFOR mission in practice implemented what could be called a Human Security approach in that it addressed its core principles, although not all were respected equally.

The first principle – primacy of human rights – was incorporated from the earliest stages of planning in consultation with the Council's human rights secretariat and with the appointment of a specific human rights advisor to the mission. A gender concept was developed, along with a reporting system to monitor human rights issues. Training was carried out in human rights and gender issues, and street patrols took with them a human rights monitor and often medical assistance for the local population.

For the first time in EU operations, a common »Soldier's card« was produced for troops with clear instructions on the use of force, gender issues such as sexual abuse, and dealing with child soldiers. The instructions were intended as a framework for the actions and behaviour of EUFOR troops and to establish a »European« standard in place of the different operating procedures of member states. The politically sensitive nature of the mission, especially in Germany, probably contributed to an acute awareness at every stage, from planning through to decisions in the heat of the moment as to what level of force was appropriate, how the Congolese would react, and the need for EUFOR to be seen as a neutral supporting force.

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10. The Report lists seven principles, including legal instruments and the appropriate use of force; subsequently these principles were reduced by the Study Group to five (see note 2).

One of the least satisfactory Human Security aspects of the mission was that of clear political authority, and this reflected the weakness of the mission's mandate. The protocol that EUFOR could intervene only as a fourth line of »stabilization« after the Congolese police and army, and then MONUC, meant that at crucial moments it was unable to act, lacking authorization. This was further complicated by a chain of command which included two headquarters (in France and Germany), plus the Council secretariat in Brussels, which were jointly in charge of directing operations. The mission's political authority was particularly problematic for German soldiers who were the subject of a vigorous national debate about why they should be in Kinshasa at all. In the words of one officer: »This mission was communicated as a bit of a nuisance. Yet German soldiers needed to hear that what they are doing is important.«<sup>11</sup> They were getting different messages from Berlin, Potsdam, Brussels, and locally.

The third principle of Human Security doctrine is effective multilateralism. While the EUFOR mission was certainly multilateralism in action, whether it was effective is open to question. There was no unity of command between the two sets of peacekeepers, and the Europeans were faced with having to »coordinate« with MONUC rather than approaching problems jointly.

Effective multilateralism also requires coordination between security and other policy initiatives, and between the European Commission, the Council, and other multilateral actors, including the United Nations and regional institutions. The most serious weakness of the EUFOR mission from a Human Security perspective was the poor coordination with other EU initiatives in DRC. Policies to contain and prevent conflict cannot be effective if they are isolated and contradictory.

Rather than a seamless transition from the rapid reaction mechanism of the military mission to the reconstructive efforts of the civilian engagement, EUFOR's role ended abruptly with no obvious means of follow-through for the other components of the EU's presence in the country. As a result, the Union had an exit strategy from DRC, but one which was limited to redeploying its 2 400 troops.

One problem noted by EUFOR staff was that the other institutions of the European Union do not have the same tools or propensity for promotion and publicity, so the Union's presence decreased very visibly with

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11. Interview, EUFOR, Kinshasa, November 30, 2006.

the departure of the military mission. It remains to be seen whether the remaining EU missions and the Commission's work can meet the expectations raised by EUFOR.

EUFOR's strongest achievement concerns the bottom-up principle, crucial to the Human Security approach. A highly inventive campaign to engage with local public opinion and take grassroots views into account began as a conventional »psyops« (psychological operations) military exercise to »win hearts and minds« in order to promote force protection and ensure an efficient two-way flow of information between the mission and the citizens of Kinshasa. What grew out of this was the largest-circulation newspaper in the country, *La Paillotte*,<sup>12</sup> which at its peak published over 60,000 copies a week, a broadcasting campaign on air eight times a day and covering seven radio stations, and focus groups and public opinion polling to provide feedback on local views of the EU mission.

Initial perceptions of the European force ranged from neutral to negative: people either knew nothing of EUFOR or fell back on a range of deep-seated »myths«: the troops had come to support Kabila's election; they were there to exploit the Congo's natural resources; or the Congolese would end up paying for the EU mission. Neutrality was paramount: the media coverage never discussed the candidates or the election results. Among those polled, the number believing in EUFOR's neutrality had risen from 30% to 50% by early September.

The other form of bottom-up approach was through civil-military cooperation projects (CIMIC), which had two objectives: (i) to deliver humanitarian aid and (ii) to raise the visibility of the EU mission. Both psyops and CIMIC suffered from budgetary constraints. There was limited consultation with local NGOs, the projects were poorly coordinated with other local or international initiatives, and, with time and money running short, the priority was a number of short-term proposals which did not necessarily match the overwhelming long-term needs of a society which lacks infrastructure and basic public goods. From a Human Security perspective, the initiatives were symbolic, not effective. Better planning and funding of CIMIC and effective coordination with the EU's long-term assistance programs could have leveraged the short-term visibility and impact of the military mission to build a more sustained partnership with local civil society and citizens.

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12. The name, which means »straw hut,« was chosen because it represents a traditional Congolese meeting place for the discussion of politics and civic issues.

Similarly, better coordination with long-term initiatives which have a regional focus – the final criterion of a Human Security approach – could have enhanced the sustained impact of EUFOR.

## DRC after the Elections

There is much still to fear from the fragile peace which has been created since 2002, particularly in terms of key Human Security principles. There is a potential security gap between the (slow) pace of reform and uncertain political will on the part of the new government, on the one hand, and the expectations of the Congolese that human security will improve following the transition.

The risk attached to the EU strategy is that by investing so heavily in the Congolese election, whether through the dispatch of EUFOR or direct assistance with the voting process, the Union has undermined rather than enhanced progress on Human Security goals. The election campaign itself further aggravated abuses against opposition groups, individuals, and the media.<sup>13</sup> According to a report by Human Rights Watch: »The international community ... preferred to look the other way on tough matters that could affect the elections. Diplomats dismissed concerns about corruption or the need to disarm private militias and integrate them into the national army, saying it would be unproductive to push too hard at such a delicate time. It was important, they said, »not to rock the boat.«<sup>14</sup>

The heightened sense of sovereignty the new regime clearly feels from its legitimation at the polls in pursuing its own policies, and the possibility that it will play bilateral partners off against each other, suggest that the high-water mark of international influence on Congo has already passed.

As one observer has remarked, the EUFOR mission was a success for the EU, but less obviously so for DRC.<sup>15</sup> It raised the EU's profile and

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13. A mission from the International Federation of Human Rights documented numerous cases of violence against activists, politicians, and media representatives. »Un processus électoral sous haute tension,« Note on FIDH mission to DRC, September 2006. Available at: [www.fidh.org](http://www.fidh.org)

14. A. Van Woudenberg, »A New Era for Kongo?,« Human Rights Watch, October 19, 2006. Available at: [www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/10/19/Kongo014495.htm](http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/10/19/Kongo014495.htm)

15. Hans Hoebeke, Remarks to 2nd European Strategic Forum, FES, Brussels, May 3, 2007.

proved to be an effective dissuasive instrument against factional violence, balancing tough and credible use of force with measures to turn around negative perceptions of an army hostile to local interests. The other two ESDP missions, EUPOL and EUSEC, have made less public impact, but may benefit from the profile of the military mission to push for an increased role regarding reforms to the security sector, which would have a discernible effect on Human Security.

Where the EU's engagement most falls short is in respect of coherence and its ability to provide a continuum between short-term »rapid reaction« measures and long-term assistance, or between »crisis management« and conflict prevention. This is not an indictment of the ESDP missions and their personnel as much as the context, particularly within the Brussels system, in which these missions are planned and implemented. There has been an element of »accidental success« about the civ-mil characteristics of the missions in that the outcome was often achieved despite their mandates and thanks to the creative energies and careful planning of individuals in implementing them; of course there can be no guarantee that an optimum mix of civilian and military instruments would be repeated in future missions.

The EU has to exploit the gains it has made as an actor in the DRC transition, and coherence around a clear and shared set of operating goals and methods such as Human Security might help achieve this. The EUFOR mission has contributed to the EU being seen as a »neutral power,« helping to offset some of the long legacy of mistrust of European motives in the Congo. But EU involvement still does not amount to being seen as a »force for good.«

Within the EU, the ESDP engagement in DRC has helped to establish EU military force as a credible instrument in the toolkit of security policy, in a difficult terrain. In the words of one German diplomat, EUFOR has not made the case for its opponents.<sup>16</sup> The mission instead represents an important »acquis« for ESDP as a form of civilizing politics which goes beyond conventional peacekeeping and stabilization. Its Human Security aspects, such as the psyops campaign and outreach to the local population, and the attention to human rights were particularly effective and transferable to future operations. Some form of standard template for such normative missions would be helpful at the outset to help troops and European publics understand the nature of the initiative and to de-

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16. Interview, first secretary German embassy, Kinshasa, December 5, 2006.

velop appropriate strategies early in a mission for them to have their full effect.

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