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Committee on Development and Cooperation

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ACCOUNT

of the mission to observe the presidential elections held in the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) on 10 March 2002

INTRODUCTION

1. In response to a letter from Mr Miranda, chairman of the Committee on Development and Cooperation, the Conference of Presidents, at its meeting of 5 February 2002, decided to send a mission to observe the presidential elections to be held in the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). Regrettably, among all the MEPs interested in participating, it was only possible for Mr Corrie to travel on the required dates. Mr Miranda, chairman of the Committee on Development and Cooperation, had been appointed Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission in Congo.

The 2002 Presidential election was expected to be an important step in the political stabilisation of the country. Congo-Brazzaville suffered three civil wars since the introduction of multi-party system and elections are widely perceived as a source of conflict. After the cease-fire agreements of Pointe Noire and Brazzaville in 1999, a political process was launched, starting with the "National Dialogue Without Exclusive" in March-April 2001. More recent steps included the adoption of a new Constitution after a referendum held on 20 January 2002, thus paving the way for the Presidential election. A new Election Law was also adopted and a recent nation-wide administrative population census was held.

Mr Corrie arrived in Brazzaville on 6 March 2002 and left on 11 March 2002.

2. On his way, Mr Corrie was first in Douala on 5 March 2002 where he was welcomed by Mr Joseph Owona Kono, from the Association Bananière du Cameroun and by the President of Cameroon Airlines.

He had discussions concerning the economic situation in Cameroon and he also met Mr Pateise Tsimi, a business man and owner of a tug company on the river. The national privatisation programme is moving slowly and both interlocutors considered that, without the support and advice from the EU and the firm hand of the EU Cameroon Delegation, the country would not have survived the economic transition. The main problems were lack of capacity and few external investment.

BACKGROUND TO THE ELECTIONS

An information note had been prepared on this issue by the Directorate General for Research.

OBSERVATION OF THE ELECTIONS

3. Mr Corrie arrived in Brazzaville the next day via Gabon and Pointe Noire after a 5 hour journey.

The first briefing session on the election was done by Mr Cobos Flores, assistant of the Chief Observer. The main problems were the logistics of travel within the country and the deployment of long term/short term observers and the possible shortfall on the electoral registers, particularly in the South. There is no list of polling stations yet (3 days before the elections). So it is not possible to route map the election day.

4. On 7 March, Mr Corrie had a lunch at the residence of Mr Holzapfel, the Head of the EU Delegation in Brazzaville. Mr Miranda and Mr Cobos Flores were also present, as well as Mr Pierre Obat, Minister of Internal Affairs and Security, and Mr Placide Lenga, President of the Supreme Court. The President and the rapporteur of the National Electoral Commission (CONEL) were also present: Mr Appesse and Mr Bowao.

There was a general discussion on the election preparations. There is a clear indication that President Sassou Nguesso will win on the first ballot and there is little evidence of any other candidate. The election follows on from the referendum which was far from perfect but gave a basis for this election and highlighted the problem areas which were mainly the election registers not being complete, i.e. no 18 years on from December added. Many people did not register and did not get their cards.

5. On the afternoon Mr Corrie had a familiarisation drive in Brazzaville. The roads are in a dreadful condition and there was one small car in a hole in the road with only its roof showing. The hole was 1.6 meters deep and full of water. There are also the scars of war everywhere with many burned out buildings and bullet marks on most walls. Even Mr Corrie's bedroom floor has a number of holes at the window, shot from a helicopter. There are many street children mostly from across the river, and also many beautiful young women offering their services.

6. On 8 March morning, a further meeting was held at the EU mission office which is extremely well organised. There is now a list of the 800 polling stations in Brazzaville but there will only be maps of the communes on Saturday morning.

There was a lunch with the American Ambassador (Mr David Kaeuper) at the residence of the Head of the EU delegation. The Americans have put some money into election preparation on an information campaign, on the rights of voters. The Ambassador felt that, although there is clearly some reluctance to fulfil all the conditionalities, on the whole the preparations had gone well although there was clearly a huge advantage for the sitting President.

In the afternoon, Mr Corrie was driven by the EU Attaché Thierry Mariotte to some of the "hot" spots. There were lots of thousands of people on the streets and driving around in convoys and a mixture of presidential supporters and opposition. It had all the makings of a difficult situation had there been an accident but the Congo weather came to the rescue and monsoon rain poured for five hours clearing the streets. Mr Corrie spoke to a number of the young opposition members and asked them what would happen after the election. They replied if their candidate did not win, they would take to the gun and fight for power again.

Later that evening, their candidate Milongo pulled out of the election saying Mr Nguesso had rigged the vote in advance. On 5 March, two other candidates, Mr Mbini and Mr Mackoumbou-Nkouka had also withdrawn their candidature.

7. On the 9th of March morning there was a meeting with the short term observers to finalise the distribution of areas of the city. Five groups of two will have to cover as many polling stations as possible. After the meeting Mr Corrie left for his area of Talangai. Words cannot

describe the conditions along the banks of the silted upriver and harbour, yet people were friendly and pleased to see observers.

The proposed polling stations were totally unprepared one day before the election. Very few had the voters roll posted and in some areas people were unaware where their polling place was. The roads were almost impassable with the pot holes filled with rubbish which added to the stench and driving hazards.

8. On March 10, the election day, Mr Corrie left the hotel at 6 a.m. to open polling station in one of the poorest areas in Brazzaville. After the chaos of the previous day, the polling station was set up and ready to receive the voters. The "box" for the secret vote was made up from a flat pack and was very practical.

The procedure was the following: a voter was checked on list one. If their name was there, they then presented their voter's card to the next table and were given a voting slip from each candidate with both name and symbol on it, plus an envelope. They voted by putting the card of their choice in the envelope and destroying the rest and depositing them in bin provided. They then put vote in box which was seen through perspex and then went to second list where their paper was stamped, they signed and left a finger print on this second list.

Unfortunately, the law is not clear on this procedure. It does not say whether the voter signs and puts a finger print or one or the other. Nor does it state which finger. Some did the thumb, some the middle finger, some the small finger.

Some people arrived with no voting card but with identification. As they were on the list, they were allowed to vote. Some arrived with no card but with identity and were on the list and were also allowed to vote.

Mr Corrie covered 24 stations during the day. In four of these, there were minor discrepancies more by lack of knowledge than by malicious intent. The rest were well run. The area covered was in serious poverty yet there was great enthusiasm for the elections.

9. Mr Corrie covered the closing of the four stations he had opened. It was done by the light of eight candles as there was no paraffin for the lamps. It was meticulously done but very easy. With eight candidates, it would be complex but at the four stations of 1.000 voters each, the average vote was +/- 70 %. Of these, President Sassou had an average of 80 %. The next best candidate had 19 votes (i.e. 2,5 %) and some candidates had no votes.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE ELECTIONS

10. According to the figures published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the final results gave an absolute majority to Mr Sassou Nguesso (89,41 % of valid votes). The candidates had the following results:

Denis Sassou-Nguesso (United Democratic Forces)	89,4 %
Kignomba Kia Mbougou (Pan-African Union for Social Democracy)	2,8 %
Angèle Bandou (Party of the Poor)	2,3 %
Jean Félix Demba Telo	1,7 %
Luc Adamo Mateta (Convention for Democracy and the Republic)	1,6 %
Come Mankasse (Congoese Union of Republicans)	1,3 %
Bonaventure Mizidy (Republican and Liberal Party)	1,0 %

The European Parliament delegation considers that these elections appeared to be free and fair without intimidation or corrupt practice in the areas it observed but cannot speak for other areas. It also believes the mere fact of observers touring an area has a beneficial effect on the outcome and strengthens the voters' feeling that people's views are being respected. Moreover, the election provided an opportunity for the Congolese people to express their desire for peace and their rejection of violence. It also welcomes the calm and commitment of the Congolese people.

The democratic process which has just begun, and which we hope will deepen, constitutes an essential prerequisite for a lasting peace and for the development of the country in a context of political stability, guaranteeing the free exercise of civic rights and fundamental freedoms.

On the basis of the general conclusions of this mission, the European Parliament delegation draws the attention of the Congolese Government to certain shortcomings it noted in the organisation and conduct of the Presidential election, particularly the difficulty for the public to gain access to electoral texts, lack of control over changes to the electoral rolls, the late distribution of polling cards, the insufficiently clear division of tasks between the national electoral commission and the administration, and the limited access of some candidates to the national media. It also deplores the low level of participation by opposition parties throughout the electoral process and the withdrawal of several candidates in the days preceding the poll. It calls on the Congolese Government to put corrective measures in place to ensure that the forthcoming parliamentary elections are better organised and calls to both the Government and the opposition parties to intensify and maintain the national dialogue.