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MISSION REPORT

following the ad-hoc Delegation to the Democratic Republic of Congo

Committee on Development

Members of the mission:

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Introduction

At its meeting of 11 May 2023, the Conference of Presidents authorised a seven Member ad hoc delegation, including the DEVE Chair and one Member of the DROI Subcommittee, plus the Chair of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (ACP-EU JPA), from 24 to 28 July 2023 (five days including travel time) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kinshasa, including a field visit in the country.

The purpose was to analyse the so-called ‘resource curse’ and ways to address it from a development perspective, with particular focus on the mining sector, where child labour and other human rights abuses remain widespread, as well as to gain further insight into the humanitarian situation of millions of people displaced across the country.

In collaboration with the EU Delegation in Kinshasa, it was decided to visit a mine in Lubumbashi, Province of Haut-Katanga, in the Southeast of the country.

Scene setting

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is one of the largest and most populous countries in Africa (around 100 million inhabitants) and is therefore a key player on the African continent and a crucial partner for the EU. Furthermore, it is home to one of the green lungs of the planet, the Congo Basin.

The DRC is endowed with vast natural resources and is a major supplier of various critical raw materials. Nevertheless, large parts of the population live below the poverty line. Because of this contrast, the country is considered to be subject to the ‘resource curse,’ a phenomenon amongst countries with an abundance of resources that have lower economic, democratic and social development than comparable countries with fewer resources.

The extractive sector in the DRC is extremely diverse. In the southeastern copper belt, large, mechanised mining operations are dominant. In contrast, other mineral deposits in the DRC – particularly gold and 3T deposits – are predominantly exploited through artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) operations. ASM operations play a significant role in the perpetuation of armed conflict in eastern DRC, and often involve child or forced labour. State and non-state actors use the mining sector to generate income, at times by directly running and controlling ASM operations.

Since the end of 2021, the security and humanitarian situation in eastern DRC has been deteriorating further. There has been a renewed militarisation, with numerous new armed groups forming and fighting over territory and the control of mines. Consequently, there are now more than 6 million internally displaced people in the DRC, a record in the world, and up to 25 million people are food-insecure. The conflict has also an international dimension. Tensions between the DRC and neighbouring Rwanda have increased further and jeopardise prospects for peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region.

On the political side, the DRC is preparing for general elections at the end of this year, after seeing its first peaceful transition of power since independence after the December 2018 general elections. Outgoing President Félix Tshisekedi is running for a renewed mandate.

Principal points

Humanitarian situation: All humanitarian actors sent a very clear message to Members that the humanitarian situation in the DRC conflict areas, in particular in the east, has been worrying for a long time but is now threatening to get considerably worse. There is an enormous financial need to cover the most basic needs of several million people over the next 1-2 years. There is a real risk of outright war involving the neighbouring countries Uganda and Rwanda, which are present in Eastern DRC. The root causes of the situation were explained to be of a political and economic nature (control of raw materials). The interlocutors urgently pleaded to pay more attention to this conflict and to help stem the humanitarian challenge.

Mining: Members learnt that there are vast differences in the structure of the mining industry in the DRC, which features both large-scale industrial mining (mainly in the south) and small-scale artisanal mining, predominantly in the east. There is a clear link between conflicts such as the one in the Great lakes region and the raw material wealth of the country.

MEPs visited an industrial mine (Ruashi) in Lubumbashi/Haut Katanga province and were briefed about the mining process and what is done by the company to do mining in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner - an aspect that was covered, for the small-scale mining sector, in meetings with civil society organisations.

Political: Many Congolese interlocutors expressed their critical opinion with regard to what they perceive as undue EU support to the government of Rwanda.

Members gave messages of continued support to the DRC as regards the dire humanitarian situation in the east. They also pointed to the strategic partnership on critical raw materials under negotiation between the EU and the DRC, which is supposed to be a partnership that turns the ‘resource curse’ into a vehicle that advances development within the DRC.

Summary account of meetings

Day 1

After a morning exchanging with the EU Delegation on the political, economic and social situation in the DRC, the delegation met with the ‘conseiller présidentiel de la veille stratégique’, who explained the initiatives of DRC president Tshisekedi for constructing institutions based on the rule of law, and for improving the economic situation in the country such as by creating added value in particular with regard to critical raw material processing (car batteries). He pleaded for quicker procedures on the EU side for EU-DRC cooperation and for more boldness by EU enterprises to come and invest in the DRC. Members stressed that the EU wishes to partner with the DRC on an equal level (including through the proposed strategic partnership for critical raw materials).

In the meeting with representatives of both Chambers of the DRC Parliament (Assemblée and Sénat), the DRC interlocutors sent strong messages as regards the involvement of Rwanda in the conflict in the East of the country and invited the EU to change its policy in that regard. Members welcomed the open discussion and gave messages of support, fully agreeing that the war-like situation in Eastern DRC is not conducive to stability and sustainable development.

In a meeting in the EU Delegation, the humanitarian country team explained in detail the alarming situation in the conflict areas in Eastern DRC, pointing to its expected further aggravation and a record number of food insecure and internally displaced people worldwide. Providing millions of people with even the most basic needs of survival is an enormous challenge, and an increasing number of arms and armed groups in the region pose additional problems. Members raised concerns on the amount of financial resources needed to deal with the situation and on how to find structural solutions to this long-term conflict.

The meeting with Human Rights Associations from the DRC highlighted challenges such as the lack of security, in particular in Eastern DRC, which prevents the construction of a fair and prosperous society, but also the lack of legal justice, the consequences of climate change and the fear that human rights will be sacrificed in the race for critical raw materials. It was pointed out that the origin of raw materials must be traceable. Members asked questions about how the EU in particular could support the LGBTQ community.

Day 2

Civil Society Organisations active in the mining sector gave an account of the development of the mining sector in the last 20 years in the DRC, explaining in particular how European companies disinvested in the early 2000s and sold shares/companies to other foreign investors. It was stressed that European companies should come back and invest, creating infrastructure and stabilising the state, and provide income and social stability for the population, but that there is strong competition from other foreign investors. Members asked their interlocutors about the main obstacles to greater European investments.

In the meeting with representatives of the Congolese mining industry, the discussions focused on the differences between large and small-scale artisanal mines, and that China is now the largest investor and shareholder in the DRC mining industry. Critical raw materials are often traded to Europe via China. The mining representatives expressed hope that EU companies would also themselves engage fully, and explained their concept of ‘economic poles’, which would attract infrastructure, jobs, and thus also security, and could therefore serve as a concept to finally pacify the war zones in the east.

During the second half of the day, the EP delegation travelled to Lubumbashi, Haut Katanga province, for the field visit.

Day 3

During the visit of the Ruashi copper mine in Lubumbashi, Members were briefed about the raw materials mined (copper and cobalt) and the technologies used, as well as about safety and environmental issues, social status and safety of workers, social engagement and tax contributions of the mine. An extensive tour of the mine included the mining pitch, various technical installations and warehouses with mining products.

The exchange with the local private sector (among them many European companies active in the Lubumbashi region and the province) showed that, despite difficulties, European companies must stay engaged and engage even further in the DRC, in order not to lose opportunities to help shape the future of the DRC which would otherwise be taken up by competitors.

In the meeting with the Governor of Haut Katanga province, the Governor encouraged

European companies to come and invest in his province, pointing to improvements in the investment climate and explaining that there are many opportunities left. Members mentioned the potential of Haut Katanga as regards renewable energy production, the possibilities to add local value to the raw materials mined in the province, in particular with regard to battery production, and possibilities to build a circular economy (waste recycling).

During a tour at the "Centre africain d'excellence pour la recherche et l'innovation sur les batteries en RDC (CAEB)" at the University of Lubumbashi, Members were informed about methods to analyse material and research into materials likely to be used in batteries at least until 2030 (cobalt, lithium).

The meeting with representatives of civil society organisations active in the mining sector, from the city and region of Lubumbashi, focussed on the problems of the small-scale artisanal mining sector. Interlocutors stressed that they are working actively to help implement safety, social and environmental standards also in the artisanal mining sector, and reported that there is progress. They would however appreciate support and would welcome initiatives and investment from the EU and European companies. Members asked about specific problems they encounter in their daily work and what the EU can do in concrete terms to assist.

Conclusions and follow-up

- Continue to follow the situation in the DRC, inform other Members and committees on the dire humanitarian situation and the critical raw materials issue in the country;
- Explore possibilities to open up the EFSD+ fund further to support investments in the critical raw materials sector;
- Organise a hearing on "Team Europe initiative: saving the Congo Basin and providing development opportunities for Congo Basin countries";
- Follow-up on the general elections in the DRC in December and possibly organise an exchange of views in due course; and
- Continue the dialogue with interlocutors met during the visit to the DRC and consider them as speakers in upcoming events at the EP that relate to the DRC.

Annex: Final programme

Final programme of the Committee on Development delegation to the DRC

Monday, 24 July

- 08:45 - 10:15 **BRIEFING AT THE EU DELEGATION TO DRC** with the Ambassador & team
- 11:00 - 12:30 **MEETING WITH CONSEIL PRÉSIDENTIEL DE VEILLE STRATÉGIQUE**
- 14:00 - 15:15 **MEETING WITH DRC PARLIAMENT**
- President of the National Assembly
 - Vice-President of the National Assembly
 - President of the Commission on Human Rights
 - President of the Gender, Family, Children Committee of the Nation Assembly
 - President of the Senate
 - President of the Foreign affairs Committee of the Senate
- 16:00 - 17:30 **MEETING WITH HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM**
(Humanitarian coordinator, donors, UN Agencies, NGOs, ICRC)
- 17:30 - 19:00 **MEETING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATIONS**
- 19:30 - 21:30 **NETWORKING COCKTAIL WITH EU AMBASSADORS, HEADS OF COOPERATION & KINSHASA INTERLOCUTORS**

Tuesday, 25 July

- 08:30 - 10:00 **MEETING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN THE MINING SECTOR**
- 10:00 - 11:30 **FÉDÉRATION DES ENTREPRISES DU CONGO (FEC) - Chambre des Mines**
- Afternoon *Transfer from Kinshasa to Lubumbashi (province of Haut Katanga)*

Wednesday, 26 July

- 09:45 - 12:00 **VISIT OF RUASHI COBALT MINE**
- guided visit of the mine
 - exchange with mining company
- 12:30 - 14:30 **LUNCH WITH LOCAL PRIVATE SECTOR**
- 15:00 - 16:00 **MEETING WITH GOVERNOR OF HAUT-KATANGA**
- 16:30 - 18:00 **VISIT OF THE CENTRE D'EXCELLENCE POUR LA RECHERCHE AVANCÉE SUR LES BATTERIES**
- 19:00 - 21:00 **DINNER WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN THE MINING SECTOR**
- Official end of the DEVE visit*