

EU election observation missions: objectives, practices and future challenges

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Véronique **DE KEYSER** (PES, BE) and José Ignacio **SALAFRANCA SÁNCHEZ-NEYRA** (PES-ED, ES) on EU election observation missions (EOMs), confirming the desire of MEPs to pursue their commitment in this domain. They consider, therefore, that election observation in new and developing democracies must remain a priority. At the same time, MEPs regret that the EU still lacks a common, comprehensive strategy for promoting democracy in third countries, and urge all EU institutions and Member States to continue their efforts in this area by agreeing to establish a European Consensus on Democracy.

MEPs recall that election observation is merely a first step towards democracy and that it needs to be complemented by other adequately funded activities and post-electoral measures. These measures could include capacity-building for national parliaments, political parties, the civil service, non-State actors and civil society, and the promotion of human rights and good governance. Therefore, MEPs request the maintenance of the budgetary ceiling agreed by the Commission of around 25% of EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) for EU EOMs over the period 2007-2013. Furthermore, they ask the Commission to set aside, within this budget funding, allocations for preparatory activities in anticipation of elections.

While paying tribute to the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), MEPs express their concern about the calling into question of the ODIHR's mandate regarding election observation. In particular, they condemn the recent imposition by certain OSCE participating States of restrictions on the duration of EOMs and their refusal to issue visas for observers, which has made it impossible for the ODIHR to fulfil its mandate.

Overall, MEPs are satisfied with the effectiveness of EU EOMs and note that the EU is leading the way on this issue and that the professionalism of EU EOMs enhances the EU's contribution to entrenching a sustainable awareness of the various elements that constitute a democratic election process.

However, MEPs call on the Commission to take the appropriate measures to further strengthen the adequate participation of civil society organisations and local observers in electoral processes and to update the methodology in order to address new challenges. In particular, they suggest that observers abstain from any behaviour that could be perceived by the local population as patronising, superior or disrespectful of local culture.

Members of the European Parliament: the parliamentary committee welcomes the well-established practice of appointing MEPs as Chief Observers of EU EOMs and calls for the appointment process to be clear and transparent. MEPs take the view that knowledge of the language used in the country in which the elections are being held should be an indicative criterion in the appointment of observers, in order to facilitate contact with the local population. In the pre-electoral period, observers should be able to meet other groups in the country in which the elections are being held. At the same time, MEPs in the Committee on Foreign Affairs call on all MEPs participating in election observation delegations to continue to follow the guidelines established for such delegations, particularly the Code of Conduct for election observers. Furthermore, MEPs call on observer delegations from the political groups (which do not represent Parliament) to refrain from taking any action that may undermine the credibility and visibility of the official European Parliament election observation delegations and that of EU EOMs. MEPs also call for greater coordination and cohesion in observer missions. This is particularly important

in terms of public statements related to the findings of EU EOMs. In particular, MEPs call for both the press statements and reports of findings to be released in accordance with a timetable which takes into account the electoral sensitivities on the ground.

With a view to improving relations between the Parliament and the Council, MEPs suggest that the Council should participate in meetings of the ECG (Election Coordination Group) and that Parliament should be given observer status at meetings of the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM).

Follow-up: MEPs consider that an effective and results-oriented follow-up to EU EOMs remains the key challenge to be addressed. A distinction should be made between technical and political follow-up. In addition, MEPs suggest that the implementation of the recommendations made by EU EOMs be closely followed up, in particular where election assistance is not provided. Furthermore, they request all EU institutions, and in particular the Council and Member State governments, to incorporate the findings and recommendations of EU EOMs in their political dialogues with the countries concerned. They call, in particular, on the Commission to include EU EOMs' recommendations in all action plans in respect of European Neighbourhood Policy countries in which EOMs are deployed (for example, in Country Strategy Papers,...).

Regarding the follow-up of elections having posed a problem, MEPs condemn the examples of practices consisting of a “business as usual” attitude towards countries in respect of which EU EOMs have been severely critical of the electoral process. They regret the fact that democratic elections are not always legitimated by the EU, which undermines the fragile idea of democracy in these countries, as well as the image of the EU. On the contrary, it is necessary to carefully assess the outcome of each mission and to make every effort to ensure that the democratic achievements of the EU EOMs (methodology, technical practice, budgetary means, electoral structures etc.) are not called into question or obliterated once the electoral process is finished.

Recommendations: In addition, MEPs make a series of recommendations to improve the way in which these missions are held. They propose:

- the possibility of deploying specialised missions to follow certain key aspects of the electoral process such as the drafting of the electoral legal framework, voter registration and post-election complaints and appeals;
- the establishment of a political dialogue in cases where the recommendations made by EU EOMs are not implemented;
- the European Parliament should be present at the opening of a new parliament whose election has been observed;
- the introduction of a strategy to support newly elected parliaments, notably in developing countries;
- **the creation of other mechanisms for the monitoring of electoral processes in cases where the deployment of a fully-fledged EU EOM is not possible.**

MEPs also suggest that by sharing its experience the Parliament can help parliaments of other countries. In particular, they propose that the possibility of establishing common observation delegations with the counterpart members of the ACP-EU JPA, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) and the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLatPA) be considered. They also recommend the organisation of joint ACP-EU observation missions periodically when elections are held in the EU.

Lastly, MEPs call for the adoption by Parliament of an annual report on EU EOMs.