

EU election observation missions: objectives, practices and future challenges

2007/2217(INI) - 08/05/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 605 to 11 and 16 abstentions, a resolution on EU election observation missions: objectives, practices and future challenges. The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Véronique **DE KEYSER** (PES, BE) and José Ignacio **SALAFRANCA SÁNCHEZ-NEYRA** (PES-ED, ES) on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Parliament confirms its own determination to contribute to the reinforcement of democratic processes by enhancing its involvement in this domain. It considers 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. Parliament requests 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 statements and actions of some OSCE participating States that call 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. The plenary draws attention to the added value of participation in international election observation missions in the OSCE area, along with the OSCE/ODHIR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and, where appropriate, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Its involvement in these missions should be continued and even increased. Members underline the crucial importance of thorough political coordination between the bodies involved, in particular as regards the diligence of its assessment, adherence to independence standards, the conclusions of long-term observers and the coherence of public statements.

Parliament welcomes the positive contribution made by EU EOMs, and underlines the success of the EU methodology. This success has made the EU the leading organisation in the field of international election observation and the focus on professionalism of EU EOMs is making an important contribution to the emergence of a significant number of experienced electoral experts. It calls on the Commission to strengthen the adequate participation of civil society organisations and local observers in electoral processes, and stresses the importance of EU observers abstaining from any behaviour that could be perceived by the local population as patronising, superior or disrespectful of local culture.

Members welcome the well-established practice of appointing MEPs as Chief Observers of EU EOMs, and calls for the appointment process to be clear and transparent in order to ensure the credibility of the Chief Observer. While throughout the duration of their mandate they work closely with the Commission and other EU institutions, they should always maintain a clear and well-defined independence, without

interference. Parliament also stresses that observer delegations from the political groups do not represent Parliament, and calls on those delegations to refrain from taking any action that may undermine the credibility of the official European Parliament election observation delegations and that of EU EOMs.

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).

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. Parliament suggests that the implementation of the recommendations made by EU EOMs be closely followed up, in particular where election assistance is not provided. Furthermore, it requests all EU institutions to incorporate the findings and recommendations of EU EOMs in their political dialogues with the countries concerned. It calls, 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.) Parliament condemns past 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. It regrets, on the other hand, that democratic elections are not always legitimated by the EU, and believes that these inconsistencies undermine the fragile idea of democracy in these countries and the image of the EU.

Recommendations: MEPs make a series of recommendations in this area:

- exploring the feasibility 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, which are, in some instances, not comprehensively covered by EU EOMs;

- 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 specific 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.

Lastly, Parliament calls for serious consideration to be given to the added value of consultation, cooperation and knowledge-sharing between Parliament and ACP parliamentary delegations and missions in the broader context of the external action of the EU, and in relation to other national and international observation missions. It proposes that working parties be set up with a view to enabling African Union partners to benefit, as part of the new EU-Africa strategy, from election observation expertise and experience, as the EU has benefited from the ODIHR/OSCE's working methods and experience.