Democracy and human rights: EU election assistance and observation

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The Council recalled its objectives in the matter of election support and observations and outlined some general principles on election support. In particular, it underlined the importance of an early dialogue with the national authorities, and the fact that consistency must be measured between election support, the Country Strategy for each partner country, and the objectives of the CFSP. Election support may contribute to increasing the confidence of the electorate in the election process, reduce the possibility of fraud, and present the opportunity to make recommendations for improving election systems in a spirit of partnership. Support may also contribute to conflict prevention. Effective EU support requires a coherent approach through mutually reinforcing use of both EC and CFSP instruments. The effectiveness of electoral assistance programmes and observation missions will be considerably increased if they are backed up by clear messages expressed through the EU's political dialogue with the government. The Council finds it constructive to differentiate between electoral assistance and election observation. The need for co-ordination and time limits vary considerably. The EU needs to develop different but complementary approaches. Close coordination between the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and Member States in the pre-election assessment and analysis of political context is important. The Council will seek to establish jointly with the Commission a list of elections in which EU intervention is considered a priority. The list will be discussed with the European Parliament. These priorities should be kept under regular review throughout the year to ensure that political developments are taken into account. On election assistance, specific actions should include institutional capacity-building with regard to organising future elections including assistance in support of regulatory framework agreements for political parties and election finance; training and education of local staff; awareness campaigns for the rights of individuals to vote; setting up of election sites; support to domestic civil society organisations active in the election field and support for the media. On election observation, the Council encourages the Commission to provide training for observers and follow-up on creating adequate instruments in order to allow a timely response to provide accelerated decision-making and recruitment in urgent situations. The practice of appointing an experienced member of the European Parliament as the Chief Observer of an EU election mission should be encouraged. On assessment by missions, an independent assessment should be delivered to Council, Commission and Parliament. Under no circumstances may preliminary results be delivered beforehand. The Commission should further develop policy in this area, and particularly, impact indicators. The Commission will undertake an overall evaluation of EU election support within three years.