Democracy and human rights: EU election assistance and observation

2000/2137(COS) - 11/04/2000 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : to present a communication from the Commission on EU election assistance and observation. CONTENT : in recent years, European union electoral missions have grown in frequency whether under the auspices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy or within the Community context, and in particular its developemnt cooperation, but up to now the experiences gained have not been compiled systematically. An ad hoc approach no longer seems appropriate not the best use of resources. The aim of this Communication is to contribute to the definition of a coherent European policy line through a proper approach involving a strategy and methodology, taking into account lessons learned from previous experiences. It responds to a specific request by the European Parliament to the Commission to assess EU participation in election observation missions in recent years. Election assistance may be defined as the technical or material support given to the electoral process. It may imply professional help to establish a legal framework for the elections. Moreover, election observation is the political complement to election assistance. It is defined as the "purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process, and the making of informed judgements on the conduct of such a process on the basis of the information collected, by persons who are inherently authorised to intervene in the process". Although the EU has gained significant experience in election observation and assistance in the last decade, approaches ahve been diverse and the wheel has sometimes been reinvented. Some progress has been made on criteria to decide on a EU electoral observation mission and a code of conduct for observers and criteria for recruiting them. But there is still a need for a coherent strategy for handling election observation and assistance. With regard to the legal framework, future EU election assistance and observation to be undertaken exclusively under the first pillar, mainly under regulations governing relations with third countries but also using new human rights regulations. In relation to the institutions, the Commission will study the opportunity of establishing an Elections Desk with horizontal co-ordination and planning tasks, including ex-ante evaluation, to assist geographical desks and delegations and liaise with EU institutions and other bodies. In addition, appropriate arrangements on electoral observation missions should be agreed upon among by the Council, the Parliament and the Commission. In conclusion, building on previous experience and existing work, the EU should adopt a strategy which: - allows for case-by-case decisions to support and observe elections; - promotes national capacity and sustainability; - promotes pluralism and support local NGOs and local observers. The recommendations contained in this communication aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of the European Union's involvement in promoting free and fair elections and a transition to sustainable democracy bybuilding on the varied experience if EU involvement so far, and the expertise of others.