

Spanish Presidency of the European Union

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EU statement on the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan

The European Union has followed closely the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan on 28 February. We are therefore disappointed to note that, in general, despite some small positive developments in line with the stated aim of the Tajik authorities to hold more democratic and transparent elections than in 2005, these elections failed to meet many of the key OSCE commitments from the 1990 Copenhagen Document and other international standards for democratic elections.

The EU notes the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, issued by the International Election Observation Mission conducted by the OSCE/ ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament. We are pleased that the election process saw a certain level of pluralism, that Election Day passed peacefully and that the Tajik authorities willingly accommodated international observers. We recognise that the voting process itself was assessed positively in about three quarters of those polling stations visited by observers and commend the

provision of ballot papers in minority languages in areas with significant minority populations. It is also encouraging that the higher-level electoral commissions were more representative than previously and that the candidate registration process was generally inclusive.

On the other hand, and while we welcome the wide spectrum of view points expressed in print media, we are concerned by the limited range of opinions presented on national television; by the prohibitively high electoral deposit, which prevented a significant number of candidates from registering; and by the lack of transparency and accountability of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda.

We are especially troubled by the negative assessment of the counting and tabulation in more than half of the polling stations as well as by the failure by the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda to issue instructions to the lower-level election commissions. Therefore, weak control over the voting process resulted in serious irregularities. We are also concerned about the prevalence of senior local officials and members of the ruling people's Democratic Party of Tajikistan on the District Electoral Commissions and the lack of representation of other political parties on the Precinct Electoral Commissions.

Given the limited range of view points aired on the broadcast media, and the obstacles faced by an independent TV channel in using its frequency fully, it is all the more disturbing that a number of independent newspapers were faced with lawsuits during the campaign period, with substantial claims for compensation brought

by complainants representing state bodies or the judiciary creating an atmosphere of intimidation.

Furthermore, we are concerned by the observation that the complaints and appeals process lacks sufficient clarity and may discourage submission of complaints or their proper consideration. We also note that almost all the complaints submitted have been unsuccessful, without in general sufficiently reasoned decisions.

Regrettably, while the legal framework provides for equality between men and women in public and political life, with a few exceptions, women do not feature prominently in politics in Tajikistan. Women were therefore poorly represented as candidates, and also on electoral commissions.

In conclusion, despite the recommendations made in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the parliamentary elections in 2005, many issues remain unaddressed. The election law has not been substantively amended since 2004 and significant shortcomings remain. In light of these shortcomings, we encourage the Tajik authorities to give serious consideration to this new assessment and to use the observations of the International Observation Mission, and any subsequent recommendations in the forthcoming Final Report, and to undertake a serious overhaul to bring the electoral process into line with OSCE commitments.

The EU takes this opportunity to reiterate the importance we attach to the development of strong democratic institutions throughout the OSCE. In line with the EU's Strategy on Central Asia, we remain committed to supporting Tajikistan in this respect, and commend to

the Tajik authorities the valuable expertise of the ODIHR in providing assistance across the full range of electoral issues.

Los países candidatos CROACIA* y la antigua REPÚBLICA YUGOSLAVA DE MACEDONIA*, los países del Proceso de Estabilización y Asociación y los países candidatos potenciales, ALBANIA, BOSNIA Y HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO y SERBIA, los países de la Asociación Europea de Libre Comercio y los miembros del Espacio Económico Europeo, ISLANDIA y NORUEGA, se suman a esta declaración.

*Croacia y la Antigua República Yugoslava de Macedonia siguen perteneciendo al proceso de Estabilización y Asociación.