PRESS RELEASE
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EU EAT Preliminary Statement on the second round of the Presidential election

Undeterred by violence, Afghans confirmed their commitment to democracy while continued efforts are still needed to preserve people’s vote integrity

Kabul, 16 June 2014 - Thijs Berman, EU Election Assessment Team (EU EAT) Chief Observer, presented the EU EAT Preliminary Statement on the second round of the Presidential election at a press conference today in Kabul. This Preliminary Statement, which outlines the Mission’s preliminary findings, analysis and conclusions on the election to date, constitutes the second post-election assessment by the EU EAT after the one published on 7 April concerning the first round.

On 14 June, Afghan voters, undeterred by violence, showed a remarkable determination by participating in large numbers in this first ever second round in Afghanistan’s electoral history. “The world is struck by the courage of the Afghan voters, who, once again, showed us their choice, not only for a particular candidate, but also for a democratic and peaceful society”, underlines Thijs Berman. The EU EAT notes also the efforts of both candidates in deploying a large number of their representatives in the polling stations in the vast majority of the provinces.

On Election day, security challenges were high, while the campaign had been marked by a direct attack against one of the candidates. “The EU EAT strongly condemns all violent incidents perpetrated against the election process, that also led to a loss of life. Election officials, candidate representatives, domestic observers and voters that carried out their duties in such difficult circumstances are to be commended”, states Chief Observer Thijs Berman.

Notable improvements by the electoral administration to be still confirmed during tallying

The postponement of the Presidential election run-off to 14 June 2014, for logistical and technical reasons, gave the electoral administration an expanded timeframe to improve the electoral process, and to complete the production and distribution of electoral material. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has shown continuous improvement since the first round, namely by increasing cooperation and communication with candidates and other stakeholders, which positively affected the overall preparations for the run-off.

“The IEC has brought important improvements between the first and second round of these elections, voting became better accessible with more polling stations and increased transparency”, highlights Thijs Berman.

Out of the 6,365 polling centres that were planned to open initially for the run-off, the IEC’ first assessment was that 6,184 (97.15%) were able to open on Election day. This marked an increase of the number of polling locations in comparison to 6,124 polling centres in the first round.

Despite the significant increase of the number of polling stations (+12%) and ballot papers (+5%) for the run-off, the IEC was not able to fully address the issue of ballot paper shortages. The IEC did not
reduce the number of ballots in areas where over allocation of ballot papers to polling stations had been reported in the first round. The lack of a comprehensive voter register and a reliable census remains a key obstacle for the IEC in ensuring balanced distribution of ballots.

The first round tallying process illustrated the IEC’s difficulty in enforcing a transparent operational model based on existing regulations. In the first round, the IEC did not publish detailed results per polling station in a timely manner, which contributed to limiting the ability of candidates to access legal remedies. The EU EAT notes that the IEC has stated its intention to guarantee full transparency in tallying, and to publish online numerical results by polling station when announcing partial, preliminary, and final results for the second round.

Complaints In total, the IECC investigated so far 11 run-off campaign related complaints; all were dismissed. At the close of the run-off election, the IECC reported that 135 complaints were filed on Election day, with an additional 140 submitted by telephone, making a total of 275 cases.

Campaign and media The two candidates and their teams engaged in a lively run-off campaign, though fewer public events were reported than in the first round. Media provided the electorate with a high volume of election related coverage. Only 12 media houses deviated from the equal coverage policy and were accordingly censured. Women’s voices were underrepresented in the media, in comparison to the first round.

Women, observers and civil society organisations The IEC reported a minor increase from 36% to 38% in female participation in the second round. Security threats and social restrictions remained a limiting factor for women to fully participate in the run-off election. Women polling staff and searchers were particularly affected by these concerns, which added to the difficulties faced by the IEC and the Police in mobilising sufficient female staff on Election day. Security challenges faced by the national observers in the first round constrained the main organisations and led to the reduction of their geographical coverage in the field for the run-off.

“The EU Election Assessment Team remains in the country to observe post-election developments, in particular closely following the tallying process and handling of election complaints”, concludes Thijs Berman. The EU EAT will, within two months of the conclusion of the electoral process, publish a comprehensive Final report including recommendations for future elections for consideration of Afghan authorities.

The complete version of the Preliminary Statement for the second round can be downloaded from the EU EAT website on http://www.eueom.eu/eu-eat-afghanistan-2014/home?LANG=en

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