



UNIÃO EUROPEIA
MISSÃO DE OBSERVAÇÃO ELEITORAL

Eleições Presidenciais, Legislativas, Autárquicas e Regional
São Tomé e Príncipe, 19 de julho e 27 de setembro de 2026



PRESS RELEASE

Peaceful and well-conducted election day but turnout falls highlighting the need for broader citizen participation and greater inclusivity.

São Tomé, 21 July 2026 – The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in São Tomé and Príncipe 2026 presented today, at a press conference, a preliminary assessment on the observation of the 19 July presidential elections.

This statement provides a comprehensive analysis of the pre-election period, the voting day and the tally, observed in all the districts of the country and in the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, by 30 observers from 15 EU Member States as well as Canada who, on Election Day, visited 104 polling stations covering 60 per cent of the circumscriptions.

“Despite its temporary nature, the elections were efficiently organised by the National Election Commission, with materials reaching polling stations on time”, explained Mr. Sérgio Humberto, Chief Observer of the EU EOM, during the press conference. *“Election day went smoothly and peacefully, voting procedures were largely respected and integrity measures applied. However, the abstention was almost 59 per cent, an historical low voter participation for São Tomé and Príncipe”,* he added.

The EU preliminary statement highlighted that the election took place in an unprecedented context in which the two leading candidates were associated with competing factions of the ruling political party, the *Ação Democrática Independente* (ADI). The unresolved leadership dispute within ADI affected electoral competition and the broader political environment, in addition to the decision made by the other main political parties not to field their own candidates.

Mr. Humberto noted that: *“The campaign was peaceful and festive, with fundamental freedoms being respected, and candidates being able to canvass freely. No incidents were reported”.*

The EU EOM preliminary statement specified that, despite limited human and financial resources, public and private media provided adequate coverage on campaign activities. Public broadcasters offered balanced coverage and private media reported on campaign activities in a generally neutral tone. Rumours and misleading information circulated mainly through unverified social media accounts and contributed to create an uncertain online environment, which also saw personal accusations and verbal attacks between the two ADI factions.

Following the invitation of Santomean authorities, the EU EOM has been present in São Tomé and Príncipe since 14 June. The EU mission will stay in the country to observe the remainder of the electoral process and will return in September to observe parliamentary, local and regional elections

A comprehensive final report, with recommendations offered to the authorities and the public for future elections, will be issued within two months of the conclusion of the electoral processes.

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