



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

An orderly well organised legislative poll closes an electoral cycle marked by abstention and calls for judicial reform

São Tomé, 29 September 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 29 September parliamentary, local and regional elections.

“The Comissão Eleitoral Nacional ensured that preparations broadly followed the electoral calendar and maintained stakeholders’ confidence, despite delayed funding and limited resources”, said Mr. Sérgio Humberto, Chief Observer of the EU EOM, during the press conference. “Election day went orderly and peacefully, with some important aspects of the election administration improved, such as the layout of polling stations to protect the secrecy of the vote. The overall turnout seems to be comparable to that of the presidential elections in July”, he added.

The EU EOM preliminary report stated that the campaign was generally free and peaceful, with fundamental rights being upheld, even if, the first day of the campaign was marked by protests following the exclusion of MCI-PS/PUN candidates that resulted in roadblocks and arrests. Campaign-finance transparency remained limited, with no effective system for timely disclosure of income and expenditure. The elections also marked the first application of the 2022 Parity Law and increased women’s representation among candidates.

“The legal framework is largely consistent with international standards” Mr. Humberto explained, “however concerns regarding the politicisation of the judiciary have been expressed across the entire political spectrum”, he noted.

The EU EOM statement highlighted that freedom of expression and media freedom were generally respected, while public broadcasters provided contestants with allocated free airtime and radio remained the main source of electoral information. No hate speech was identified on social media.

Ms. Ana Catarina Mendes, Head of the European Parliament Delegation, which observed the polls as part of the EU EOM, declared: *“Our presence in São Tomé and Príncipe reflects a clear political commitment: democracy matters, elections matter, and citizens’ will must be respected. Election observation is a concrete expression of that commitment. It also affirms that democracy knows no borders and that its defence requires presence, dialogue and responsibility”.*

Ms. Mendes also emphasised: *“We met members of the polling stations diligently carrying out their duties, many of them women and young people. Overall, we observed a responsible and impartial performance, as well as the presence of representatives from the various political forces in the voting chambers, ensuring pluralism”.*

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Following the invitation of Santomean authorities, the EU EOM has been present in São Tomé and Príncipe since 4 September. The EU mission will stay in the country to observe the remainder of the electoral process. 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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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 49 observers from 17 EU Member States as well as Canada who, on Election Day, visited 125 polling stations covering 70 per cent of the polling centres.

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