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**STATEMENT BY Mr DARIUSZ ROSATI, HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION
TO THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION**

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE OF 31 MARCH 2019

Kiev, 01 April 2019

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you today on behalf of the European Parliament delegation, and to thank you for your interest in our observation.

My first thoughts and words should go for the Ukrainian people. They demonstrated their strong commitment to democracy and freedom, and we want to praise them for that. They invited and welcome us, and came in so high numbers to the polling stations, notably women and young voters, to fulfil their duties and have a say on their future. The outcome of yesterday's vote is still provisional, but I would like to emphasise the importance for all actors, from candidates to supporters and voters, to respect the electoral process, accept in good faith the upcoming results and use only legal means to contest them.

As concerns the whole electoral process, the European Parliament's delegation subscribes to the statement on preliminary findings and conclusions that is being presented today. I take this opportunity to thank all those present here for our good and successful cooperation. I would like to complement some parts of our joint statement in order for all of us to get a clear understanding of what is at stake.

First of all, we do mention the challenging context in which these elections took place, notably as regards the situation in Crimea and in some eastern parts of Ukraine's territory. Let's face the reality, and call a spade a spade: Ukraine is at war since Russia sent troops to annex Crimea, has occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and continuously provides all military and political backing and support to the separatists. The direct consequences are, so far, 13.000 casualties, hundreds of thousands wounded, millions of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, massive violations of Human Rights, humanitarian catastrophe, devastation and destruction: this is the context of these elections, and we should all bear this in mind.

This election was definitely competitive, since no candidate could be clearly identified as the probable winner. The choice of candidates was, to say the least, vast and diverse, representing a wide spectrum of political alternatives, although only 5 out of 39 were women.

It was, however, not flawless : the unified electoral code could not be adopted on time, despite long standing commitment of a majority of Ukrainian actors to deliver swiftly on the matter; cases of vote-buying and of misuse of administrative resources have been reported; the neutrality of some high State officials is questioned, because of their campaign activities; the clearly imbalanced and unequal access of candidates to media is unfortunately reinforced by biased coverage of certain candidates and of the campaign; no genuine debate took place between the candidates; and it remained too cumbersome, lengthy and complicated for too many voters to register or cast their votes, from internal labour migrants to Ukrainians living abroad. We sincerely expect this to be remedied in time for the parliamentary elections later this year.

We also have to stress that disinformation played an important role in this campaign: although one cannot assess and quantify precisely the impact of disinformation on voters, we know that internal and external influences and interferences have played an important role in the way candidates were portrayed as well as their intentions and programmes presented. These disinformation campaigns together with targeted cyber-attacks serve one goal: to delegitimise this election, and, hence, to tarnish the legitimacy of the winner and of future presidential actions and decisions. I am convinced the Ukrainians and the international community will not fall in this trap!

As regards the next steps, it is my pleasure to confirm you that a delegation from the European Parliament will come and observe the second round. In three weeks' time, a new presidential mandate will start. Together with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which will also soon be renewed, the

President will have to pursue and amplify the long awaited and long needed reforms that have been inspired and pushed forward in the wake of the Revolution of Dignity. The appetite for reform and concrete actions in the field of the fight against corruption is immense, and the Ukrainians deserve that this is addressed without further delay. The European Parliament will, in this regard, continue its privileged and unique cooperation with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, for the benefit of the Ukrainian people.

Thank you !

The European Parliament delegation was composed of 6 Members (Mr Dariusz Rosati, EPP, Poland), Ms Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (EPP, Sweden), Ms Anna Gomes (S&D, Portugal), Mr Josef Weidenholzer (S&D, Austria), Mr Valentinas Mazuronis (ALDE, Lithuania) and Ms Rebecca Harms (Greens/EFA, Germany). The delegation was integrated into the International Election Observation Mission led by the OSCE-ODIHR, and observed the voting in Kiev, Lviv and Odessa.