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**ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION TO
THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
IN TIMOR LESTE
(22 July 2017)**

**Report by
Ana Gomes, Chair of the EP Delegation**

Annexes:

- A. List of participants**
- B. European Parliament Election Observation Delegation Statement**
- C. EU Election Observation Mission Preliminary findings and conclusions**

Introduction:

Following an invitation from the Timor Leste authorities, the Conference of Presidents authorised the sending of a delegation to observe both presidential (20 March) and parliamentary elections in Timor Leste in 2017. The 4 members delegation to the parliamentary elections, integrated into the EU EOM led by Ms Bilbao Barandica as Chief Observer, was chaired by Ana Gomes (S&D, PT) and composed of José Ignacio Faria (EPP, PT), Immaculada Rodriguez-Pinero Fernandez (S&D, ES) and Nikolay Barekov (ECR, BG).

The usual programme was organised for the EP delegation: briefings from the Core Team, meetings with representatives from the main political parties, with the authorities, with the central election management bodies, with representatives from the media and the civil society, with academics, and with national and international observers.

The context of the 2017 elections:

Timor-Leste's 2017 elections coincide with the country's 15th-year celebration of independence. Following the young state's fourth presidential elections in March, in which Francisco Guterres (Lú-Olo) was elected after only one round, these parliamentary elections were the third since the United Nations-supervised referendum on independence from Indonesia in 1999. The 2012 general elections saw four parties pass the 3% (subsequently changed to 4%) threshold to enter parliament: CNRT (National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction), led by Xanana Gusmão; FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor), headed by Lú-Olo; the Democratic Party (PD), led by Mariano Sabino; and Fretilm (F-M), led by José Luis Guterres.

As a reminder, the March Presidential elections took place in a calm environment with no other serious incidents. A number of campaign programmes lacked substance, and several candidates made policy proposals and promises that went beyond presidential functions. A notable feature of the campaign was the influence of suco chiefs, who facilitated political party meetings not on the CNE calendar. Existing legislation sets no limits on the funding and services candidates may accept as donations or spend on campaigning.

As this was the case for the previous elections, former

The emergence of a new party, the PLP, led by outgoing President Taur Matan Ruak, was also an important element in the campaign and focused attention on the July legislative elections.

In the months before the election there had been a number of government initiated amendments to the legal framework for elections. In particular the supervisory mandate of the National Election Commission (CNE) had been reduced and it had become more politicised. The EU EOM noted that some of these amendments had been introduced very

late and had therefore created uncertainty and diminished confidence in the legal framework. Full details are provided in the report of the EU EOM - attached.

Pre-electoral environment

In the run-up to the campaign, the EU EOM observers noted that FRETILIN and the CNRT held "consolidation events" aimed at promoting party affiliation, especially among young people. With the exception of Francisco "Lú-Olo" Guterres and António Conceição, campaign activities got off to a low-key start before 3 March. An estimated 3,000 people attended Lú-Olo's opening rally in Ermera. Approximately 2,000 attended Conceição's on Sunday 5 March. In contrast to Lú-Olo's speech, in which he focused on geo-politics and international relations and the improving relationship between the police and military, Conceição talked to voters about improving living conditions, reducing poverty and bringing an end to corruption.

Long Term Observers (LTOs) across the country reported that all party campaigns were being directed from Dili, with many coordinator offices waiting for money and instructions from the capital. It was evident that FRETILIN, which was providing T-shirts and flags for campaign events, had greater financial resources than the PD. The PD reported that while it would organise some rallies, its principal campaign methods would be community meetings and door-to-door canvassing. The main political parties had well-developed strategies to target young people, however reports showed a low proportion of women working for these parties.

The EP delegation met six of the eight candidates, including the eventual winner and the second placed candidate. Meetings also took place with Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araújo, with Aderito Hugo da Costa, Speaker of the National Assembly, with Sakharov Prize laureate and former President & former Prime Minister "Xanana" Gusmao, with Nobel Peace Prize winner and former President & former Prime Minister José Ramos-Horta, with heads of the election administrations, with the Bishop of Baucau (Baucau team only), and with representatives from the civil society. Prior to the official start of the programme, the Chair and one other member attended the only televised debate between the eight candidates.

Election Day

The EP delegation split into two teams on election day, travelling to Dili-Aileu and Dili-Gleno, and observing closing in Dili.

The elections have taken place in a smooth and peaceful manner.

They considered that the election administration had generally worked smoothly and transparently at all levels. They welcomed the high level of young people and women working as officials in the polling stations.

However, the MEPs were concerned about the very limited number of domestic observers in the polling stations on election day and called on the EU and the wider international

community to provide greater capacity support to civil society, including assistance in promoting the empowerment of women and young people.

The delegation also noted that polling centre officials very rarely made a point of checking the ink on voters' fingers, although this was the only way to ensure there was no double voting. The MEPs did not consider that this was the result of any misunderstanding of the procedures on the part of the staff of the polling stations but was mainly an indication that the procedures themselves were not clear enough. Although the delegation did not believe that this had an impact on the results, they considered that this point needed to be addressed in advance of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Press conference and the EU EOM preliminary statement

The EU EOM and EP press conference took place on 24 July 2017. The Head of the EP delegation fully endorsed the points made by Ms Bilbao Barandica and the conclusions of the EU EOM. In her statement, Ana Gomes commended the remarkable progress made by Timor Leste over the last 10 years, with a very satisfactory level of management of the electoral process, together with commendable involvement of the population and the encouraging trust and confidence of the citizens in democracy and the rule of law.

She also reiterated some of her main messages delivered at this occasion of the presidential elections, and urged the Timorese authorities to deliver, now that the electoral cycle is completed until the next 4-5 years:

- the issue of political party financing and notably, first and foremost, the transparency of funding sources to allow an informed choice by the citizens.
- the fair access to the media, to ensure a level playing field between candidates or parties
- the unsatisfactory place of gender equality on the political and social agenda in Timor Leste

She also invited the newly elected Assembly, on behalf of the EP delegation, to keep sustainable development and youth very high on the agenda for the next five years.

Post-election day developments

FRETILIN of President Lu-Olo narrowly emerged as the largest party, with 23 seats out of 65, followed by CNRT of former President Xanana Gusmão with 22 seats. The three other parties entering the Parliament are the People's Liberation Party of former President Ruak, the Democratic Party and the Khunto.

	Votes	%	seats	Difference / 2012
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Fretilin	168,480	29.7	23	-2
CNRT	167,345	29.5	22	-8
PLP	60,098	10.6	8	New
Democratic Party	55,608	9.8	7	-1
Khunto	36,547	6.4	5	+5

The post-electoral atmosphere has been reported to be peaceful, with all political parties and their candidates accepting the final results. The media reported extensively on the EU EOM's preliminary statement.

Following intense negotiations between parties represented in the Parliament, and the resignation of Xanana Gusmao from the CNRT leadership, Mari Alkatiri (Fretilin) formed a minority government supported by Fretilin and PD (30 seats out of 65), and sworn in in September 2017. Alkatiri II Government (Alkatiri I was in charge 2002-2007) noticeably includes, amongst others, M.Ramos Horta (former President 2007-2012), M.Araujo (former Prime Minister 2015-2017) and Antonio da Conceição (former Presidential candidate). for this first time since 2007, Xanana Gusmao is not part of the Government.

**ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN TIMOR LESTE**

22 JULY 2017

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Members

1. Ana GOMES, S&D, Portugal - Chair
2. José Inácio FARIA, EPP, Portugal
3. Inmaculada RODRÍGUEZ-PIÑERO FERNÁNDEZ, S&D, Spain
4. Nikolay BAREKOV, ECR, Bulgaria

Annex B

**Statement by Ana Gomes
Head of the EP election observation delegation
to the parliamentary elections in Timor-Leste, 22 July 2017**

Dili, 24 July 2017

Our delegation is delighted to be back in Dili having observed the Presidential elections earlier this year. You know how closely the European Parliament follows developments in your country and how committed we are to stand by your side.

It has been an honour for me to lead our four-Member delegation. As you know, this delegation was integrated within the framework of the EU Election Observation Mission led by my colleague Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, who is also a Member of the European Parliament. As Chair of the European Parliament delegation, I would like to underline that we fully subscribe to the statement Ms Bilbao has just delivered, and to its conclusions.

Yesterday was the fourth time I personally observed elections in Timor-Leste, having been here in 2007, 2012 and in March this year for the presidential elections. I can only underline that remarkable progress has been made in the last ten years. We are now witnessing a very satisfactory level of management of the electoral process, together with commendable involvement of the population and the encouraging trust and confidence of the citizens in democracy and the rule of law. This is notable for a country which gained its independence so recently, and reassuring for a country with such a young population. We note and welcome the high level of voter participation. I also take the opportunity to commend the serious and genuine efforts shown by the

CNE and the STAE in considering and successfully implementing recommendations made with a view to improving the electoral process.

Following the conclusions made by our colleague Ms Bilbao, I would like to raise a few issues which should require the full attention of the authorities that will lead Timor-Leste for the next five years.

First and foremost, it is worth reiterating what was highlighted in the framework of the presidential elections: the issue of political party financing. Even before envisaging a regulatory framework for such financing, namely establishing a limit to donations, it is of vital importance for the Timorese authorities to tackle meaningfully and without delay the issue of the transparency of funding sources. The Timorese deserve to know how their political parties are financed in order to be in a position to make an informed choice in the elections.

In this regard, the adoption of the anti-corruption law would represent a positive step in the right direction, notably by ensuring the disclosure and public control of personal assets of Members of Parliament and of the government, thus improving confidence of the Timorese people in their representatives.

This is all the more relevant for another aspect that should deserve the full attention of the authorities, namely fair access to the media. A level playing field must be ensured between all parties or candidates, guaranteeing that access to the media is not constrained or defined by the financing capacities of these parties or candidates. Not taking decisive action in this direction could affect the quality of Timorese democracy in the long run.

I would also like to complement some remarks by the Chief Observer on the specific issue of the absence of official publication of candidate lists: even though the main stakeholders do not consider that this hindered transparency of the electoral process, it could nonetheless be detrimental to the representation of women in the parliament, despite the existing law on the matter.

In this connection, through discussions with various stakeholders, we came to the conclusion that gender equality is not high enough on the political and social agenda. This needs to be addressed to ensure that women's and children's rights become a reality in both private and public spheres, and the European Union stands ready to help.

In addition, I would like to share with you some of our reflections, based on the discussions we had with political parties and civil society representatives.

One is the importance of an effective opposition in a national parliament. The quality of democracy in Timor-Leste, as elsewhere, depends on the performance of the opposition, as much as on the functioning of the government.

Secondly, we note that the sustainable development of Timor-Leste remains the central focus of the debate. Throughout our meetings, the strategy options for Timorese society and economy were raised, involving concerns about the longer term. Timor-Leste has impressive assets on which to base a sustainable development strategy: besides oil and gas, there are other natural resources that could enable diversification and development of the economy, such as marine resources, renewable sources of energy, and agricultural development to meet food security needs. Investing in basic infrastructure and boosting connections within the country would aid this strategy.

But the most important asset of Timor-Leste is, without doubt, its people. Timor-Leste is fortunate to have a growing young population, but that poses specific challenges since the youth have particular needs and aspirations regarding education, capacity and job opportunities. Investing in education and health is the most strategic choice any country can make. And here in Timor-Leste, education involves improving literacy in the official languages, which is also essential for the functioning of the State.

We stand by the Timorese people and its authorities in these times of important decisions for the future of their country.