

DELEGATION TO OBSERVE
THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN MAURITANIA
(11 and 25 March 2007)

**Report by Mr Alain HUTCHINSON,
Head of delegation**

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26 March 2007

Following a recommendation by the election coordination group, the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament decided on 15 February 2007 to send a delegation to Mauritania to observe the presidential elections on 11 March and 25 March 2007.

In accordance with their own rules, the political groups in the European Parliament appointed the following Members for the **first round** of the elections:

- Mr Alain HUTCHINSON (PSE, Belgium)
- Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS (PPE, Latvia)
- Mr Ryszard CZARNECKI (UEN, Poland)

The following Members were appointed for the **second round** of the elections:

- Mr Alain HUTCHINSON (PSE, Belgium)
- Mrs Marie-Arlette CARLOTTI (PSE, France)
- Mr Mario MANTOVANI (PPE, Italy)
- Mr Ryszard CZARNECKI (UEN, Poland)

The delegation held its constitutive meeting on 1 March 2007 in Brussels and appointed as its chairman Mr Alain Hutchinson, who had already chaired Parliament's delegation to observe the parliamentary and municipal elections in November 2006. It discussed the schedule for the mission and political developments in the country since the last observation mission.

The delegation visited Mauritania from 9 to 13 March and from 23 to 27 March 2007. It worked in close collaboration with the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), particularly the head of the mission, Marie Anne Isler Beguin. The delegation met Mrs Isler Beguin several times, and her suggestions were duly incorporated into the preliminary statement. At the press conferences after each of the two rounds of the elections, the head of the delegation published a press release jointly with the EOM (Annex II).

The delegation met the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the ambassadors of the EU Member States and the main candidates before the first round and the two remaining candidates on the eve of the second round. The head of the delegation met the transitional President, Colonel Ely Ould Mohammed Vall, before the first round; Mrs Carlotti met him before the second round.

On the basis of these meetings, this report briefly analyses the political situation in Mauritania with reference to the elections, before describing the actual observation of the elections. It concludes with an outline of the political outlook after the elections and presents recommendations to the European Parliament.

1. Brief analysis of the political situation in Mauritania

The presidential elections of 11 and 25 March represent the final *electoral* stage of the democratic transition process following the coup d'état of 3 August 2005. The other stages were the adoption by referendum of a revised Constitution in July 2006, whose flagship measure was limiting the presidency to 5 years, renewable only once, and the holding of parliamentary and municipal elections in November/December 2006 and of elections to the Senate in January 2007.

During consultations with the European Union pursuant to Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the transitional government - the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCJD) - headed by Colonel Ely Ould Mohammed Vall, had given 23 undertakings concerning the restoration of democracy, including the holding of elections within a fixed period, neutrality of the members of the MCJD during the transitional period, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, respect for the rule of law and sound management of public affairs.

The European Union has monitored the transition process very closely, particularly by sending an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to the parliamentary/municipal elections in 2006 and the presidential elections in March 2007. On each of these occasions, the EOM was reinforced by a delegation from the European Parliament.

In the immediate aftermath of the presidential elections, it seems that the promises made by the MCJD have on the whole been kept. The African Union, which had suspended Mauritania's membership after the coup d'état, readmitted the country on 12 April 2007.

The presidential elections saw fierce competition between two major political forces, one being that of the former regime of Ould Taya, which by and large supported the elected president Abdullahi, and the other being that of a large part of the former opposition, united behind Ahmed Ould Daddah. However, this simplistic description conceals the complexity of Mauritanian politics, which is increased by the existence of a large number of independent candidates. This phenomenon, which goes back to the eve of the parliamentary elections and which was suspected of being a cover for the possible return of the former forces of the Taya regime, also characterised the presidential elections.

Even if the formal transition is completed, with the investiture of the new president and the formation of the new Parliament in the next few weeks, the challenges which remain in order to consolidate democracy remain substantial.

The new President will have to forge a national consensus on the political priorities for the near future. Mauritania has long suffered from internal divisions, and the present climate of political liberalisation could easily lead to political chaos.

Another challenge is that of rebuilding Mauritanian society, which is governed by tribal and clan allegiances, and applying the standards of a modern State in the process. This task includes the 'humanitarian liability' - a euphemism for slavery, which has formally been abolished, and its after-effects.

The army has returned power to civilians, but its future role in the State and relationship with the political authorities remain to be determined.

The major challenge facing the country will be that of combating poverty and distributing more fairly the fruits of an economic upturn, particularly thanks to oil revenues.

There are also legitimate fears that the old regime may return to power by democratic means, fears which relate less to individuals than to former practices such as misgovernment and corruption.

2. The elections and observation proper

Deployment:

	1st round	2nd round
Alain HUTCHINSON	Nouadhibou and Nouakchott	Chinguetti, Ouadane
Ryszard CZARNECKI	Participation cancelled for medical reasons	Chinguetti, Ouadane
Valdis DOMBROVSKIS	Atar and district	
Marie-Arlette CARLOTTI		Ouâd Nâga, Nouakchott
Marco MANTOVANI		Ouâd Nâga, Nouakchott

Conduct of the elections

a. First round on 11 March 2007

Results: no real surprises

With 19 candidates standing, a certain dispersal of the vote was inevitable. The two most successful candidates, who therefore qualified for the second round, were Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi (25%), supported fairly openly by the political bosses of the old regime of Taya, and Ahmed Ould Daddah (20.68%), President of the 'Rally of Democratic Forces'.

In third place was Zein Ould Zeidane, the former governor of the Mauritanian Central Bank, the youngest of the candidates (aged 41), who had campaigned actively; he secured 15% of the vote and accepted the results. Observers on the spot believe that he could play an important role in future.

Next came Messaoud Ould Boulkheir (10%), the representative of the Harratine community ('Black Moors' - former slaves), and Saleh Ould Hanana (7.65%), representing the 'forces of change' and the Eastern tribes, regarded as a 'moderate Islamist' (he is calling for relations with Israel to be broken off). Both are members of the 'Coalition for Change', and their voters were expected to transfer their allegiance to Ould Daddah, the same being true of most of the Peuls who had voted for Ibrahima Sarr (8%), for whom the 'humanitarian liability', of which the black population is the victim, was a big issue, and of the progressive voters supporting Mohamed Ould Maouloud (4%), a member of the Coalition for Change, who suffered from tactical voting for Daddah.

All the other candidates polled less than 2%, including the former President of the Republic, Ould Haidalla (1.73%).

Validity of the poll

Observers, particularly the European Parliament's mission, chaired by Mr Hutchinson, drawing on the work of the European Union EOM (which visited 26% of polling stations), but also the

observer missions from the International Organisation for the French-Speaking World, the African Union, the Arab League and civil society, both Mauritanian and African, all stated that the election had been well organised, free and transparent, observed by representatives of many candidates, without excessive interference from the administration. As the Constitutional Council did not receive any complaints from the candidates who had been eliminated, it validated the results.

Technical problems

As a fresh census had been held since the parliamentary elections, new voting cards were printed. Nearly half of them had not been claimed by their intended recipients, giving rise to fears of delays during voting.

In reality, the delegation observed that people who did not have their cards knew their serial number, which made it possible to find them easily. The abstention rate was 30%, corresponding to the proportion of cards not claimed by the end of the day.

During the parliamentary elections, many voting cards had been cancelled because the Arabic letter B (meaning 'has voted') was not written correctly (in a country with a 50% illiteracy rate). This time, instructions had been issued to ensure that greater flexibility was exercised, and there was no problem.

A fundamental problem: the inequality of the resources available to the candidates

The inequality of resources among the candidates (particularly between the three who polled the most votes and the rest) was visible and obvious. We even heard accusations that candidates had received financing from abroad.

By law, there is a ceiling on campaign financing and a requirement for it to be transparent, but no implementing decrees exist and no one seemed to believe that the rules were being applied.

While the military junta, as such, honoured its promise to remain neutral, some of its members, including the head of the presidential guard, made little effort to hide their preference for the candidate who ended in first place.

Kaedi: an isolated problem and a worrying start?

On the evening of the results, shots were fired outside the local government building of Kaedi prefecture (to the south of the capital), killing one member of the army and wounding several others. The car - fortunately empty - in which the EOM observers had been travelling was hit by submachine-gun fire. As it was not possible to identify the assailants, there was speculation about a possible repeat of this incident or even worse during the second round, which might even render it impossible to transfer power to the elected President. In the end, these fears proved unfounded.

b. Second round on 25 March 2007

On 25 March, for the first time in the history of Mauritania, a second round of presidential elections was held. Another innovation was the first televised debate (also relayed by radio) between the two candidates. It was not a real debate, being conducted more 'side to side' than 'face to face', but nothing like it had been seen before and it could set a precedent and be taken further in time.

Results

The high turnout (71%) indicates that the people of Mauritania retain their confidence in the democratic process despite the number of elections which have been held in recent months.

The results of the first round could have encouraged supporters of Ould Daddah to believe that their candidate could win. The main doubt, however, concerned the behaviour of voters who had not voted for either of the candidates who progressed to the second round (65%).

Between the two rounds, the leader of the 'Harratines', Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, who had polled 10%, defected to the forces of the 'grand coalition' and probably influenced the result in favour of Sidi Ould Abdellahi, who won the election with 52.85% of the vote. The losing candidate, Ould Daddah, did not contest the election of the new President, whom he congratulated, thereby enhancing the newly elected President's legitimacy. However, the EU EOM had observed certain problems with the 'hiring' of identity cards (for long enough to vote) and obstruction of voters' transport.

Technical problems

The problems already mentioned with reference to the first round were not resolved: lack of transparency and of compliance with the ceilings on campaign spending, 'release' of officials for campaigning purposes, poor writing of the letter indicating that a voter had voted or poor stamping of the equivalent emblem, rendering ballots invalid. But this was only a marginal phenomenon and could not call into question the final result.

3. Prospects and recommendations

Although the winner's team includes many men who belonged to the old regime, it is possible to hope that certain changes which took place during the transitional period will remain in force: liberalisation of the press, transparency of public accounts, an end to privileges for those close to the levers of power.

In order to be elected and to garner the votes of the 'Harratines', the new President had to make promises in the social field and concerning the 'humanitarian liability'. In this spirit, he announced the formation of a government of national unity as soon as he was elected.

Nonetheless, the interests of the 'nomenklatura' and of the military hierarchy will probably be upheld by the new regime or, as one European ambassador said to the Parliament delegation, 'nothing will change: the blacks will do the work, while the Moors will call the shots and draw up the accounts'.

The delegation found that its election observation missions had helped to instil esteem and respect for the European Parliament in Mauritania. This makes it necessary to continue its political commitment after the formal transitional period and to work to consolidate democracy so as to ensure that there is a substantive transition and establish genuine democratic traditions. The European Parliament should seek dialogue with the Mauritanian Parliament as soon as it is constituted and should verify the progress made on the ground by sending a delegation at an appropriate time.

ANNEX I: Schedule

First round

Friday, 9 March 2007

- 15.30 Arrival in Nouakchott and transfer to hotel
 MERCURE
 Tel. (222) 529.50.50
 Fax (222) 529.50.55
 160 avenue Gamal Abd el-Nasser
 BP 2391
 Nouakchott
- 18.00 Briefing with Mrs Marie-Anne Isler-Béguin, Chief observer of the Election Observation Mission of the European Union (EU EOM), the Core Team of the EU EOM, the head of the European Commission delegation and representatives of three Member States (France, Germany and Spain)
Place: European Commission Delegation
- 19.30 Briefing by members of the Core Team on the presidential elections
Place: EU Election Observation Mission

Saturday, 10 March 2007

Meetings with the various candidates for the election and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Departure of the teams for Nouadhibou and Aleg

- Nouadhibou: Mr Hutchinson, MEP, Mr Krauss and Mr Vallin, secretariat, one interpreter

- Aleg: Mr Dombrovskis, MEP, Mrs Staub, secretariat, one interpreter

Sunday, 11 March 2007

- 07.00 Opening of polling stations; observation of elections
 Team in Nouakchott: Mr Czarnecki, Mrs Walelign, one interpreter
 Teams in Nouadhibou and Aleg
- 19.00 Closure of polling stations

Monday, 12 March 2007

- Return of teams from Nouadhibou and Aleg
- 17.00 Debriefing of the various teams by the election observation delegation

Exchange of views between the delegation and (a) the EU EOM concerning the preliminary statement and (b) the representatives of Member States

Place: German Embassy

Tuesday, 13 March 2007

Departure of the delegation

Second round

Friday, 23 March 2007

15.30 Arrival in Nouakchott and transfer to hotel
MERCURE
Tel. (222) 529.50.50
Fax (222) 529.50.55
160 avenue Gamal Abd el-Nasser
BP 2391
Nouakchott

Briefing with Mrs Marie-Anne Isler-Béguin, Chief observer of the Election Observation Mission of the European Union (EU EOM), the head of the European Commission delegation and representatives of three Member States (France, Germany and Spain)

Place: European Commission Delegation

Briefing by members of the Core Team on the presidential elections

Place: EU Election Observation Mission

Saturday, 24 March 2007

Meetings with the candidates Ahmed Ould Daddah and Sidi Mohamed Ould Sheikh Abdellahi

Deployment of teams

Sunday, 25 March 2007

07.00 Opening of polling stations; observation of elections

19.00 Closure of polling stations

Monday, 26 March 2007

Return of teams deployed

Debriefing of the various teams by the election observation delegation

Exchange of views between the delegation and (a) the EU EOM concerning the preliminary statement and (b) the representatives of the Member States

Place: German Ambassador's residence

20.00

Dinner hosted by the EP delegation for the head of the EU election observation mission, members of his team, representatives of the Member States and the head of the European Commission delegation

Place: Hotel Mercure

Tuesday, 27 March 2007

Departure of delegation

ANNEX II: Press release



EUROPEAN UNION Election Observation Mission Mauritania 2007

PRESS RELEASE

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), headed by Marie-Anne Isler Béguin, has observed the democratic transition process in Mauritania since the parliamentary and municipal elections in November and December 2006.

The delegation of Members of the European Parliament attached to the EU EOM, chaired by Alain Hutchinson, MEP, supported the work of the EU EOM and closely monitored the transition from its inception. The second round of the presidential elections on 25 March is the final electoral stage in this process.

The EU EOM observes that the poll again proceeded calmly and undisturbed.

The EU EOM, which, on this occasion, deployed 80 observers covering 622 of the polling stations, i.e. 26% of them, did not observe any serious incidents. The minor problems noted did not vitiate the poll.

With regard to the procedure, the EU EOM welcomes the expertise displayed by the officers manning the polling stations in performing their respective tasks. The constant efforts of the authorities and of the INEC to ensure the proper conduct of the elections throughout the country's territory bore fruit, in particular, in the form of better display of the electoral roll outside polling stations and a reduction in the number of invalid ballots.

The European observers particularly wish to stress that the transitional authorities displayed respect for the commitments they had entered into, and that the people of Mauritania were clearly very determined to establish genuine democracy.

For the first time since their country gained its independence, the people of Mauritania were able to freely elect their President by means of a genuinely pluralistic, democratic and transparent election.

The European observers congratulate the people of Mauritania, the elected President and all the candidates, who, in both the first and second rounds, accepted democratically the results of the polls.

The European observers anticipate that the transfer of power will proceed satisfactorily. They encourage all involved in the country's politics to continue to consolidate democracy, respecting the established constitutional framework.

Throughout the various stages of the elections, the European observers were very well received and established good cooperative relations with the authorities. The European observers particularly wish to thank the people of Mauritania and the country's politicians, who displayed confidence in them.

Nouakchott, 29 March 2007

ANNEX III: Preliminary statement of 14 March 2007



EUROPEAN UNION Election Observation Mission Mauritania 2007 PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The first round of the presidential elections was held on 11 March in an atmosphere of calm, transparently and in accordance with the established procedures. The organisation of the second round would benefit greatly if face-to-face debates were held and the rules on monitoring of campaign financing were implemented properly.

Nouakchott, 14 March 2007

At the invitation of the Mauritanian authorities, the European Commission decided to send an election observation mission (the EU EOM) to observe the two rounds of the presidential elections on 11 and 25 March 2007. The EU EOM is headed by Marie Anne Isler Béguin, Member of the European Parliament.

The EU EOM has been in Mauritania since 2 February 2007 and will remain in the country until 14 April 2007. The mission is operating in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation of 27 October 2005. This long-term observation covers all stages of the electoral process and is intended to promote transparency, the credibility of the elections and the confidence of those participating in the process.

During the first round of the presidential elections, the EU EOM has deployed 80 observers, nationals of 19 of the 27 Member States of the European Union and Switzerland, in the thirteen wilayas in the country. A European Parliament delegation led by Alain Hutchinson joined the EU EOM and endorses this statement. The 80 observers will be kept in readiness until the second round of the elections on 25 March 2007.

During polling day, the EOM observers visited 625 polling stations, thus covering more than 26% of the 2378 polling stations. The mission will continue to observe the election contest and to assess the political landscape and the preparations for the second round.

Summary

- The presidential elections constitute the final stage in the process of emergence from the transitional regime established after the coup d'état on 3 August 2005. They are proceeding in accordance with the timetable initially established.
- The legal provisions governing the elections accord with international standards, despite the persistence of certain shortcomings.
- Some 1 130 604 voters were invited to cast their votes at 2378 polling stations. A fresh, complementary electoral census held in January helped to make the electoral roll more complete. It is now regarded as reliable and relatively exhaustive.
- Nineteen candidates, all men, stood for election, giving voters a real choice. The submission of nominations and the procedure for resolving disagreements about eligibility were conducted in accordance with the law in force.

- The election campaign proceeded calmly. The freedom of expression and freedom of movement of the candidates were not obstructed, and there were very few incidents, which were moreover of very limited scope.
- The material and financial resources available to the candidates were clearly very unequal. The rules on monitoring of, and ceilings on, campaign spending were not applied.
- Despite the commitments given by the transitional authorities, the election campaign took place without any liberalisation of broadcasting, the public monopoly on radio and television remaining in force. The public media gave the candidates equal access to their services and provided relatively neutral coverage of the campaign. Some private media organs provided partisan coverage in favour of particular candidates, while others adhered to stricter ethical rules.
- The High Authority for the Press and Broadcasting (HAPA) played only a small role in this campaign, confining itself to making free slots available to the candidates, in the absence of a genuine political debate. The complaints about television by certain candidates did not yield any concrete results.
- The Ministry of the Interior organised the polls efficiently and distributed materials in time. The administration behaved neutrally.
- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) carried out its supervisory task dynamically and actively and stepped up its measures to cultivate awareness among voters.
- Apart from one serious incident in Kaédi during the consolidation of the results, polling day passed calmly, and the procedures in force were respected. The count and the calculation of the results were held transparently and without major difficulties.
- Some further technical and administrative improvements ought to be made (design of report forms, personal signature of the electoral roll, arrangements for marking ballot papers, wider distribution of voting cards, display of the electoral roll outside polling stations, immediate publication of the results by polling station).
- The national observers performed useful duties, although limited to polling day. The candidates had numerous representatives at most polling stations, adding to the scrutiny and transparency of the elections.

Political environment

The presidential elections were held in an open political environment and one which had become peaceful since the coup of 3 August 2005. They were held in accordance with the commitments given by the transitional authorities to the European Union and with the original timetable for them. After the constitutional referendum of 25 June 2006 and the municipal and parliamentary elections, these presidential elections constituted the last stage in the process of emergence from the transition period and the establishment of democratic institutions.

19 candidates representing a wide range of opinion and political views contested the elections in a calm atmosphere in which the candidates' freedom of expression and movement was respected.

The authorities and the administration generally behaved neutrally, as required. The Ministry of the Interior and the administrative authorities as a whole performed their role as organisers of the elections while remaining neutral and impartial.

The equitable character of the electoral contest ought in future to be enhanced by holding genuine intellectual debates and by means of effective scrutiny of campaign financing.

The legal framework of the elections

On the whole, the legal framework of the presidential elections complies with the main international standards for democratic elections, despite the persistence of shortcomings.

The major legislative reforms introduced before the elections, during the transition period, the limit on the number of consecutive terms which the President may serve, the ineligibility of the transitional authorities, the establishment of an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the adoption of the single ballot paper constituted guarantees of the pluralism and transparency of the elections.

The law on the financing of political parties was completed, shortly before the previous elections, by adopting rules instituting arrangements to limit and monitor campaign spending. The provisions in question are fairly comprehensive and include a ceiling on spending as well as requiring candidates to manage the financing of their campaigns transparently and provisions on the appointment of a financial agent and monitoring committees. Despite the unquestionable progress which this new legislation represents, no machinery was actually created to carry out this monitoring in practice.

The experience of the parliamentary and municipal elections led to certain procedural improvements, particularly regarding the rules on the interpretation of the marking of the single ballot paper, which had been too strict and had resulted in a large number of ballot papers being declared invalid. The relaxation of these rules made it possible to reflect voters' wishes more accurately during the first round of the presidential elections, but in view of the persistence of difficulties, consideration should be given to the possibility of simplifying the actual methods of marking the ballot paper.

The immediate publication of the results with a breakdown per polling station, and the individual signing of the electoral roll are essential safeguards to ensure the transparency and integrity of the polls and should be incorporated into the legal provisions.

In the absence of a unified electoral code, the legal provisions applicable remain difficult to ascertain because of their dispersal in different legislative instruments which have been amended ad hoc and sometimes incompletely. A number of important provisions remain imprecise, particularly those concerning the duties and functioning of vote-counting committees or the procedure for referring administrative disputes to the INEC.

Administration of the elections

Ministry of the Interior. The fundamental guarantees of the reliability and and transparency of the polls and of the count were in place. The Ministry of the Interior worked very effectively and demonstrated a concern for greater transparency of the conduct of the elections. It displayed creativity, particularly in responding to the slowness with which the new voting cards were distributed or to prevent 'carroussel' fraud by requiring ballot papers to be signed. The neutrality of the administrative authorities was only rarely called into question by the conduct of these elections. However, improvements could be made to the design and use of the report on the elections in order to make it a more effective tool for monitoring them.

INEC. The Independent National Electoral Commission took advantage of the experience gained during the previous elections and performed its supervisory and monitoring role more fully and actively at polling stations and during the centralisation of the results. It also stepped up its work to cultivate awareness among voters.

Electoral rolls. Three successive censuses of voters have been performed by the National Statistical Office (NSO) since the beginning of the transition process under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior. The use of the tried and tested methodology of the NSO and the use of a secure national identity card made it possible to draw up reliable electoral rolls. Their exhaustiveness was significantly improved at the end of the two complementary census phases, the administrative departments having made an effort to facilitate the simultaneous issue of identity cards to people who did not have them. The last complementary census, from 2 to 31 January 2007, increased the number of registered voters to

1 130 604, thus making the electoral roll more exhaustive. The period of display of the provisional electoral roll produced only a very limited number of appeals within the legal time limit. As some voters were manifestly not very well informed about this verification period, it was not possible to correct some omissions in time.

Voting cards. It was not possible to complete the distribution of new voting cards to all registered voters within the required period, and the success of the operation varied widely between regions (between 40% and 80%). At national level, some 60% of all the voting cards were distributed before polling day. The administration organised distribution of the new cards at polling stations, even among the most remote groups in certain cases, but people only belatedly went to fetch them, giving rise to fears that a majority of voters would turn out on polling day without knowing their new serial number on the electoral roll. It was very useful that voters were given the alternative of discovering their number using the voice server of the mobile phone operators or the website of the Ministry of the Interior. With a view to the second round, these efforts should continue in order to perfect the distribution of cards, to inform voters better and to display the electoral roll at all polling stations until polling day.

Material preparations. The election equipment and materials were generally of good quality and the material logistic preparations were carried out effectively within the required time limits.

Polling station staff. The selection of officers to man polling stations was generally coordinated so as to ensure that they were impartial. Their training could be more practical and more decentralised. It could be reviewed and perfected, particularly as regards the way of drawing up the report on the elections and the method of performing the count. The EOM noted that only 17% of staff at polling stations were women.

Cultivation of awareness among voters. Despite the general weakness of the measures to cultivate awareness and promote civic education, improvements were made in comparison with the parliamentary and municipal elections. Certain new and original initiatives implemented nationwide (the caravan of hope and the film 'Taxi démocratie', for example) had a significant impact and deserve to be taken further.

Candidacies

Among the conditions originally proposed for the nomination of candidates, the principle that a financial deposit must be lodged was eventually abandoned, so that candidates only required the support of at least 50 municipal councillors. The rules applicable therefore entail very little discrimination and make it extremely easy to stand as a candidate.

The Constitutional Council validated all 20 candidacies where the candidate was nominated by the requisite 50 councillors within the legal time limit. The legislation applicable is fairly restrictive, in that it stipulates that only candidates themselves may contest the validity of the provisional list of candidates. The only appeal lodged concerned the candidacy of the former governor of the Central Bank, Zein Ould Zeidane, which was disputed on the grounds that the transitional authorities were ineligible. The appeal was rightly deemed unfounded, as the post in question could not be regarded as entailing membership of the government. In accordance with the law, the Constitutional Council also rejected the request by Chbih Ould Sheik Melainine to withdraw his candidacy just after the government had published the definitive list.

Election campaign

In general, the election campaign proceeded calmly and without major incidents. The forces of law and order deployed sufficient numbers of officers and maintained safety effectively at public events. Campaigning activities mainly consisted of the holding of public gatherings, meetings and presentations of programmes, but without face-to-face debates. The EOM observers saw substantial numbers of women at these events, often constituting more than a third of the audience.

Despite the existence of fairly comprehensive legislation on the arrangements for campaigning activities, the law was not applied effectively. The legal provisions establishing a prior notification system for campaigning programmes were not much complied with, but the administrative authorities displayed a

certain flexibility in this regard and worked in consultation with all the candidates' campaign teams. This situation increases the discretionary power of the administration but was on the whole managed effectively and without major complaints being lodged. Despite the emotions triggered by the exaggerated media coverage of two campaign incidents which were of limited scope, public liberties and the opportunity to demonstrate, to campaign and to move freely were not arbitrarily restricted.

As the rules on campaign spending were not applied effectively, the election campaign was marked by a manifest disparity in the resources available to the candidates, and there was no corrective action by the authorities.

The administration generally abided by its obligation to maintain neutrality, and the EOM did not formally identify any case of use for campaign purposes of funds or material resources belonging to the State or public enterprises, despite a series of allegations to this effect by the press and by certain candidates.

The media

Liberalisation of broadcasting. The transitional authorities' original intention of liberalising broadcasting did not come to fruition. National radio and television remain under monopoly control. Liberalisation would have enabled the candidates to express their opinions through a variety of channels in the media and to present their programmes to voters more easily. Despite this shortcoming, radio and television provided neutral coverage of the activities of the various candidates.

High Authority for the Press and Broadcasting (HAPA). During the election campaign and under the rules on the public media, the role of the HAPA was confined to making free slots available to the candidates in consultation with radio and television management. The HAPA did not sufficiently contribute to the emergence of face-to-face debates. The HAPA did not always investigate and deal effectively and quickly with the complaints about television by certain candidates who alleged that coverage of the campaign had been unfair, in view of the broadcasting of pictures deemed to have been deliberately negative. These complaints mainly concerned the quality of the pictures and sound and the absence of coverage of the activities of certain candidates. Handicapped by technical difficulties, the HAPA was often unable to verify whether the complaints were justified, and tried to secure solutions agreed between the candidates' campaign directors and the television management.

Although national public opinion was strongly in favour of political debates, ultimately there were none. The five months of experience of the HAPA were not enough to permit the organisation of face-to-face debates between the various candidates in the public media. The large number of candidates and their mobility during the campaign did not facilitate the holding of such debates.

Monitoring of public media. With the aim of checking that the candidates had equal access to the public media, the EOM established a media monitoring unit for the duration of the campaign. Its work consisted of measuring the space assigned to the various candidates in the public and private press and measuring the air time that they were given on television and radio. It also involved analysing the tone in which these media treated information.

The public media generally covered the election campaign neutrally. The radio gave slightly more air time to four candidates (Abdellahi, Zeidane, Jeyid and Boulkheir, in that order) out of a total of 19 candidates. The differences in treatment were less significant on television. The free slots were assigned correctly in practice, both on radio and on television.

In the case of the public press (Horizons and Chaab), coverage and the assignment of free space were good. No complaint was received against these two official organs or against the Mauritanian Information Agency.

Lastly, the private press organs displayed two different approaches to coverage of the campaign. Some newspapers maintained a position of neutrality towards all the candidates (le Calame, for example), while others displayed a distinct preference for a particular candidate (Nouakchott Info, El Emel Jedid, Essiraj).

National observation

The presence of 785 national observers at nearly a third of the polling stations visited also helped to ensure the transparency of the elections. In addition to the National Monitoring Centre for Elections (ONE), three civil-society organisations received financial support to enable them to observe the elections for a short period: the *Initiative for Civic Education and the Promotion of Political Dialogue* (IPCD), the *Study and Research Group for Democracy and Economic and Social Development* (GERDDES) and the *Cyber-Forum*. Certain difficulties encountered in the coordination of these organisations led to the late submission of applications for accreditation to the Ministry of the Interior.

A step forward was therefore taken with the recognition of the diversity of observer organisations. Their capacity for action on the ground still needs to be enhanced. It is also regrettable that there is no long-term national observation.

The strong mobilisation of candidates' representatives, who were present in large numbers at all the polling stations observed, was an additional check on the integrity of the process and helped to increase its credibility.

Voting

The administration conducted the presidential elections on 11 March efficiently and in a well organised manner. They took place in a calm atmosphere, and there was a large turnout. Generally, voters were able to cast their votes under satisfactory conditions as regards transparency and regularity. In certain regions, electoral propaganda activities or efforts to influence voters were nonetheless carried on openly during the election in the vicinity of polling stations.

The quality of the logistic preparations enabled most polling stations to open within a reasonable time, equipped with the essential electoral materials. The few delays which were noted, mainly due to the late arrival of electoral officers, did not detract from the proper conduct of the elections. The opening procedures (counting of the number of ballot papers received and recording of the seal numbers, for example) were not always scrupulously complied with.

The experience of the parliamentary and municipal elections, the progress made in training officers and and the greater simplicity of the presidential elections helped to improve the conduct of the poll. The essential procedures, particularly checks on the identity of voters and the use of indelible ink, were on the whole applied correctly, although the examination of voters' fingers at the entrance to the polling station [for traces of ink, indicating that they had already voted] was often somewhat careless. The distribution of voting cards on the spot did not significantly slow the voting, as many of the voters who arrived without their voting cards had ascertained their serial number on the electoral roll. The formality of requiring the chief electoral officer at the polling station to sign each ballot paper, which had been decided on the eve of the elections to prevent certain types of fraud, was generally carried out properly.

The counts

The counts were generally carried out in a relaxed atmosphere and without major difficulty. Although the transparency of the count was felt to be satisfactory, electoral officers still did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of reconciliation procedures, particularly to detect certain irregularities. These checks were therefore neglected at nearly half of the polling stations observed.

Despite the experience gained by voters and the measures taken to ensure that voters' choice of candidate as indicated on the ballot paper was more fully taken into account, the persistence of large numbers of invalid ballot papers (6.38%) at certain polling stations makes it desirable to consider how the methods of marking ballot papers could be simplified, as the rules are still too restrictive.

The extracts from the reports on the results were displayed outside the polling stations in 85% of the cases observed and were handed over to the candidates' representatives in 93% of the cases observed.

Transfer, consolidation and publication of the results

The establishment of vote counting committees in the 53 moughatas is an important innovation in the process of centralisation of the results. Because the rules were imprecise, the EOM observers noted a great variety in the ways in which these committees operated. The extent to which the administrative authorities were involved differed: some committees were even relegated to a relatively passive role. On the whole, however, the centralisation of the results was conducted efficiently and transparently. However, the multiplicity of the documents used and the transcriptions necessary in the process of consolidation of the provisional results by the Ministry of the Interior increases the risk of substantive error.

The INEC had established an efficient and worthwhile system of parallel compilation of results.

The mission once again draws attention to the fact that the immediate publication of the results broken down by polling station is essential in the interests of transparency, and often makes it possible to nip complaints in the bud.

The EOM wishes once again to thank the Mauritanian authorities for their constant accessibility and unreserved cooperation, which have greatly assisted its work.

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ANNEX IV: Preliminary statement of 29 March 2007



EUROPEAN UNION Election Observation Mission Mauritania 2007 PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The presidential elections of 11 March 2007 were open, credible and transparent, making it possible to move on from the transitional period; they represented an important stage in the process of democratising Mauritania. Bolstering civil society, liberalising broadcasting and monitoring campaign financing remain points for attention in the future.

Nouakchott, 29 March 2007

It may be recalled that, at the invitation of the Mauritanian authorities, the European Commission decided to send an election observation mission (the EU EOM) to observe the two rounds of the presidential elections on 11 and 25 March 2007. The EU EOM is headed by Marie Anne Isler Béguin, Member of the European Parliament.

The EU EOM has been in Mauritania since 2 February 2007 and will remain in the country until 14 April 2007. The mission is operating in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation of 27 October 2005. This long-term observation covers all stages of the electoral process and is intended to promote transparency, the credibility of the elections and the confidence of those participating in the process.

During the two rounds of the presidential elections, the EU EOM has deployed 80 observers, nationals of 19 of the 27 Member States of the European Union and Switzerland, in the thirteen wilayas in the country. A European Parliament delegation led by Alain Hutchinson joined the EU EOM and endorses this statement.

During polling day, the EOM observers visited 622 polling stations, thus again covering 26% of the 2378 polling stations. The mission will remain in the country until 14 April 2007, particularly to cover the post-electoral aspects. During the next few weeks, the mission will draft a final report, which will be published and will contain the conclusions from its observations and recommendations for the future.

Summary

- The second round of the presidential elections was held on Sunday, 25 March 2007 in an atmosphere of calm and without any incidents. The turnout remained high, indicating the support for the democratic process which exists among the people of Mauritania.
- This was the final stage in the transition process initiated after the coup d'état on 3 August 2005. The transfer of power to the elected President, which should take place on 19 April, will complete the establishment of democratic institutions. This unique election represents a turning point in the country's history.

- Despite the lack of an official election campaign between the two rounds, the two candidates were treated fairly in the public media. For the first time, a debate broadcast live on television and radio, facilitated by the HAPA, enabled voters to compare the ideas represented and the programmes presented.
- The Ministry of the Interior conducted the poll on 25 March efficiently and transparently. The efforts made to provide further training between the two rounds made it possible to implement all the voting procedures better.
- Drawing on the experience gained, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) stepped up its checks and supervision. It contributed effectively to the monitoring and transparency of the results.
- The attendance of candidates' representatives at all the polling stations observed provided an additional guarantee of transparency of the process. Despite the difficulties encountered, the national observation also contributed.
- During the second round, the EOM observed a significant increase in partisan activity by supporters of the two candidates in the neighbourhood of polling stations.
- After the elections, the political climate was calm. The quality of the process was recognised by politicians, and the results were not contested.

Political landscape and campaign

This second round of the presidential elections constituted the final stage in the process of emergence from the transitional period and restoration of democratically legitimate institutions. It proceeded in accordance with the commitments given and with the original timetable for it.

As there was no official campaign between the two rounds, campaigning by the two candidates was discreet but intense (meetings in private places, door-to-door campaigning, offers of transport). In this respect, the mission recommends that an official campaign period be instituted between the two rounds, with detailed rules governing it. This would avoid differences of interpretation as to what activities were permitted and which were prohibited, and would make it easier to take the necessary measures to ensure equal treatment of candidates with regard to access to the media, monitoring of financing, and campaign activities.

On the whole the administration and public companies remained neutral during the election campaign and the polls. Whenever possible, allegations that public assets had been used for electoral purposes were investigated by the EOM, and it was not possible to confirm any of them.

The EOM welcomes the calm political climate in the aftermath of the elections and the acceptance of the results by the parties concerned, which reflect the quality of the elections and demonstrate the maturity and sense of responsibility of the public and politicians.

The fact that no legal actions were brought over the results is further confirmation of their good acceptance. The Constitutional Council did not receive any complaints.

Media

Despite the lack of any official election campaign between the two rounds of the elections, the High Authority for the Press and Broadcasting (HAPA) carried out its duties as a regulatory body for the media to ensure equal access to the public media for the two candidates. In consultation with the radio and TV companies, the HAPA allowed two minutes' coverage of each of the statements by ex-candidates in support of one or the other of the two candidates, a measure which was on the whole respected by these two media. The HAPA also played a part in sponsoring the live debate between the two candidates on radio and TV on 22 March.

With regard to media cover more generally, the results of the monitoring by the EOM showed that radio and television gave slightly more coverage to the candidate Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi (54.72% on radio and 57.17% on television). This situation can be explained, in particular, by the larger number of candidates beaten in the first round who lent their support to this candidate. Public newspapers (Horizons and Chaab) treated the two candidates more equally.

Because of the perceptible imbalance in favour of Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi in the public media, the HAPA rightly responded by recalling the need for the media to treat the two candidates equally. This did not enable balance to be restored. However, the mission does not consider the difference to have been very significant or deliberate.

A live debate between the two candidates, lasting 2 hours and 45 minutes, was organised at 21.00 on 22 March and broadcast on radio and television. The mission welcomes this initiative, which constituted a first, although it consisted of a presentation of the respective positions of the candidates on a series of predetermined subjects rather than a discussion of ideas with all the cut and thrust of debate.

The private press displayed its diversity, varying in the way in which it covered the activities of the candidates. El Emel Jedid, Essiraj and Nouakchott Info favoured Ahmed Ould Daddah, while Al Akhbar displayed a preference for Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi. Le Calame and l'Authentique provided more balanced coverage.

Legal framework and administration of the elections

The EOM wishes to highlight once again and to welcome the considerable progress which has been made during the transitional period with regard to the law and the administration of elections. Major reforms have made the procedures more reliable and transparent, and guaranteed the proper conduct of these elections. Of particular relevance in achieving this were the establishment of an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the design and production of the ballot paper.

The Ministry of the Interior showed once again its excellent capacity for the material organisation of elections and its efficiency in carrying out the difficult task of managing the logistics of the election with the required punctuality. Drawing on the experience gained, the INEC stepped up its checks and supervision. The EOM considers, incidentally, that it would be desirable to think about how the expertise gained by this institution can be preserved.

A few days before the second round of the election, one of the candidates requested an audit of the electoral register. The EOM checked the allegations made at the time and can confirm that the electoral roll meets the requirements regarding reliability and transparency.

The EOM considers that improvements could still be made to the legal framework and to the administration of elections in order, for example, to simplify the methods by which ballot papers are marked, allow voters to sign the electoral roll in person and review the design and arrangements for completing the report on the poll.

The poll

A total of 1 130 604 voters were invited to cast their votes at 2378 polling stations on Sunday, 25 March.

The Ministry of the Interior conducted the poll on 25 March efficiently and in an organised manner, against a background of calm, although the atmosphere was slightly tenser than during the first round. The turnout remained high overall (67.48 %), with considerable regional variations, from 57.5% in Guidimagha to 76.96% in Trarza.

The efforts made in most moughatas between the two rounds of the elections to provide additional training and clarification of certain procedures for the poll made it possible for all the voting procedures to be applied better.

Nearly all the polling stations opened on time with the appointed officers and equipped with the essential materials. Voting proceeded more quickly than in the first round.

The electoral roll was displayed properly outside nearly all the polling stations, helping voters to go to the right place and making it possible to identify them. Among the checks instituted, the requirement for the chief electoral officer for the polling station to sign the back of the ballot papers issued to voters was also complied with at most of the polling stations observed. On the whole, checks on the inking of fingers were inadequate. Many voting cards were still at the polling stations on polling day, but that did not disrupt the proper conduct of the poll.

In comparison with the first round of the presidential elections, the EOM observed more partisan activities by supporters of the two candidates in the vicinity of polling stations throughout the country. There were many rumours and mutual accusations regarding the practice of taking people's identity cards in return for payment, but most could not be confirmed.

The presence of representatives of the candidates at all the polling stations observed was an added safeguard and helped to increase the transparency of the poll. Despite a lack of experience and in spite of the serious difficulties encountered in coordinating their efforts, the national observers also contributed to this transparency. Their reorganisation ought to receive assistance.

The count and consolidation of the results

The EOM observed that the count was carried out openly and without irregularities, although the procedures were not always uniform, particularly as regards checks on signatures, counting signatures, reconciliation of ballot papers and the use of check-lists of voters' names.

The reduction in the number of invalid ballot papers (4.04% as against 6.38%) constitutes another improvement in the process.

Nearly everywhere, the reports on the results were systematically displayed and the extracts from the reports delivered to the candidates' representatives.

The mission also expresses its appreciation of the excellent work performed by the INEC to carry out monitoring and ensure the transparency of the results, thanks to the establishment of a modern and efficient network.

As it had promised, the Ministry of the Interior arranged for publication of the results per polling station, thus enabling candidates and observers to check effectively that the results were likely to be correct. This performance should be welcomed, as it contributed to the transparency and credibility of the poll. However, swifter publication would enable the candidates to submit appeals, if called for, within the legal time limits.

The vote counts were regular and transparent.

The 2006 and 2007 elections constitute remarkable democratic progress within a short period of time. This election, which was unique in its kind, represented a turning point in the country's history and completed the establishment of democratic institutions. Energies should continue to be mobilised by strengthening the political parties and civil society. Similarly, liberalising broadcasting and monitoring campaign financing remain points for attention in the future.

The EOM takes this opportunity to thank the Mauritanian authorities, the candidates, the political parties and civil society for their constant accessibility and their unreserved cooperation, which have greatly assisted its work.

The EOM wishes to pay homage in the strongest possible terms to the people of Mauritania for their support for the democratic transition process. The reception they gave the EOM and their expressions of support gave the observers real encouragement.

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