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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN JORDAN

ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION

21-25 January 2013

**Report by
Mr Christian Dan PREDÁ, Chair of the Delegation**

**Annex:
List of participating MEPs**

INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the Independent Election Commission of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan dated 9 August 2012 and the decision of the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission Ms Catherine Ashton on the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament authorised on 15 November 2012 the sending of a delegation to observe the legislative elections in Jordan.

The parliamentary elections of 23 January 2013 marked the first time that an EU Election Observation Mission was deployed in Jordan, allowing an opportunity for the European Parliament to be fully integrated into this long-term framework. Against the backdrop of profound political changes taking place in the region, the 2013 parliamentary elections were seen as an important step in the process of introducing gradual political reforms in Jordan, as initiated by the King Abdullah II.

The EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM), present in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan since 13 December 2012, was led by the Chief Observer M David MARTIN, Member of the European Parliament. Altogether the EU EOM deployed 96 observers (from all 27 EU member states, as well as from Switzerland and Norway) in all 12 governorates of the country.

A delegation of the European Parliament joined the EU EOM on 21 January. The delegation was chaired by Mr Christian Dan PREDA and was also composed of Mr Philippe BOULLAND, Mr Andrzej GRZYB, Ms Tanja FAJON, Mr Ivo VAJGL, Mr Paweł KOWAL and Mr Bastiaan BELDER.

The Delegation wishes to highlight its excellent cooperation with and express its gratitude to the Chief Observer Mr David MARTIN, the EU Election Observation Mission, and the EU Delegation in Jordan.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Since the end of 2010, Jordan has been facing a continued socio-economic deterioration leading to popular demonstrations, which were given a further impetus following the political uprisings in the Arab world since the beginning of 2011. The public protests were relatively measured and peaceful in comparison with the uprisings in other Arab countries, but the protesters challenged the status quo of the political system which has been relatively untouched since Jordan's independence. The demonstrators - representing a wide spectrum of Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin, East-Bankers and Islamists as well as youth - called for a political reform, limitation of the power of the King and the executive branch and tangible measures to tackle the high unemployment, rising cost of living and corruption. The protesters also demanded the revision of the electoral law and free and fair elections.

The King has tried to respond to street protests by appointing successive governments, nominating a National Dialogue Committee and then a Royal Committee for the Revision of the Constitution. Amongst the constitutional amendments adopted were the establishments of an Independent Election Commission and of a Constitutional Court. Moreover, in the course of 2012, new legal provisions have been introduced in the form of Parliamentary Election Law, Political Parties Law and Press and Publication Law.

Despite of the changes, considerable powers remain vested with the King who retains the power to appoint the Prime Minister and the cabinet. **However, in the aftermath of the election, the King has conceded his prerogative, calling on the newly elected parliament to propose the new Prime Minister who will then be authorised to form the cabinet.**

In terms of constitutional prerogatives, the Parliament remains weak and highly dependent on the will of the King to proceed with reforms. Its weakness also draws on the fact that political parties lack solid structure, with the exception of the Islamic Action Front, the political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the run up to the elections, the Islamic Action Front supported by Democratic Popular Union Party and the Communist Party, called for the boycott of the election arguing that political reforms were merely cosmetic in nature; the election system based in majority on the single non-transferable vote puts political parties at a disadvantage; and that the integrity of the election process would not be ensured.

ORGANISATION OF THE ELECTIONS

The new legal framework represented an improvement compared to that of previous elections, and the newly established Independent Election Commission, in charge of administering the elections has made significant efforts to perform its mission in a transparent and impartial manner, managing to reverse the general negative perception on the integrity of the previous electoral processes.

Nevertheless, the legal framework left a number of important issues unresolved. Most notably, the fundamental principles of the electoral process, such as equal suffrage and periodicity of elections were not incorporated in the Constitution. Constituency delimitation provisions including criteria (e.g. size and population) were not included in the legal framework. As a result, for the purpose of this election, the constituency delimitation applied in the 2010 election has been attached to the new Election Law and re-applied, against international commitments and practices.

The newly adopted Election Law foresaw an increase in the number of MPs represented in the House of Representatives to 150 and introduced a national constituency of 27 seats to be elected by proportional representation with closed lists. However, with most MPs elected through the single non-transferable vote electoral system (SNTV), majority of the candidates running in the local constituencies were independents with no affiliation to any political party.

The women quota in the newly adopted Election Law has remained the same, 10 per cent. The EU EOM Preliminary Statement considers that women remain discouraged from entering into politics, primarily for cultural reasons. In addition to that, the fact that the Jordanian society, as reaffirmed by the newly amended Article 6 of the Constitution, is based on family and domestic values with women being its pillar, seems to create an additional barrier towards an effective affirmation of women in life and in the political arena. Women's representation in the election administration was low, particularly in decision-making positions.

The freedom of the media remained an issue of concern. The newly amended Press and Publication Law requires news websites to register and get a licence from the Press Public

Department. Furthermore site owners and Editors-in-chief are responsible for news content published and posted comments. Although the provisions have so far not been implemented, they are seen as an attempt to limit the freedom of expression and opinion guaranteed by the Constitution.

The final voter list, compiled on the basis of a completely new voter registration exercise, saw some 71 per cent of the eligible voters register. Most political stakeholders challenged and questioned the accuracy of the final voter list largely due to the extensive use of proxy registration which in many cases was even conducted without the consent or knowledge of the respective eligible citizen.

To a positive note, the issuance for the first time of single-use voter cards and printed ballot papers with safety features of high quality was introduced as an additional preventive measure against electoral fraud. Equally, the training programme for the staff of the polling stations was done efficiently and bore good results.

CANDIDATES

The 2013 parliamentary elections for the 150 seats in the House of Representatives were marked by the highest number of competing candidates in the history of parliamentary elections in Jordan. That primarily derived from the introduction of a national constituency of 27 seats to be elected by proportional representation with closed lists. Of the total 1,425 candidates, 606 (incl. 105 women) run for the local constituencies and 819 (incl. 86 women), enlisted on 61 national lists, competed for the national constituency seats. Less than 70 candidates were running as incumbents of the previous parliament. A total of 191 women contested for these elections, representing 13.4 per cent of the total number of candidates, while women represent 51.8 per cent of the registered voters. Out of 61 national lists, only two national lists were headed by women candidates. In the other lists, female candidates were usually listed on the fifth position or below, and had thus relatively few chances to get elected.

The political parties and movements which run their candidates in the elections were more or less divided into three camps: the loyalists; the secular forces (which include the Pan-Arab and Leftists trends); and the Islamists. With the exception of 4 national lists which were supported by political parties, most of the 61 national lists did not have an electoral platform and for most part their members were usually unknown on the political arena.

Most of the candidates running for the local constituencies were independents, with no affiliation to any political party, and the majority of them have been selected within a clan/tribe; several lists were formed by independent businessmen.

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Generally, the pre-election period has been marked by a relative apathy of the Jordanian population, with the reform process, including the parliamentary elections themselves, seen as a welcome, yet an insufficient step in meeting the demands of the citizens.

The EU EOM Preliminary Statement finds that the constitutional rights of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and movement were enjoyed by all contestants during the campaign period. Generally, campaign was not very competitive despite the high number of candidates and national lists contesting - largely due to tribal affiliations, uneven financial resources amongst the contestants and the non-participation of some opposition forces in the process.

The EU EOM Preliminary Statement also mentions that rigid regulatory framework and self-censorship limited a lively public debate in the print and broadcast media. Whereas public media were legally obliged to provide balanced and neutral reporting, the private media remained in this respect unregulated. Broadcasting, print and online news media campaign coverage was highly commercialized.

Cases of use of political money such as vote buying and other fraud attempts were reported during the campaign. Candidates and others were detained allegedly involved in forging or withholding voter cards and offering money. Domestic observers complained about belated actions taken by the Independent Election Commission and inconsistent application of the law.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

Some 250 civil society organisations engaged in the electoral process by forming three domestic observation coalitions (RASED, Nazaha, the NCHR-led coalition). Together they deployed 522 long-term observers to assess all stages of the elections, including voter registration, candidate nomination and campaigning. On Election Day, they accredited 6,990 observers to all 4,069 polling stations throughout the country to observe polling, counting and tabulation of results.

With regard to the international election observation, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) deployed three long-term observers' teams each. Moreover, IEC accredited observers from the League of Arab States, the Middle East Political and Economic Institute, the Global Network for Rights and Development, the Election Network in the Arab World and the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies as well as from a number of foreign embassies, among them of Australia, France, Japan, Oman, Palestine and the USA. The Carter Center deployed an election expert team which was based only in Amman.

PROGRAMME OF THE DELEGATION

Following a briefing with the Core Team of the EU Election Observation Mission, which provided a full overview of the situation, the EP Delegation held meetings with the representatives and candidates of the Jordan National Union Party, whose Secretary General and head of the national list, Mr Khashman, had been detained upon charges of vote-buying; with a representative of the bureau of the Islamic Action Front, Jordan's strongest political party and the leading political force calling for the boycott of the elections; representatives of the moderate Islamic Centrist Party, which took part in the elections; Mrs Abla Olbeh, Secretary General of the leftist Hashed Party and the spokeswoman for the Council of National Opposition Parties; the Chairman of the Independent Election Commission, Mr Abdullah Al Khatib; as well as with the representatives of the Jordan National Commission for Women's Affairs. The EP Delegation had also an opportunity of discussing the current situation with the EU Heads of Missions and EU Ambassador to Jordan.

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the EP Delegation split into four teams to observe in districts of Amman (both capital and rural - 2 teams) as well as in Irbid (2 teams). All four teams observed the election from the opening of the polling stations (7 a.m.) until closing (which, upon the decision of the IEC was prolonged throughout the entire country by one hour until 8 p.m.) and counting. All the EP teams deployed reached similar conclusions:

- Although active campaigning (mainly by minors distributing campaign cards on behalf of candidates) took place in the immediate vicinity of the polling centres, generally voting proceeded in a peaceful and calm atmosphere, free from intimidation or major disturbances;
- Polling staff - among whom women constituted a minority, and in no instance, in those stations observed, headed the staff of the polling station - was well-trained, competent and efficient, which contributed to the smooth running of the elections;
- In most of the polling stations observed, procedures were executed in a highly transparent manner, with representatives of individual candidates, some party agents and domestic observers following the voting and counting. However, in one instance, an EP team deployed to Irbid observed an attempt by one voter to photograph her voting card. In the presence of EP observers, the polling station staff prevented the act, but a domestic observer present in the polling station indicated that this was not the first instance of such an attempt, and that previous attempts were not met with such decisive reaction by the polling staff.

JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

After the Election Day, the EP delegation held a meeting to discuss its observations in the presence of the Chief Observer and members of the EU EOM core team.

On Friday, 25 January, the Chief Observer, Mr David MARTIN, presented the preliminary statement of the EU EOM and Mr Christian Dan PREDA spoke on behalf of the EP delegation, in his capacity as its Chairman.

Mr PREDA praised the work of the Independent Election Commission and especially the efforts of its Chairman, Mr Abdullah Al Khatib in striving to ensure credibility of the elections, in particular vis-à-vis Jordanian citizens. Mr PREDA highlighted that the election process was generally well organised, noting active campaigning in front of polling stations and lack of respect for electoral silence on election day as the most immediately apparent problem. On a more political note, the Chairman of the EP Election Observation Delegation pointed out:

- The need for a better representation of citizens and their different political sensibilities in the political life of the country;
- The necessity of political parties to become strong political actors, inter alia through programs which represent and respond to real needs and expectations of Jordanians;
- The need to better engage women in the political, economic and social life of the country.

Finally, giving strong encouragement to continue with the reform process, Mr PREDA conveyed EP's will and interest to support and cooperate with the new Parliament and the Jordanian authorities to that end.

FINAL RESULTS

On Friday, 24 January, the Independent Election Commission announced preliminary results which, following a partial recount in a number of contested districts, were endorsed as final by the IEC on Monday, 27 January. The voter turnout, as announced by the IEC on 24 January was measured at 1,288,043 or around 56.69% of the 2,272,182 registered voters.

Of the 61 political lists competing for 27 seats at national constituency level, 22 lists managed to obtain a seat for their candidate(s), although only 4 will have more than one representative elected through the national constituency (the moderates Islamic Centrist Party - 3 MPs; Stronger Jordan - 2 MPs, incl. 1 woman; the Homeland - 2 MPs; National Union Party - 2 MPs).

It is worth noting that out of the 819 candidates enlisted on the national list for the general constituency election, 86 of them being women, only one, Ms Rule El Hroub, who led the "Stronger Jordan" list, managed to obtain the seat. Furthermore, out of the 606 registered candidates running in the 45 electoral districts, 105 of whom were women candidates, only 3 managed to obtain a seat outside of the women quota foreseen - one of them obtaining the highest amount of votes in the district, and the remaining two obtaining the seat with the lowest amount of votes in the district. Thus the new House of Representatives will have 19 women MPs - 4 directly elected and 15 from the women quota, which amounts to less than 13% of the total number of MPs.

The Election Law foresees a period for contesting the election results, and one legal appeal as regards election results in district 1 of Amman has been filed in early February. The IEC is also preparing to conduct by-election for one seat, given that a winning candidate has died of heart attack following the elections.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Election Observation Mission of the European Union will remain in Jordan until the end of the post-election process and, upon its completion, will present the final report on the elections. This report will contain specific recommendations to the Jordanian authorities, aiming to improve certain aspects of the electoral process for future elections.

The election observation Delegation of the European Parliament, as part of long-term EU EOM, was an important tool in the evaluation of the electoral situation in Jordan. The delegation recommends that the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group, the competent EP Committees as well the relevant EP delegations monitor the findings and recommendations of the final report of the EU EOM and use it as a basis for their political dialogue with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN JORDAN
ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION
21-25 January 2013**

Members

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Mr Philippe BOULLAND, EPP, France

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