



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION TO OBSERVE

FEDERAL AND REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

(12- 17 May 2005)

**Report by
Mr Anders WIJKMAN,
Chairman of the delegation**

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Introduction

By letter of 1 December 2004, Dr Seyoum MESFIN, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, forwarded an invitation to the European Union - addressed to Commissioner FERRERO-WALDNER - to send an observation delegation to observe the federal and regional parliamentary elections scheduled for 15 May 2005.

The Conference of Presidents of the Political Groups decided on 10 March 2005, to send a delegation of ten Members to Ethiopia for election observation on the basis of the d'Hondt System. The following Groups sent representatives: 4 Members from the EPP-ED, 2 Members from the PSE, 1 Member from the ALDE, 1 member from Verts/ALE, 1 Member from UEN and 1 Member from GUE/NGL.

The appointed Members were the following: Mr Anders WIJKMAN (EPP-ED), Mr Rainer WIELAND (EPP-ED), Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS (EPP-ED), Mr Mario MANTOVANI (EPP-ED), Mr Mauro ZANI (PSE), Ms Fiona HALL (ALDE), Ms Margrete AUKEN (Verts/ALE), Ms Luisa MORGANTINI (GUE/NGL), Mr Girts Valdis KRISTOVSKIS (UEN) (annex A). Ms Glenys KINNOCK (PES) was also appointed, but was unable to attend.

The secretariat worked in cooperation with the Commission's delegation in Addis Ababa and with the EU Election Observation Mission on all issues related to political briefings, observation on election day itself and issuing the post-election statement.

Constitutive meeting

On 12 April 2005, the delegation held its constitutive and preparatory meeting in Strasbourg. Mr Anders WIJKMAN was elected by acclamation chairman of the delegation. The draft programme of the delegation was presented and, following some suggestions from Members, approved (see final programme in annex B).

Concerning the polling day, the decision was made to split members of the delegation into four teams, with the intention of visiting four different regions of the country. The towns and boundaries chosen for this purpose were the capital, Addis Ababa, Aksum, Dire Dawa and Arba Minch, to be observed by one team each. Arba Minch was later changed to Awasa, based on security updates, and on the advice of the Core Team of the EU mission.

A first draft of the deployment plan was formulated on the basis of preferences expressed by Members, of spoken languages and of experience in election observation. It was decided to provide observer teams with interpretation from Italian to English and from Latvian to English and vice-versa.

Programme of the election observation mission

Members of the delegation arrived to Addis Ababa on the afternoon of Thursday, 12 May 2005. Next morning, on 13 May 2005 the delegation began at 07.30 with an initial series of meetings in the meeting rooms of the Hotel Sheraton Addis Ababa.

Members were first briefed at a breakfast meeting by **Ms Ana GOMES, Chief Observer of the EUEOM, the Core Team** (Mr Raphaël Lopez Pintor, Mr Tony Reis, Mr Xabier Meilan, Ms Delphine Skowron) and **Mr Tim CLARKE, Head of the Ethiopian Delegation of the European Commission**, on the present political situation in Ethiopia, focusing particularly on the forthcoming elections and their expected outcome.

Ms GOMES underlined the importance of the presence of EUEOM, as it was the first time that international observers had been invited to Ethiopia to observe the elections. She emphasised the high expectations and trust of the Ethiopian voters in the EUEOM. Members' comments concerned the expected results and how the political forces would react to it. Members had the opportunity to discuss points concerning the access given to the observers at all stages of the electoral process and security and media-related issues.

At 08.30 the delegation met **Mr Beyene PETROS, leader of the UEDF opposition party**, who talked about intimidation of campaigning opposition supporters and candidates. He let Members know about the UEDF request, tabled to the Supreme Court, to elect community observers independently, instead of appointing them.

At 09.00 the delegation met **Mr Hailu SHAWEL, leader of the CUD opposition party**, who informed Members that, based on reports of fraud and imprisonment of opposition candidates, the coalition requested the National Election Board (NEB) to postpone the elections in twelve constituencies. He admitted that the elections represent a step forward compared to those of 2000, as this time access to mass media was guaranteed to the opposition. Members discussed the possible reaction of CUD on the different voting result scenarios, and asked questions on the party's programme, with a special focus on relations with Eritrea and the issue of land reform.

These meetings were subsequently followed by another at 10.00 with **Mr Ato Kemal BEDRU, chair of the National Election Board**, who explained the composition of the NEB, the constituencies and polling stations as well as the staff appointed to conduct the elections. Mr BEDRU listed the different kinds of complaints the NEB received. He mentioned almost 4000 officials had been removed as their impartiality had been questioned. The ruling of the Supreme Court against the disputed NEB statement -in which accreditation of NGO observers was authorised even if the NGO in question did not have election observation as its core activity- was also mentioned.

Members concentrated in their questions on the numbering, stamping and processing of ballot papers and on anti-fraud measures in a broader sense.

The delegation was thereafter received in the **Ethiopian House of Representatives by its speaker, Mr Ato Dawit YOHANNES**, who made a presentation on the Ethiopian Electoral Law followed by an in-depth exchange of views with Members of the European Parliament on the electoral process.

Shortly after, the delegation went to the Prime Minister's office where **Prime Minister Ato Meles ZELAWI**. During his presentation, Prime Minister focused on the background preparation for elections and the possible scenarios according to the results to be expected. He criticized the attitude of the opposition coalition claiming that it was unfair and pointed out that, even in the unlikely case of an opposition victory, the coalition would not be able to rule the country. Finally, he underlined that the government had made serious efforts towards democracy and that the presence of international observers for the elections was a clear indication of this.

At the Hotel Sheraton, Members convened at 16.30 for a second meeting with **Ms Ana GOMES** and with the Core Team in order to discuss operative and practical matters of the election observation. In the evening the Head of Delegation of the European Commission offered a dinner at his residence for Members of the European Parliament and political authorities.

On the following day, 14 May, the delegation split into four teams. One team stayed in Addis Ababa, one team travelled to Aksum, another to Dire Dawa and one to Awasa, in order to observe polling stations in those areas on the day of the elections.

Election Day

The federal and regional parliamentary elections were carried out on Sunday, 15 May 2005. All teams of the delegation began the observation at 06.00 to see the preparation for the opening of the polling station. At all locations, despite the early hour, voters were queuing, a feature which remained constant throughout the day. The observed turnout appeared to be relatively high.

1. Addis Ababa

The part of the delegation that stayed in Addis Ababa was composed of Mr Mauro ZANI, Mr Mario MANTOVANI and Mr Rainer WIELAND, accompanied by one member of staff and two interpreters. On the afternoon of 14 May, the delegation had received a useful briefing from Long Term Observers of the EUEOM who provided information on the location of polling stations, drew attention to the details that were to be observed and explained the means of reporting the results.

The team concentrated its observation on urban areas of Addis Ababa, observing the opening and then the voting process in several polling stations. The closing operation was observed at the same polling station chosen for the opening.

2. Aksum

The Long Term Observers of the EUEOM, responsible for Aksum, received the Members who travelled by air- Ms Luisa MORGANTINI, Mr Girts Valdis KRISTOVSKIS, one staff member and one interpreter - upon their arrival. As with their colleagues in Addis Ababa, they provided the delegation with information on the political situation in the area and other useful elements for observation. They organised a meeting with the constituency chief responsible for one constituency in the region. Aksum, which is the centre of Tigray region, on the northern part of the Ethiopia, was interesting for election observation, as disputed border regions with Eritrea belong to this territory, and 30.000 government troops were present at the border.

The team visited 11 polling stations throughout the day, focusing on urban and rural areas of Adwa city. Members met Prime Minister MELES ZENAWI at his hometown Adwa and observed him voting. In most of the polling stations in Tigray there were no opposition candidates running - or they had withdrawn at the last moment. In some polling stations ballot boxes were not closed properly and most of the polling station officials were apparently not aware of the correct voting procedure. In spite of these difficulties, voting was conducted in a calm and organised manner, despite many voters having to queue for long periods in order to cast their ballots.

3. Dire Dawa

The composition of the team for the observation of the elections in the East was the following: Ms Fiona HALL and Mr Valdis DOMBROVSKIS, assisted by one staff member.

Following previous contacts with the EU Core Team, it was decided to observe opening and voting in some polling stations in Dire Dawa in the morning, and to go afterwards for the voting and counting to Harar, a small Muslim town one hour drive from Dire Dawa.

As far as the opening and the voting in Dire Dawa are concerned, no particular problem occurred. From 5.30 a.m., people began to queue in front of the polling stations where they received a briefing by the head of the polling station. All voting formalities were fulfilled correctly. In total, the team observed 9 polling stations in Dire Dawa.

On its way to Harar, the team decided to stop in some villages along the road, to observe how the elections were carried out in the rural areas. In the village of Abele Keke, some serious irregularities were noticed in the voting process such as unsealed ballot boxes, campaign material of the ruling party on the wall, missing ink marking and missing destruction of voting cards. Furthermore, young people reported that representatives of the ruling party had tried to buy votes. A special report on this incident was drawn up by the team.

In Harar, the team observed five polling stations and the counting in two of them. Here also, the voting process ran smoothly without any particular remark, except the huge queue in front of the polling stations due to the high turnout. As far as counting is concerned, the team decided to observe this operation in two polling stations. Counting took place with some delay because officers were told not to start it before the arrival of the representatives of the regional electoral board who were supposed to control whether the ballot box had been properly sealed. As nobody arrived, it was decided to start the counting which was made in a very friendly atmosphere, public officers being helped by representatives of the political parties.

At 00.30 a.m., as the counting went too slowly, the team decided to leave the polling station and to come back on the following morning at 7.00 to finish the observation of the counting. Unfortunately, at 6.00 a.m. the officers decided to suspend the counting for some hours in order to rest and to restart it at 2.00 p.m. The team present in Harar was able to control that the ballot papers had been moved into a locked room guarded by three policemen.

4. Awasa

The chair of the delegation, Mr Anders WIJMAN, together with Ms Margrete AUKEN, one staff member and the EPP-ED group representative, travelled by car to Awasa in the afternoon of 14 May.

In the evening of 14 May, members of the delegation had a dinner with local Long Term Observers of the EU mission. The situation of the town of Awasa and surroundings was discussed and deployment plan agreed.

On Election day, early in the morning, Members started their observation before opening in a polling station close to the hotel. Then, first voting operations were monitored and from the very beginning and Members were impressed by the very high turnout and the calm and peaceful atmosphere in which voting was taking place.

During the whole morning Members observed various polling stations in town, according to the agreed deployment plan.

In the afternoon, in order to have an idea of the ongoing voting operation outside town, Members went to observe polling stations in rural areas.

Shortly before closing, Members went again to a polling station already visited during the day in order to monitor closing and counting operations.

Closing was conducted in a fairly professional, efficient and rapid way. However,, the same could unfortunately not be said for counting, which was conducted with huge difficulties, slowly and with many uncertainties.

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Members of the delegation had the overall impression that operations on polling day were conducted in a generally commendable way, without violence, intimidation or rigging. However, some problems were observed at the counting process, mainly due to the lack of training of polling officials and technical capacity of

When meeting at the hotel next day, Members underlined the high level of efficiency of polling station committees, the general calm environment in which the process was conducted and the high level of voter participation. No significant problematic incidents were observed, the most curious example being a large number of votes declared invalid because of double voting, due to a problem with the ink marks.

On the evening of 16 May the delegation met for a debriefing dinner at the Hotel Sheraton Addis Ababa, to which Ms GOMES, the Core Team, Mr CLARKE, the UK ambassador and other Commission officials were invited. That informal meeting gave the delegation a chance to exchange views on the outcome of the elections and to share their impressions. A common thread of the delegation's position was clearly highlighted and shared with the EUEOM.

On the morning of 17 May Ms HALL and Ms GOMES addressed a press conference where the Preliminary Statement of the EU Election Observation Mission (annex C) was presented. Members of the EP delegation participated as well. As stated by Ms HALL during the conference, the European Parliament's position on the elections in Ethiopia was in line with the findings of the Preliminary Statement, as the EP delegation had worked in close cooperation with and under the umbrella of the EUEOM.

Conclusions

The delegation of the European Parliament that observed the federal and regional parliamentary elections in Ethiopia on 15 May 2005 fully endorsed the Preliminary Statement of the European Union Election Observation Mission.

Furthermore the delegation wished to stress that the following main issues were possible to underline at that stage:

- ✓ The European Parliament election observation delegation conducted its work in the framework of the European Union-Election Observation Mission. The nine Members of Parliament came for a short period to observe on election day itself a limited number of polling stations throughout the country.
- ✓ Members of the European Parliament were very pleased with the warm welcome received during their mission by the Ethiopian people.
- ✓ The general impression was positive, in that these elections, conducted in a peaceful manner, represented an important step forward in the democratisation process of Ethiopia and in raising respect and awareness of Human Rights.
- ✓ The delegation praised the high level commitment of polling station committees and all those present in the polling stations throughout the day (and night).

- ✓ In the polling stations visited, some technical problems and irregularities could be observed, but the overall impression was that they were not intentional but rather due to a certain lack of resources, knowledge and experience of such an electoral process.
- ✓ Drawing lessons from these elections, the delegation of the European Parliament would recommend that for future elections, voting procedures on election day be improved, for instance concerning the number of voters per polling station, the number of booths, the secrecy of vote and the design of ballot boxes.

Follow-up after the end of the EP mission

1. As the general situation worsened after the return of the delegation, - violent atrocities occurred in Addis on 7 June 2005 - and the EUEOM issued its second post-election statement (annex D), the Committee on Development decided to extend its usual reporting debate to a mini-hearing on Ethiopia. The exchange of views on the Ethiopian elections was organised as part of the meeting of the Committee on Development on 21 June 2005.
2. As a conclusion of this debate, the European Parliament decided to deal with Ethiopia at its plenary level as a human rights urgency issue, and dedicated its regular human rights urgency plenary debate to the Ethiopian situation on 7 July 2005 in Strasbourg. As its result, the same day Parliament adopted a motion for resolution on the situation (Annex E) in which - among other issues - calls on the Ethiopian government to establish an inquiry commission and release political prisoners immediately (mainly opposition leaders and human rights defenders).
3. Furthermore, on 25 August 2005, following the election appeals' process, the re-run of elections and the Somali regional elections, the EU Election Observation Mission issued a critical statement (annex F) on the way these processes had been carried out.
4. Unfortunately Members of the EP delegation kept on receiving worrying alerts regarding the general post-election situation in Ethiopia. They were informed that several people were forced into exile and others were detained, furthermore in inhuman prison conditions. The establishment of a democratically elected and functioning legislative assembly seemed far from a reality. Therefore due to these concerns Members regularly consulted the EUEOM Chief Observer, as well as opposition leaders, the Ethiopian Embassy in Brussels and followed the political situation closely.
5. On 13 October 2005 and 15 December 2005 the European Parliament dealt with the issue again and adopted resolutions on Ethiopia, repeatedly calling for - among other issues - the respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights as well as the release of political prisoners (annex G and annex H).
6. On 15 March 2006, the EU Election Observation Mission issued its final report (Annex I) which was fully endorsed by the delegation.
7. In February 2006 Commissioner Luis Michel conducted negotiations and visited some prisons in Addis Ababa. Members found it important to have an opportunity to be briefed about the results of his visit. Therefore Members of the EP delegation decided to organise a joint meeting of the Committee on Development, Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Sub-committee on Human Rights on 15 May 2006 in Strasbourg on the one year anniversary of the elections. The main objective of this event is to conduct an exchange of views with the Commissioner, with the Ambassador and some opposition figures in order

to get a clear picture of the situation, to raise awareness of the human rights problems and to find the best ways of how the EP delegation could contribute to the democratisation of Ethiopia.