



**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN WEST BANK AND GAZA**

**Election observation mission  
from 7 to 10 January 2005**

**Report from the Chairperson of the ad hoc delegation for election observation  
in West Bank and Gaza,  
Mr Edward Mc MILLAN-SCOTT**

**Annex: List of participants  
Programme  
European Union Election Observation Mission - Preliminary Statement**

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8 mars 2005

## **Introduction**

In November 2004, following the death of Mr ARAFAT, Mr Hassan KHREISHEH, the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council invited the European Parliament to observe the presidential elections scheduled for 9 January 2005.

The Conference of Presidents decided, on 18 November 2004, to send a delegation of thirty Members.

The decision to send such a large delegation was taken in light of the political momentum that is in evidence in the Middle East and so as to include all the political groups represented in the European Parliament.

The list of Members who took part in this delegation is attached in Annex A.

An official European Union Election Observation Mission, led by Mr ROCARD, was set up to observe the elections in Palestine. The European Parliament ad hoc delegation and the EU-EOM, as normal in these situations, worked in close cooperation.

Before leaving for Palestine the delegation met twice in order to decide on its chairmanship and to establish a programme for the election observation. At its constitutive meeting on 8 December the delegation appointed Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT as Chairperson and Mrs NAPOLETANO as vice-chairperson. Recommendations were made and an outline of the mission programme was drafted in preparation for the second meeting.

At its second meeting on 15 December the delegation adopted the programme and appointed Mr GUARDANS, SPERONI and Mrs MORGANTINI, along with the Chairman and Deputy Chairperson, as group coordinators. They would each be assigned to and coordinate observation activities in designated areas on election day. There followed an exchange of views with Mr ROCARD on the situation in Palestine and the working environment and methodology of the EU EOM.

## **Programme of the election observation mission<sup>(\*)</sup>**

### **✓ Overview of the meetings on 7 and 8 January**

On Friday 7 and Saturday 8 the delegation held a series of meetings on the legal framework for the Presidential elections in Palestine, on the general political environment in the run-up to election day and on the preparations made by the Central Election Commission.

#### **1. Meeting with the Head of the Commission's Technical Assistance Office, the representative of the Presidency of the Council and the representatives of the Member States consulates in Jerusalem - Friday 7 January, at 9.00 am, Hotel Ambassador (East Jerusalem)**

Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT outlined the purpose of the election observation mission, the programme of the delegation, the deployment plan for the election day (involving the distribution of the delegation into five groups covering most of the Palestinian territory) and other practical details. He then proceeded to introduce the speakers, notably Mr John KJAER,

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Programme in Annex B

head of the EUTAO in the West Bank and Mr Frans POTUYT, for the Dutch Presidency as well as the representatives of the German, Italian, British, Spanish, Danish and French consulates.

Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT also reiterated the political importance of the forthcoming elections and hailed them as an example of democracy for the whole Arab world. Promotion of democratic values should be at the heart of the Union's Neighbourhood policy and at the top of the agenda of the newly established EUROMED Parliamentary Assembly.

For Mr John KJAER the presidential elections opened a new chapter in Palestinian history. They were intended to grant the Palestinian people a real democratic choice, provide legitimacy to the future President and promote democratic values amongst Palestinian citizens. This was a window of opportunity for the peace process which should be seized by all parties concerned.

The EU Election Observation Mission was just one aspect of the EU long-term electoral assistance to the Palestinian Authority: EUR 10 million had already been disbursed and an additional 4 million had been allocated for the observation mission. EU aid was centred on assisting the Central Electoral Commission in their preparations for the elections. The EU EOM was unprecedented in its size and bore witness to the political importance attached by the Union to these elections.

Finally, electoral assistance should be seen as part of a wider effort to promote democratic values and institutions and better governance in the Palestinian Territories. The main areas on which action should be focused are reform of the security services, review of the judiciary and improvement in financial management. A task force had been set up specifically to help the Palestinian administration in achieving these targets.

For Mr Frans POTUYT the large presence of international observers made an important contribution to the electoral process. The EU Heads of Mission were in permanent contact with the Palestinian Authority to discuss the reform process, including improving the framework of electoral law. The municipal elections were a successful test case and bore witness to the Palestinians' interest in participating in the democratic process. However, he stated that the forthcoming elections could not be considered fair given the restrictions imposed by the occupation of Israeli forces in Palestinian territories.

Some Members questioned the statement by the Dutch Presidency on the impact of Israeli presence in the Palestinian Territories whilst others inquired about the situation of Palestinian voters in East Jerusalem, the voter participation of displaced Palestinians, the freedom of movement for presidential candidates during the campaign and for voters on election day, and, finally, the reliability of the civil registry.

In their replies, the representatives of the Commission and the Member States stated that presidential candidates had been severely restricted in their movements, particularly in East Jerusalem and Gaza. Arrangements for East Jerusalem mirrored the 1996 agreement whereby only a small proportion of the population (approx. 6,000 voters) would cast their vote in the city itself, in five<sup>1</sup> postal offices. All the others (estimated at 114,000) would have to travel to 14 special polling stations around East Jerusalem.

Voters were somewhat reticent to register and it was felt that there might be confusion about where they should go to vote. Only Palestinian residents in the Palestinian Territories would be allowed to vote. The case of Palestinians blocked on the Egyptian side of the border to Gaza was

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<sup>1</sup> This number was later increased to 6

mentioned. The Central Electoral Commission had tried to update the civil registry by cross-checking it with the voters' lists.

After the briefing the coordinators of the five election observation groups met with their colleagues to discuss the details of the deployment on Election Day.

## **2. Meeting with Mr Hassan KHREISHEH, 1st deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council - Friday 7 December, at 14.00, PLC Chamber (Ramallah)**

Welcoming the EP Delegation, Mr KHREISHEH spoke of the importance of this moment in Palestinian history as they prepared to choose their new leader in a democratic manner. He expressed his deep wish for these elections to be free and fair, insisting that the best means of guaranteeing such a process is not through the presence of international observers but the involvement of the Palestinian people themselves.

He recalled that many had predicted chaos in the Palestinian Authority following the death of President ARAFAT; however, no constitutional change was made to accommodate one or other of the potential presidential candidates. The message was clear: the will and the choice of the Palestinians would be shown through the ballot boxes. Recalling that he was himself a member of the opposition, he stated his strong belief in democracy and periodicity of elections as his political credo.

Mr KHREISHEH explained the unique nature of the PLC. It is the only Parliament in the world whose members cannot all sit together on a regular basis thus necessitating reliance on videoconferencing, not to mention two of its members being currently detained in Israeli prisons. Furthermore, general elections were due to take place in 1999 but had been constantly postponed. PLC members thus still exert their mandate today.

As a result, Mr KHREISHEH insisted on the necessity for Israel to lift its current occupation. He reaffirmed the need for negotiations with the view to establishing a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In conclusion, the speaker expressed his confidence in the future, stating that nowadays, one after the other, occupied countries all over the world are recovering their freedom.

Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT expressed his condolences for President ARAFAT and announced that he would pay his respects at President Arafat's tomb at the Muquata on behalf of the European Parliament following the meeting.

Stating that during this visit the delegation would observe the divisions which the Palestinian people face on a daily basis, the Chairman of the EP delegation asserted his conviction that these elections in the Palestinian territories should be a model for the entire Arab world. He commented that the EP was also there to observe whether democratic assistance funded by the EU was being properly implemented, especially in the geographic area of the European neighbourhood, which is of utmost priority to the European Parliament.

During the exchange of views with members of the delegation, Mr KHREISHEH, assisted by his colleague Mr Ziyad ABU ZIYAD elaborated on the following issues:

- it would have been more convenient to hold presidential and general elections together, as in 1996, but this would only have been possible if the scheduling had been done well in advance. In this case, President Arafat's death had triggered the constitutional mechanism of

holding presidential elections within 60 days; nevertheless, Mr KHREISHEH expressed the wish to welcome the EP observers once again for the general elections in July 2005;

- on the arrest of presidential candidate Mustafa BARGHOUTI while campaigning in Jerusalem, he reiterated that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied territories and that the situation experienced by Mr BARGHOUTI is a regular occurrence for Palestinians;
- concerning Hamas, he would like them to be part of the next Palestinian Parliament, hoping that a mixed system of voting (50% of the seats on national lists, 50% of the seats according to constituency vote) would allow this;
- he also reaffirmed that the electoral campaign had been fair and that all candidates had had to face identical difficulties; by law, candidates were given equal time in the public media and a new law is currently being drafted to regulate campaign coverage in the private media sector;
- he certified that all polling stations were easily accessible (ground floor), thus allowing elderly and crippled people to vote without additional difficulties;
- candidates had their own observers in the various polling stations; they were allowed to monitor the whole voting procedure and, if need be, contest the counting and request a recount;

Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT concluded the meeting, restating how impressed the delegation had been by the determination of the Palestinian people. Referring to the words and deeds of his relative, Lawrence of Arabia, Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT deplored the passing of 50 years in which we are still waiting for the promise to come true.

However, he also expressed optimism at the current situation and for the future. He reiterated EU commitment to the issue and that, in his view the United States is definitely not the only power that can make it all happen!

### **3. Meeting with the chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Mr Hanna NASIR - Friday 7 December, at 15.30 PM, Best Eastern Hotel (Ramallah)**

In his introduction Mr NASIR stated that the Commission consisted of 9 members working independently from central government. Its work and decisions were subject only to the oversight of the judiciary. A major challenge for the Commission had been the registration process. More than 70% of the potential voters had registered. The Palestinian Legislative Council, however, did not consider this satisfactory and had decided to allow citizens on the civil registry to vote.

The Commission had spent considerable time updating the registry (which dated back to 1996) to avoid double voting. As a precautionary measure against fraud, the Commission had also decided to introduce compulsory ink marking of all voters. Despite efforts, there were persistent problems with regard to the ballot in East Jerusalem. This was largely due to the lack of polling stations and the fact that ballots would be transported to the nearest electoral office by Israeli nationals (CEC polling officials would not be allowed into the postal offices).

The presence of EU observers was welcome - they would monitor the way in which the Palestinian Authority managed the elections but also the behaviour of the Israeli forces towards Palestinians who wished to cast their votes. The final results were expected to be published on Monday morning, 10 January.

In reply to questions by Members of the delegation, Mr NASIR explained that

- contacts with CEC members based in Gaza had been maintained via videoconferencing.
- the house-to-house registration of voters in East Jerusalem had been conducted by a University institute on behalf of the CEC given that the official registration offices had been closed down by the Israeli authorities;
- ballots cast in East Jerusalem would be transported by the Israeli authorities to the Central Election Commission for counting;
- voters might experience difficulties in other areas than East Jerusalem, e.g. in the 16 districts affected by the wall or at the Rafah checkpoint, at the border with Egypt, depending on the attitude of the Israeli military forces on election day;
- 1,1 million people had registered to vote; another 700,000 had been added on the basis of the civil registry; out of a total of 1,8 million Palestinians, 1,4 million lived in the West Bank; people who were neither on the electoral lists nor on the civil registry would not be allowed to vote;

After the meeting the delegation travelled to the Mukuata to lay a wreath on the tomb of Yasser ARAFAT.

#### **4. Meeting with Mr Michel ROCARD, MEP and Chief Observer of the EU Electoral Observation Mission, 17.30, Ambassador Hotel (Jerusalem)**

Originally scheduled for the morning of the same day, the meeting with the Chief Observer had to be postponed because of time constraints. Although there was not enough time for a thorough exchange of views between Mr ROCARD and his peers, the delegation welcomed the briefing by the Chief Observer who had been on-the-spot since the middle of December.

Mr ROCARD began by describing the situation of holding of elections under military occupation as being "the limit of the impossible". He spoke of the choice of the Palestinians, following the death of ARAFAT. to hold elections with universal suffrage as a "courageous" one, and considered it to be the beginning of a democratic process despite current conditions. Mr Rocard added that it was also the wish of the Israelis to hold free and fair elections.

Concerning possible irregularities in the electoral and voting process, the EU Chief Observer noted that in the present case there is no "Ukrainian danger", i.e. a risk of massive fraud. However, the EP delegation should not think that the election observation mission served no purpose. On the contrary, democracy is not a one-time election-event.

Up until this year Palestinians had only been given the chance to cast their vote twice (local elections in 1976, of which less than 50% of the then-electorate is still alive, and presidential elections coupled with general elections in 1996). And yet this is a country and a population

which is expressing a clear wish for democracy - in local elections in late 2003 the average turnout was 81%. This is much higher than in most European countries.

The important presence of the EP *in loco* makes a key contribution to the instilling of democracy throughout the Palestinian territories and in Palestinian society. It is this leitmotiv, far from political tourism, that should guide and set the deontology of the EP's on-the-spot presence.

Mr ROCARD spoke further about Palestinian frustration that the EU is only an observer of the elections. The tendency would be to expect more from the EU, for example firm political action against possible impediments set in place by Israeli soldiers. He also warned Members of the difficult situations that they might witness the following day whilst on deployment and the feelings of resentment and contempt that might ensue. Mr ROCARD urged them to keep in mind that about 1,000 Israeli citizens die every year as the result of terrorist attacks.

#### **5. Meeting with Mr Mustafa BARGHOUTI - Saturday 8 December, at 10.30 am, Rocky Hotel (Ramallah)**

Mr BARGHOUTI made the following points:

- the mere holding of the elections meant that some goals had already been attained. The Palestinians were showing that fair and democratic elections were possible even under occupation. Their maturity proved that this people deserved to have an independent state.

The elections were a model for the Arab world. During the campaign a third force, standing between Fatah and Hamas had emerged. People who did not identify themselves with either (the silent majority) wanted to express themselves, wanted a solution to the conflict, wanted freedom and peace. These people identified themselves with Barghouti.

- The election campaign was taking place under occupation and, therefore, the freedom of movement of the electors was restricted; this illustrated some of the problems the population is confronted by.

During the election campaign (which lasted one month) he was personally attacked eight times by the Israeli authorities. Even the day before, when he had tried to visit the Al Aqsa mosque with prior permission from the Israeli authorities, he had been prevented from entering East Jerusalem without any reason being given. *"Israel is humiliating us"*.

- He was confronted with difficulties also from the Palestinian side: his supporters were beaten, posters were ripped down, and the intelligence services exerted psychological pressure on him by spreading rumours and lies. Furthermore, ABU MAZEN [Mahmoud ABBAS] had access to all facilities belonging to the Palestinian Authority (cars, funding, and employees) whereas his party was not receiving any public subsidies.
- ABU MAZEN subscribed to the old system whereas Barghouti was in favour of reform, especially in order to promote a multi-party system, improve healthcare and education, introduce transparency in the funding of political parties and redirect public expenditure (currently, for example, 34% of the budget is allocated to security issues in comparison to 8% for healthcare; out of 150 000 civil servants, 50 000 are engaged by the security services).

## **6. Meeting with the EU EOM Core Team - Saturday 8 December, at 12.00 am, Best Eastern Hotel (Ramallah)**

The delegation was briefed by the EU EOM Core Team, notably Mr Michel ROCARD, Chief of Mission, Mr Mark STEVENS, Deputy Chief of Mission, together with their Media and Security Experts. After outlining the structure of the EU long-term election observation mission and the electoral legal and administrative framework, speakers focused on the campaign environment and on security conditions.

The EU EOM Media monitoring had shown that official campaigning time had been equally distributed amongst all candidates. However, the Fatah candidate, Mr Mahmoud ABBAS, had benefited from far greater news coverage than his competitors. Abbas's use of public infrastructure and resources for campaigning purposes had also been noted.

Members were finally briefed about security conditions on Election Day.

## **7. Meeting with Mr Mahmoud ABBAS, Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee and Presidential candidate - Saturday 8 January, at 2.00 PM, Mukkata (Ramallah)**

Mr Mahmoud ABBAS recalled the difficult context in which the elections were taking place (60-day deadline following the death of Yasser ARAFAT, Israeli occupation), and expressed his satisfaction and pride as to the way in which the process had been handled so far.

These elections were part of a momentous process, the next steps being the relaunch of peace negotiations and the general elections in the summer. Mr Mahmoud ABBAS outlined the internal priorities as the reorganisation of the Palestinian security forces, the decommissioning of terrorist groups, the establishment of a truly independent judiciary and economic recovery. EU financial assistance was essential to combat poverty (60% of Palestinians live below the poverty line). Reducing poverty would also mean diminished support for terrorism, with economic progress being the best argument for convincing Palestinian citizens of the advantages of peace.

Following questions by MEPs, Mr Mahmoud ABBAS explained that the EU has a major role to play in relaunching the Roadmap and ensuring that both parties were committed to it. The peace process was facilitated by improved relations with neighbouring Arab countries (especially Lebanon and Syria). Internal reforms involving security, finances and public administration - namely achieving a fair and independent judiciary - were underway. New laws had been passed and it was now a matter of implementing them.

Mr ABBAS finally recalled the role of Mr ARAFAT - "unfairly treated when alive" - in supporting the Roadmap and renewed his commitment to peace negotiations with international legitimacy "as the only way possible". Should he be elected, he firmly restated his own commitment to meet with Israeli leaders as soon as possible after the elections.

Mr McMILLAN SCOTT announced that he would recommend inviting the next President of the Palestinian Authority to attend a solemn sitting of the European Parliament.



✓ **Election day**

**Area of Jerusalem**

The largest group of the delegation (9 Members) observed the elections in the area of Jerusalem, under the coordination of the Vice-Chairperson of the Delegation, Mrs NAPOLETANO.

The team had previously decided to enlarge their area of observation and to cover Jericho and Bethlehem as well in their observation.

Mr ADAMOU and KASOULIDES spent the day in **Bethlehem** where, having met with the EU-EOM responsible for the area, they agreed to make random visits in the area so as to be able to observe a high number of polling stations. Their impression was that the process was conducted very professionally and in a calm and civilized manner. Voter participation was high, from both males and females.

Some concerns could be raised about the visibility of ballot papers to other voters once placed in the boxes, which might influence the process, and the fact that, in one case, a policeman was evidently trying to influence voters in favour of one candidate. They did not detect any particular problem in crossing the check points.

In general, they observed that the free will of the electorate could be expressed through this elections.

Mrs CASTEX and MR TAKKULA and one member of staff went to **Jericho**. The team went to 12 voting centers housing in total 40 voting stations.

Those voting stations and centers working on the basis of the election register seemed to have the task well in hand. Those voting centers working on the basis of the civil register were more chaotic.

The team noted that at a certain point at the end of the morning, the officials in the polling stations refused to answer questions from observers. It was not until later in the afternoon that the information block was lifted.

The election observation team followed the count of the votes cast in the Jericho Main Prison.

From the very first voter and throughout the day, the team was impressed by the competence and professionalism of all the electoral officers. The training these teams had received bore fruit. As the teams were exclusively composed of teachers, the vast majority of officers were women.

Four teams observed the electoral process in the town of **Jerusalem**, which of course was a special case owing to the fact that there were no polling stations in town, there were only six post offices where people could cast their vote.

The teams were as follows: ANGELILLI/ZAPPALA', TANNOCK/GARCIA MARGALLO, LASCHET/STENZEL, and another of Mrs NAPOLETANO and staff.

Despite the difficult situation due to the presence of the Israeli authorities, the election process was conducted in a positive environment and access to voting centers via the check points was

not particularly difficult. Nevertheless, the turnout proved to be extremely low and all teams were concerned by this.

The teams noticed that only a small number of those able to vote in the six postal centers exercised this right and that Palestinian voters with Israeli ID, fearing the consequences on their future in Jerusalem, felt intimidated and did not vote in the 14 villages surrounding the town where polling stations had been set up.

### **Area of Gaza**

The team was composed of 4 members, Mrs Luisa MORGANTINI, Mrs De KEYSER, Baroness NICHOLSON and Mr CHIESA, accompanied by two members of staff and an interpreter. Two local guides/interpreters joined the team in Gaza City.

The team left for Gaza on Saturday p.m. from the Mukuata.

Passing the Israeli checkpoint at Erez was an experience in itself. As drivers from Jerusalem were not allowed to cross the border with Gaza, members of the delegation had to drive the three cars through the terminal to the Palestinian control post on the other side, where drivers from Gaza were waiting for the delegation. Thanks to the arrangements made by the staff of the EU core team, Israeli Defence Forces tried to ease the transfer as much and were as friendly as possible, even granting Baroness Nicholson a cup of tea!

Upon arrival in Gaza City late afternoon, the team had a meeting with Mr Marwan KARAFANI, Chairman of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, with Ms Jamila SAIDEM Chairperson of the Committee on Refugees of the PLC, and with Mr Yasser NAJAR, Senior Assistant to the Minister on Foreign Affairs.

The delegation moved to the hotel where another meeting was held with various representatives of the Centre of Research for Peace and other Palestinian NGOs based in Gaza. The delegation then went for a courtesy meeting to the private house of the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Nabil SHAATH, before joining NGO representatives for an informal dinner at the hotel. The evening ended with the security briefing of the EU core team in Gaza, distribution of maps and exchange of views on next day's deployment.

On election day the team split into three groups. Taking into consideration information received by the British intelligence service, the consulate of the UK firmly warned its nationals about possible terrorist attacks against British nationals present in Gaza on election day and urged them to leave the place. Reluctant to leave the Gaza strip, Baroness NICHOLSON decided to spend the election day at the electoral centre in Gaza City and to return to Israel before nightfall.

A team composed of Ms Véronique de Keyser (PSE, B) and Mr Giulietto CHIESA (ALDE, I), accompanied by one member of staff and a local guide/interpreter went to the South of the Gaza strip (mainly Rafah and surroundings) and returned to Gaza City to observe the closing of the polling stations.

The second team, composed of Ms Luisa MORGANTINI and accompanied by one member of staff, an interpreter and a local guide, went to the Northern part of the Gaza strip (Gaza City, Jabalia Refugee Camp, Beit Lahya) before heading south in order to observe the polls in Khan Younis and in the enclave of Al Mawasi, and coming back for the closing of polling stations in Gaza City.

Teams left Gaza at midnight, crossed the Erez checkpoint (extensive checks by Israeli security took about one and a half hours) and arrived in Jerusalem at 3:15 am on Monday 10 January.

Overall, the Gaza teams, dispatched throughout the whole of the Gaza strip, observed about 20 polling centres, ranging from Gaza City, refugee camps, enclaves and smaller urban centres. The conclusions of both teams were extremely positive. Members were impressed by the organisation, determination, civic awareness - and behaviour - of both the people responsible for the polling stations and the voters. There were no reported incidences of attempts to hinder the voting procedure in polling stations.

The only issue that must be raised is the unreliability of the voter registers, as remarked upon in other areas. This resulted in the somewhat tiresome consequence of elderly voters having to travel from one polling centre to another (civil register-specific polling centres), which were sometimes far apart, in order to be able to vote.

Although the Israeli Defence Forces were extremely accommodating to the EP observer team, it was hard not to feel the effects of military occupation on the freedom of movement of the 6000 Palestinians living in the enclave.

Last but not least, the election process in Al Mawasi, notwithstanding the absence of electricity (and thus by candlelight) and heating, was as well organised and regular as in other polling stations observed.

### **Area of Nablus**

The team covering the **Nablus, Qalqiliya and Jenin** area left for Nablus on Saturday 8 January p.m. where it met with representatives of the civil society, and MPs.

The four MEPs (Mr GUARDANS CAMBO, Mrs HYBASKOVA, Mr HOWITT, Mr LOUIS) and two officials, accompanied by an Arabic-French interpreter, split into three separate teams which covered, respectively, the area west of Nablus, including Qalqiliya, the Nablus area and Jenin.

The teams visited approximately 35 polling centres in rural villages and urban areas, refugee camps, such as the Belata camp in Nablus and the Jenin camp, enclaves, such as the village of Ras at Tira, and other difficult areas, especially around Jenin, where the presence of international observers was less felt. No irregularities were noted and there were limited instances of assisted voting.

In general all teams were impressed by the conscientiousness and dedication of polling officers. The strong presence of women at polling stations (some of them holding the position of director of the centre) had certainly encouraged and facilitated women's vote. Access to polling stations was generally easy (exceptions were noted in enclaves located between the wall and the green line in the Jenin area and in the village of Beita where the curfew imposed by Israeli forces following an attack was lifted only in the morning of election day). In rural areas the CEC had organised public transport for voters who had to go to the special polling stations.

Turnout was generally high, including in refugee camps, with the major exception of the special polling stations. The environment around polling was calm. Access to polling centres was monitored by Palestinian security officers. As a result no arms were noted inside the centres.

### **Area of Hebron**

The team was composed of Mr SPERONI (Coordinator), Ms LUCAS, DE ROSSA, Mr MASIP HIDALGO, two members of staff and an interpreter.

The team, divided in three cars left Jerusalem at 8:00 am and arrived at Hebron at 9:00. The Hebron election observation team went to approximately 25 voting centres.

All groups underlined that they were always well received and had no access problems whatsoever. The area surrounding the voting centers was rather crowded in several locations. In almost all the voting stations observers of candidates Mahmoud ABBAS and Moustafa BARGHOUTI were present.

The situation in all the voting stations and centres working on the basis of the election register seemed to be well in hand. The same could not be said about polling centers using the civil register. People were complaining about the fact that they were not registered.

In the afternoon, in some polling stations, the observers were refused the answer to the two questions which they had regularly asked in other voting stations.

The teams also visited the H2 area where there was almost no one around. Members were not hindered by Israeli soldiers present in this area. One polling station was quite crowded, but there were no special events to be reported.

### **Area of Ramallah**

The team charged with observing the elections in the area of Ramallah (Mr Mc MILLAN-SCOTT, Mrs HEDL, Mrs GRUBER, Mrs MASTEMBROEK and Mr GAHLER) decided to deploy in three groups, in order to get an overall overview of how the election process was conducted in the area.

Mr Mc MILLAN-SCOTT, chairperson of the delegation, was accompanied by two officials and an interpreter. Mr Mc Millan-Scott, as well as observing the voting in polling stations in Ramallah town, held meetings with the Campaign Directors of several of the candidates, visited the headquarters of the EU-EOM mission and the main media center. At one polling station he had a chance to exchange views with Mr BARGHOUTI and Senator John KERRY. In addition, he met another group in a private capacity.

At the closing time of the vote, Mr Mc MILLAN-SCOTT was in Al Amari Refugee camp where he observed the closing procedure and the subsequent counting of the votes in Benet Al Bireh School.

Mrs HEDH and Mr GAHLER and one member of staff spent the day observing polling stations on the outskirts of Ramallah. They closely cooperated with Short Term Observers responsible for the area. Together they witnessed the opening of polling station in Ein Arik, a village close to Ramallah. Throughout the day, they were impressed by the high level of participation of women in the electoral process.

On their request, on three occasions the Israeli Defence Forces removed barriers in order to facilitate the observer's movements between Palestinian villages.

Mrs GRUBER and Mrs MASTENBROEK decided to observe polling stations in areas more distant from Ramallah. Having started the observation in Qalandiya camp, they travelled to the North visiting Al Amari and finishing the day close to Qalqiliya. They were impressed by the high level of professionalism of those responsible for running the polling stations, the high level of participation of women and the notable campaigning means deployed close to the polling stations by Fatah supporters.

#### ✓ **Debriefing on 10 January**

On 10.1, the delegation met for a general debriefing on the overall observation. Following an introduction by the Chairperson, the coordinators of the 5 teams (Mrs NAPOLETANO, GUARDANS, DE KEYSER on behalf of Mrs MORGANTINI, Mr SPERONI and the Chairman briefly addressed other Members of the delegation, giving an overview of the most relevant points observed on election day by their teams. Other Members (Mrs STENZEL, Mr TANNOCK, Mrs LUCAS, Mr DE ROSSA Mrs HEDH AND MASTENBROEK) took the floor to focus on particular experiences they had had during election day.

After a general debate, the delegation agreed that the coordinators would provide the Chairperson with some written remarks on their experience, in order to incorporate these into the report of the delegation.

The legal expert of the EU- EOM, Mr CALDWELL, informed Members of the outcome of the elections known at that stage (turnout) and drew their attention to problems that might have arisen following the CEC decision on the election day to change conditions for voter eligibility. A potential calendar of complaints and timing for appeals was indicated.

Finally, the Chairperson proposed to the delegation to agree on a first statement of the EP delegation to observe the elections in Palestine.

After a comprehensive debate, where most of the Members of the delegation intervened, a text was drafted and, as agreed with Mr ROCARD, inserted in the preliminary statement of the EU-EOM which was presented to the media at a press conference which took place at 14.00 on the same day (Annex C).

#### **Conclusions** \*

##### **The ad hoc delegation to observe the presidential elections in Palestine on 9 January 2005**

- ✓ recalls that the ad hoc delegation to observe the elections in Palestine was conducted in close cooperation with the European Union Election Observation Mission led by Mr Michel Rocard, Member of Parliament, and shares the conclusions of the EU-EOM preliminary statement issued on 10 January 2005;
- ✓ Commends the work of the EU-EOM in analysing the preparation for the election, its monitoring of the media, its organisation of short-term observers, its handling of logistics and its analysis of the results

- ✓ thanks the Palestinian and Israeli authorities for their cooperation and assistance to the delegation

### **On the election process**

- ✓ bearing in mind the narrow timeframe and the difficult circumstances resulting from Israeli occupation under which the electoral process had to take place, warmly welcomes the civic and democratic manner in which these Palestinian elections took place on 9 January 2005 and endorses the final electoral result;
- ✓ considers that despite the above difficulties, the Central Election Commission successfully managed the election (candidate and voter registration, monitoring of the campaign environment and training of polling staff);
- ✓ commends the preparation, competence and professionalism of all electoral staff; welcomes the strong presence of women amongst polling staff and their participation in the vote;
- ✓ believes that this augurs well for the general elections to come and should lead to a stronger representation of women in the Palestinian Legislative Council, in line with the objectives pursued by the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly; calls on the European Parliament to support the role of women in Palestinian political life and in the wider Arab world;
- ✓ welcomes the readiness shown by the Israeli government to contribute to the smooth-running of these elections;
- ✓ is pleased to record that the EP delegation has no significant incidents of fraud to report; considers this successful democratic event a promising omen of further consolidation of the democratic process in the Palestinian territories and in the whole Arab world;
- ✓ deplores the situation in East Jerusalem and Gaza, which led to the low turnout of voters in these key areas of the region;
- ✓ is concerned that, following the decision by the Israelis to close the border at Rafah, after it had been blown up by a terrorist attack, nearly 10-15,000 Palestinian citizens have been blocked in Egypt for almost one month and were unable to reach their home towns and exercise their right to vote;
- ✓ underlines that while the elections were conducted in an efficient way and generally met international standards, some concerns remain regarding the electoral legal framework (transparency of funds, separation of parties and public institutions, campaigning and access to media);
- ✓ regrets the decision to prolong the opening times of polling stations and to allow any ID bearer to vote, since this could have seriously undermined the credibility of the electoral process and the legitimacy of the result;

### **On the preparation of the next legislative elections**

- ✓ calls upon the Israeli authorities and the newly elected President of the Palestinian Authority to start discussions immediately on the improvement of conditions for voters in East Jerusalem (universal registration, setting-up of proper polling stations) and Gaza (opening of borders and checkpoints);
- ✓ emphasizes the need of an independent Central Election Commission, able to fulfill its duties without any kind of external pressure;
- ✓ urges all political parties and factions to participate in the upcoming general elections, scheduled for 17 July 2005;
- ✓ highlights the necessity to improve voter registration and update the civil registry and to reform the electoral legal framework in order to ensure transparency in campaigning funds and a clear separation of parties and public institutions;
- ✓ records that the EP delegation for relations with the PLC considers this reform as a priority in their discussions with their Palestinian counterparts;
- ✓ insists on the necessity to pursue international and European efforts towards greater voter education in view of the greater complexity of the upcoming parliamentary elections; calls on the Commission to continue to provide assistance in the preparation of these elections;
- ✓ recommends that the EP sends an ad hoc delegation to observe the legislative elections;

### **Final considerations**

- ✓ is convinced that the massive involvement of the EU, both in human and financial terms, in the organisation of these elections, was appropriate and necessary and encourages the EU to maintain and strengthen its presence and action in the Palestinian territories; restates that the EU must take the lead in developing and democratising the Mediterranean neighbourhood in general;
- ✓ encourages the newly elected President to honour his pledge to renounce violence, to reinforce control over the Palestinian security corps, and to carry through internal reforms; calls on the Palestinian Authority to pursue the process of consolidating democratic institutions by promoting an independent judiciary, clearer separation of powers, good governance -including transparent accounting- and the rule of law;
- ✓ urges Israel to reopen the Rafah border and to put an end to the harassment and intimidation of ordinary Palestinian citizens at transit checkpoints within the Gaza strip;
- ✓ invites both the EU and the US, as well as the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, to welcome the opportunity offered by the elections and firmly believes that the Roadmap continues to be the main guideline to reach peace;
- ✓ recommends that the European Parliament develops a coherent strategy in this area and deems it appropriate that, in the wake of these momentous elections, its Committee on

Foreign Affairs draws up an own-initiative report providing an in-depth analysis of the situation and identifying new opportunities in the area;

- ✓ suggest that this report should focus on:
  - close scrutiny of the electoral process in view of the upcoming legislative elections,
  - fostering the democratic reform and good governance in the Palestinian Authority,
  - ensuring that the role played by the Union in the Middle East is commensurate with the extent of its financial support in the area;
- ✓ is convinced that democracy is not a single-election-event and therefore suggests the creation of a joint follow-up working party, which under the auspices of the Foreign Affairs Committee, steered by the Chairman and Vice-Chairperson of the EP *ad hoc* delegation for the observation of the Palestinian Presidential Elections, and involving the chairs of the relevant interparliamentary delegations, the Chief Observer of the EU electoral observation mission and the European Commission, will closely monitor the electoral process in view of the upcoming Palestinian legislative elections.
- ✓ requests the Commission to forward to the working party a breakdown of the costs of the EU-EOM and ancillary or related expenditure

\* **IMPORTANT NOTE**

The ad hoc delegation met with Mr ROCARD, on 23 February 2005 to review this report which was written immediately after the election. Members were anxious to stress that, while they confirmed its contents, they recognise the very welcome evolution to date in Israeli / Palestinian relations. They also draw attention to the Resolution on the situation in the Middle East adopted by the European Parliament on 27 January 2005.



# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

## AD-HOC DELEGATION FOR THE OBSERVATION OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

9 January 2005

Participants list

<b>Members (28)</b>		<b><u>Group</u></b>	<b><u>Country</u></b>
Mr Adamos	ADAMOU	GUE	Cyprus
Ms Roberta	ANGELILLI	UEN	Italy
Mme Françoise	CASTEX	PES	France
Mr Giulietto	CHIESA	ALDE	Italy
Ms Veronique	DE KEYSER	PES	Belgium
Mr Proinsias	DE ROSSA	PES	Ireland
Mr Michael	GAHLER	EPP-ED	Germany
Mr José Manuel	GARCIA MARGALLO Y MARFIL	EPP-ED	Spain
Ms Lilli	GRUBER	PES	Italy
Mr Ignasi	GUARDANS CAMBO	ALDE	Spain
Ms Anna	HEDH	PES	Sweden
Mr Richard	HOWITT	PES	United Kingdom
Ms Jana	HYBASKOVA	EPP-ED	The Czech Republic
Mr Ioannis	KASOULIDES	EPP-ED	Cyprus
Mr Armin	LASCHET	EPP-ED	Germany
Mr Patrick	LOUIS	IND-DEM	France
Ms Caroline	LUCAS	V/ALE	United Kingdom
Mr Antonio	MASIP HIDALGO	PES	Spain
Ms Edith	MASTENBROEK	PES	The Netherlands
Mr Edward	McMILLAN-SCOTT	EPP-ED	United Kingdom
Ms Luisa	MORGANTINI	GUE	Italy
Ms Pasqualina	NAPOLETANO	PES	Italy
Baroness Emma	NICHOLSON	ALDE	United Kingdom
Mr Francesco	SPERONI	IND-DEM	Italy
Ms Ursula	STENZEL	EPP-ED	Austria
Mr Hannu	TAKKULA	ALDE	Finland
Mr Charles	TANNOCK	EPP-ED	United Kingdom
Mr Stefano	ZAPPALA	EPP-ED	Italy

PPE-DE	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
PSE	Group of the Party of European Socialists
ALDE	Group of the Alliance of Democrats and Liberals of Europe
Verts/ALE	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
IND/DEM	Independence and Democracy Group
UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations Group
NI	Non attached members

### **DG III Staff (7)**

Mr Dietmar NICKEL	Director General
Mr Pietro DUCCI	Administrator
Mr Silvio GONZATO	Administrator
Mr Hans-Hermann KRAUS	Administrator
Mr Alexandre STUTZMANN	Administrator
Ms Morag DONALDSON	Administrative Assistant
Ms Claudia SCHWENDENWEIN	Administrative Assistant

### **Political Group Staff (5)**

Mrs Evangelia MITSOPOULOU	Advisor EPP-ED group
Ms Ruth DECESARE	Advisor PES group
Mr Bruno MASARA	Advisor PES group
Mr Niccolo RINALDI	Advisor ALDE group
Ms Silvia LOCATI	Advisor UEN group

### **Office of the Vice-President**

Ms Jennifer FORREST

### **Interpreters (5)**

Rania ABDALLAH-ASAD KHAMAD  
 Amira ABDEL ALIM  
 Manal EL HELOU  
 Mouna MRAD  
 Radhia ZRIBA

### **Press and audiovisual (4)**

Ralph PINE	Press liaison
Angus ROXBURGH	Journalist
Karel LAMONT	Sound technician
Jean-Pol DETIMMERMAN	Cameraman

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AD-HOC DELEGATION FOR THE  
OBSERVATION OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

**Programme**

**Thursday, 6 January**

Arrival of MEP'S and staff in Tel Aviv

Transfer to the hotel

Ambassador Hotel  
*Nablus Road*  
Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem

**Friday, 7 January**

**Jerusalem, Hotel Ambassador**

- 8.45 Last minute information on the programme of the delegation
- 9.00 Meeting with Heads of Mission, Council and Representatives of the Member States, and European Commission Technical Assistance Office (ECTAO) to the West Bank and Gaza
- 10.15 Coffee break
- 10.30 Meetings of the five teams of the delegation to discuss deployment plan
- 13.00 **Departure of the delegation for Ramallah**
- 14.00 Meeting with Speaker of Legislative Council
- 15.00 Meeting with the Palestinian Central Electoral Commission
- 17.30 Meeting with Mr Michel ROCARD, Chief Observer of EU Election Observation Mission
- 18.00 Reception offered by ECTAO  
Ambassador Hotel

## **Saturday, 8 January**

- 9.00 Departure to **Ramallah**
- 10.00 Meeting with Mr. Mustafa Barghouthi, Presidential Candidate
- 11.00 Briefing with the EU-EOM core team on election process including security issues
- 13.30 Meeting with Mr Mahmoud Abbas, Presidential Candidate  
Fatah HQ

Departures of the Gaza and Nablus groups

Accommodation:

Al Yasmeeen Hotel	Palestine Hotel
Nablus	Gaza

Rest of the delegation back to **Jerusalem**

*Afternoon*

- 14.30 Visit of the Security Wall in **Jerusalem**

## **Sunday, 9 January**

Deployment of the delegation in 5 teams in the following areas<sup>(\*)</sup>:

1. East Jerusalem / Jericho / Bethlehem
2. Gaza
3. Area of Hebron
4. Nablus, Qalailiya and Jenin
5. Area of Ramallah

- From 21.00 on Hotel Ambassador: Buffet for the various teams of the delegation coming back to **Jerusalem**

## **Monday, 10 January**

- 9.30 De-briefing meeting of the delegation
- 12.30 Departure of the delegation to Tel Aviv
- 14.00 EU-EOM Press Conference
- 14.45 Departure of the Chairman of the delegation
- 18.45 End of delegation work



**European Union Election Observation Mission  
West Bank and Gaza 2005**

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## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

### **“Palestinian election overcomes difficult and tense conditions but highlights challenges that lie ahead”**

#### ***Executive Summary***

- The 9 January election for the president of the Palestinian Authority represented a genuine effort to conduct a regular electoral process. Despite the difficult and tense conditions, Palestinian electoral authorities made adequate and sufficient arrangements for voters and the strong turn out showed that the public was enthusiastic to exercise its democratic rights. However, the occupation and continuing violence as well as restrictions on freedom of movement meant that a truly free election was always going to be difficult to achieve.
- With the exception of some tense parts of the Gaza Strip, the process on election day in the regular polling stations was generally peaceful and voters had sufficient freedom of movement, with the noticeable relaxation of checkpoints in some areas, but with problems remaining in Nablus, Hebron and parts of Gaza. Observers noted that the process in the regular polling stations was well conducted and polling station commissions worked extremely hard and diligently to administer the voting.
- The electoral authorities ensured that the electoral process was ready for the conduct of the poll on 9 January despite the challenges and obstacles they faced. This was an enormous effort on their behalf. However there is concern at the last minute changes for voting at the special polling stations, which was outside of the law and impacted negatively on the proper administration of voting at these places as it did not benefit from the safeguards envisioned in the law. The Central Elections Commission (CEC) is strongly urged to ensure that such a situation is not repeated in future elections.
- There is concern at the lack of proper voting facilities and clear procedures for the voters of East Jerusalem, and it was noted that on election day people faced administrative obstacles in exercising their voting right. The electoral arrangements in East Jerusalem are highly problematic and the 1996 Protocol on Elections does not provide proper electoral conditions. During the campaign the

final procedures were only worked out very late and candidates suffered from this. Likewise on election day, the late confirmation of procedures and consequent lack of adequate public information resulted in confusion for voters. It is clear that for the coming elections the present Israeli-Palestinian agreement concerning elections in East Jerusalem requires reconsideration in order to avoid further tension and problems.

- The election campaign passed off without major incident directly linked to the campaign, but there were restrictions on the freedom of movement for candidates. This caused a lot of frustration among candidates as they faced obstacles in gaining access to voters, notably in East Jerusalem and Gaza. However, the campaign was vigorously contested, with candidates utilising media advertising and eventually conducting rallies in most areas. Freedom of movement would have been greatly facilitated by clearer and more timely procedures for the granting of permits for candidates and their staff.
- With the exception of East Jerusalem the voter registration process conducted by the CEC was highly credible, capturing some 71% of the electorate. The later decision to also open the process to persons on the civil register complicated the work of the CEC.
- There was misuse of public resources in favour of one candidate, with public officials seen campaigning in his favour. The law is clear on this point and this should not be allowed, but the electoral authorities did not act against this despite numerous complaints.
- Despite the noted shortcomings, it is clear that given the context this election represents an achievement and an opportunity. Whilst democracy cannot necessarily be consolidated in one or two elections, the practice for Palestinian leaders to seek legitimacy through the ballot box is being entrenched and the spirit and numbers in which the Palestinian people registered and participated are strong indicators of a will to follow the path of the rule of law and popular participation.
- It remains clear that the most serious problems facing the election stemmed from the wider political context and the impact of the existing occupation and conflict. For the electoral process the challenge now is to learn from this experience by further strengthening the independence of the CEC, ensuring more rigorous enforcement of the legal provisions and clarifying and developing the legislative framework in time for the proposed legislative council elections later in the year.

## ***Detailed Findings***

### ***Election Day***

With the exception of some tense parts of Gaza, the process on election day was generally peaceful and voters had sufficient freedom of movement and were able to

reach their polling places. But observers reported that restrictions remained in parts of Nablus, Hebron and Gaza. Observers noted that the process in the regular polling stations was well conducted and the proper voter list proved to be reliable. However, observers did report of widespread campaigning around polling stations, mostly for Mahmoud Abbas, which created a partisan atmosphere.

The most significant problems on election day were in East Jerusalem and in the special centres for voters on the civil register. In East Jerusalem, on the basis of the 1996 Protocol on Elections, some Palestinians had to vote in Israeli post offices, but no voter registration had been conducted due to the curtailment of the registration process in September by the Israeli authorities.

The inadequate and late agreement on many of the technical arrangements for East Jerusalem, including the door-to-door registering of voters only days before the election, resulted in a lack of timely information for voters and in people being unsure of where to vote on election day, causing confusion and anxiety. As a consequence a decision was eventually taken on the day of the election to allow people registered during the January canvas to vote at any post office. Whilst this was a pragmatic response to a real problem, it exemplifies how poor the arrangements and information for voters had been. The procedures in the post office did not provide proper secrecy for voters and generally discouraged participation.

It should be noted that whilst the 1996 Protocol providing for voting in East Jerusalem was a joint Israeli-Palestinian Agreement and was the only arrangement available for the process, many details were lacking and it does not provide for the reasonable participation of voters, with voting being limited to post offices for up to just 6,000 of the potential electorate of some 100,000 persons. Voters in East Jerusalem should enjoy the same conditions as voters elsewhere and not be subject to the restrictions and inconveniences witnessed during this election.

The decision by the Central Elections Commission to extend the hours of polling from 19.00 to 21.00, and the concurrent last minute changes to the voting procedures allowing for all eligible persons with an ID card but not on the voter list to vote at any special voting centre, resulted in an unruly and irregular process in many of the 71 centres and raises serious concerns about the process at some of those places, notably in Gaza North, Gaza City, Ramallah, Tulkarem and Hebron. This provision is not foreseen in the election law and the decision is a matter of regret.

The use of the civil register was a consequence of the Palestinian Legislative Council decision to provide the voting franchise even to persons not included on the initial voters list, which although offering the electoral franchise to more of the electorate severely complicated the work of the CEC. Observers noted that large numbers of persons, including from the police and security forces, were transported to special polling centres to take advantage of this late change, raising serious concerns about both the decision and its consequences.

The large scale presence of candidate agents and civil society observers in polling stations increased the transparency and accountability of the electoral process, as did

the provision for the posting of the results protocol at the polling centre, and these practices are both commended and encouraged for future elections.

### ***Electoral Administration***

The election benefited from the fact that the CEC and lower level election administration bodies enjoy credibility and public confidence. This is a vast improvement from 1996 and aided the organisation and credibility of the process. The EUEOM has concerns regarding the last minute changes to procedures on the day of the election, as noted, but generally the CEC did a very good job under difficult conditions.

The initial voter registration process of September and November 2004 was widely reported to have been well conducted, and the CEC managed to compile a safe list of voters representing some 71% of the estimated total eligible electorate, which is a credible amount. However it is regretted that there was no agreement between Palestinians and Israel on registering voters in East Jerusalem, resulting in voter registration centres in East Jerusalem being closed down by the Israeli authorities. This contributed to the late identification of Palestinian voters in East Jerusalem and contributed to the confusion on election day.

One area of concern regarding the administration is the issue of complaints and appeals. Numerous complaints were lodged with District Election Commissions and the CEC, such as on misuse of public resources, but there was a lack of any real action on these. There was also a lack of transparency, in that complaints and any decisions were not necessarily made public. Such a lack of transparency and inaction on many complaints raises concerns among stakeholders as they do not see the rule of law being upheld in such cases.

### ***Electoral Campaign***

During the pre-election period the most notable difficulty facing the process was the restriction on freedom of movement for candidates and election officials. This resulted in a number of candidates facing serious difficulties in their campaigning activities and a number of incidents between candidates and Israeli military and police at checkpoints, with Mustafa Barghouti and Bassam Salhi both facing repeated problems.

Again, this problem was exacerbated by the late and unclear procedures, notably for East Jerusalem where the procedures were only finalised in the last days of the campaign. Restrictions on freedom of movement also impacted on the preparations by the electoral authorities, particularly in Gaza where violence continued throughout the pre-election period. However, by the eve of the election all essential electoral materials were reported to have been delivered, enabling the timely opening of polling stations.

A widespread problem during the campaign was the involvement of PA institutions, personnel and materials on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas. The law is clear on this point; the PA is not supposed to be involved at all in such a manner. However, observers reported on a government minister in Hebron inviting teachers to attend a Mahmoud Abbas campaign rally; banners and posters hanging on the office buildings of



Governors, Security and Police forces, Local Government and public institutions in Tulkarem, Gaza, Nablus, Hebron and Bethlehem; the active involvement of the security forces in attending campaign rallies for Mahmoud Abbas and security forces obstructing a meeting for Tayseer Khalid in Tulkarem. In many of these cases a complaint was lodged with the district or central election officials but it is uncertain whether any action was taken or not.

There were allegations made against some candidates of illicit campaign financing activities, from either public or foreign sources. It is not possible for the EUEOM to verify the veracity or otherwise of such allegations and all allegations were denied by the candidates. But if the regulatory framework had been clearer and more demanding on candidate disclosures the problem could have been addressed.

### ***Media Coverage***

Media coverage was an improvement compared to 1996, with more voices represented across the media spectrum. The legal provision of equal free airtime for candidates on Palestine TV and Voice of Palestine radio was very positive.

However, on Palestine TV, for example, Mahmoud Abbas received 94% of the overall airtime in news broadcasts during the campaign period. Monitoring also showed that the privately-owned Watan TV devoted 47% of its programming to Mustafa Barghouti, while Amwaji Radio dedicated 94% of the time to Bassam Sahli.

Print media was more balanced and critical, though with a continued advantage for Mahmoud Abbas. However, it was observed that the three main daily newspapers violated the campaign silence by publishing articles on candidates and running paid advertisements.

### ***Remarks by the EUEOM Chief Observer and the Head of the European Parliament Delegation***

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) on election day fielded 277 observers from 26 countries throughout the West Bank and Gaza, making it the largest international observer group present.

The mission was established in Ramallah on 8 December and was joined at the time of the election by 28 Members of the European Parliament, the largest electoral observation delegation deployed by the parliament to date. The MEPs were deployed along with the other observers across all 16 electoral districts.

The mission's Chief Observer, Mr Michel Rocard, said holding a democratic election under occupation is fraught with difficulties and is therefore a rare event.

"In this case it has happened because it is essential. Following the death of president Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian people and national institutions chose to respect the

provisions in the Basic Law and embark on an electoral process to identify their new leader. This decision was a courageous one and shows a demand for democracy," he said.

Mr Rocard, a member of the European Parliament and a former French Prime Minister, said he was pleased that the Israeli government had from the outset expressed public support for the process.

"As a result of this electoral process, the Palestinian people will benefit from a democratically elected and internationally recognized leadership, which will enable them to start to face the difficult challenges that lie ahead," he added.

European Parliament vice-president, Mr Edward McMillan-Scott, who led the MEP delegation, said: "Our task is to deliver an informed political verdict on the electoral process in due course. After an initial appraisal, my colleagues have confirmed that, despite the Israeli occupation and lack of opportunity for East Jerusalem and other residents to vote, the Palestinians – especially women -- have conducted an election of which they can be proud. It prepares the ground for the parliamentary elections, which could serve as a model for others in the region."

The EUEOM included participants from EU Member States plus Norway, Switzerland and Canada. The mission will issue a final report with recommendations at a later stage.

***For further information contact EUEOM press officer, Nuala Haughey, on 054-6907617 or 059-232656***