



**Declaration by Brando BENIFEI,  
Head of the European Parliament's election observation  
delegation  
(integrated in the EU EOM to Lebanon )**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am **Brando Benifei**, Member of the European Parliament, and it is my pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of our Delegation of 7 Members of the European Parliament, coming from 6 different Member States of the European Union and 6 different political groups.

The European Union has observed all elections in Lebanon since 2005. This demonstrates our commitment to this country and its people.

The European Parliament - the only directly-elected body of the EU, representing 447 million European citizens - also followed these elections.

During our stay in the country, we met with national authorities, representatives of several political parties, the Supervisory Commission for Elections, civil society organisations and academics. And of course, we observed the conduct of the elections.



First of all, we would like to fully subscribe to the conclusions of the European Union Election Observation Mission. We fully endorse the findings presented today by my colleague and friend, the Chief Observer, Mr Gyorgy Holveny.

We are glad that in spite of everything, the elections took place at the natural end of the previous parliamentary term. As we know, however, democracy goes beyond elections.

The polls were held in a context that the World Bank described as one of the three most severe crises recorded since the 1950s. Over the last few years Lebanon has faced a financial collapse, a pandemic, one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history, a huge social-economic crisis, widespread corruption, large-scale protests and a political stalemate. Moreover, the Russian war against Ukraine has precipitated Lebanon's food security freefall. In just two and a half years the economic crisis caused the poverty rate to rise from 30% to around 70-80%.

In his April 2022 report, the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur stated, and I quote, that the Lebanese State, including its Central Bank, "is responsible for human rights violations, including the unnecessary immiseration of the population, that have resulted from this man-made crisis".



The institutional breakdown, and the increased dysfunctioning of the Lebanese institutions give the impression that the state is not always in charge, as it should. This is coupled with a widespread corruption, which permeates all levels of society.

Notwithstanding the very nature of the Lebanese consensual democracy, it should be possible for reforms to be carried out. The constant practice of veto wielding, which leads to an ineffective Parliament incapable to take decisions, should be addressed.

Moreover, there is a lack of independence of the judiciary and the prosecution of high-profile criminal cases rarely delivers results, as has been particularly evident in the case of the investigation of the Beirut port blast.

In some of our meetings the issue of macroeconomic structural reforms was described as the best way to address these challenges. In general, we noted a quite general understanding that the IMF is the best available option to get support from the international community, provided the prior conditions of the staff level agreement are swiftly implemented.



The highest authorities of the state told us clearly that external interference and a huge injection of foreign funds during the campaign has led to widespread practices of vote buying.

They added that this phenomenon distorted the level playing field during the election campaign, and in particular the access to the media, which in turn affected the voters' choice.

Many political actors shared with us the preoccupation concerning the integrity of the votes coming from the out of country voting.

On election day we split in three teams and we covered Batrun, Byblos, Chuf, Saida, Mount Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut.

We would like to express our admiration of all the voters of Lebanon in the way they have acted with patience and determination in peacefully exercising their democratic rights, very often queuing for long. On the other hand, we would like to stress that we witnessed several shortcomings.

Due to the lack of resources, including those of the Supervisory Commission for Elections, many polling staff members demonstrated



a clear lack of training, which had a negative impact on the respect of the electoral law provisions, for example in securing the secrecy of the vote.

Our delegation equally observed the presence of more party agents than those foreseen by the law within and around the polling stations. Often this led to confusion and risked creating an intimidating atmosphere. However, we would like to commend the positive presence of the army and police services, which contributed to the relatively peaceful conduct of the elections.

We deplore that the exercise of the right to vote of citizens with disabilities was not guaranteed in the vast majority of the polling stations we observed.

The burdensome transfer of the voter registration location from the ancestral village to the residence place, the socio-economic crisis and the failure to establish the mega-centers of voting might have had an impact on the voter participation rate.

Finally, we deplore that none of the EU EOM recommendations following the 2018 elections were implemented, in particular the ones regarding the weak role of the Supervisory Commission for Elections in dealing with the financing of the campaign and the media



regulation and the participation of women in the political life of the country.

Women in Lebanon still face significant social and financial barrier in Lebanese politics and their participation has been minimal. Furthermore, according to the 2020 World Economic Forum Gender Gap report, Lebanon has one of the highest overall gender gaps in the world, ranking 145 among 153 countries. We consider that the 51% of the population should be represented in larger number in the political life of the country.

Election Day is now behind us, but we are following closely the tabulation and the possible disputes for the attribution of seats. The Lebanese people have elected a new Parliament, in spite of the shortcomings we have witnessed.

We expect the new Parliament to play its role as a responsible and constructive political actor to get Lebanon out of this dreadful crisis.

Despite the rigid electoral system, these elections demonstrated the feasibility of a political alternance. This could be a sign that the Lebanese people want to turn the page.



Finally, I would like to strongly urge all political forces to focus on the interest of the Lebanese people as opposed to their own political interests.

The people of Lebanon deserve a better future!

Thank you