



EUROPEAN UNION ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION GUINEA-BISSAU JUNE-JULY 2005

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS – SECOND ROUND

PRESS SUMMARY

THE SECOND ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON 24 JULY 2005 WAS GENERALLY WELL ORGANIZED, IN A TRANSPARENT AND INCLUSIVE MANNER, AND MET ESSENTIAL INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS. THE NATIONAL ELECTION COMMISSION (CNE) AND THE REGIONAL ELECTION COMMISSIONS (CRES) RAN THE ELECTION PROCESS SUCCESSFULLY. ALTHOUGH RESULTS ARE STILL BEING PROCESSED, VOTER TURN-OUT SEEMED LOWER THAN IN THE FIRST ROUND. ELECTION DAY WAS LARGELY PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY AND VOTERS WERE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR FRANCHISE FREELY, DESPITE A TENSE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD WITH ISOLATED VIOLENT INCIDENTS LEADING TO THE DEATH OF FIVE PERSONS.

THE FINAL ASSESSMENT OF THIS SECOND ROUND ELECTION WILL DEPEND, IN PART, ON THE COMPLETION OF COUNTING AND TABULATION, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS BY THE CNE, AND THE COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCESS. THE EU EOM WILL STAY IN COUNTRY TO OBSERVE THE REMAINING ASPECTS OF THE ELECTION PROCESS, AND WILL PUBLISH A FINAL REPORT, CONTAINING DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE ELECTION PROCESS, WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF THE COMPLETION OF THE ENTIRE PROCESS.

Preliminary Assessment

After closely following the electoral process for two months, the EU EOM reached the following conclusions regarding the second round of elections:

- While counting is not yet completed, the voting process on election day was largely peaceful and orderly.
- As in the first round, the second round election was conducted under a legislative framework that provided for the conduct of democratic elections, although it can be improved and simplified in advance of future elections;
- The National Election Commission (CNE) and the Regional Election Commissions (CREs) administered the second round electoral activities in a professional and impartial manner. The CNE corrected in most of the cases some technical shortcomings brought to its attention by the EU

EOM and the CREs after the first round; there was no lack of ballot papers and ink observed or reported this time.

- The non-interference in the process by the armed forces should be praised as a sign of commitment to the strengthening of democracy and national reconciliation;
- The civil society contributed in a very substantial way to prevent conflict and reduce tensions. In many cases, religious leaders in the interior played an important role in containing the escalation of conflicts;
- Fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association were generally respected, and citizens were able to participate freely in the process, despite of the acts of violence registered during the campaign in the capital, Bissau, and Bafatá and Gabú, which contrasted with the peaceful and orderly atmosphere during the first round. No significant restrictions were placed on the candidates;
- The peaceful character of the massive rallies held simultaneously and close to each other by the two candidates on the last day of campaign was remarkable, even more so if compared with the violent incidents and disturbances, although isolated cases, verified during campaign meetings and marches in the capital and in other regions of the country;
- The media generally offered a balanced coverage of the electoral process, and the state-run television and radio aired free air time programs produced by the candidates. However, some private media repeatedly violated legal provisions regulating the publication of opinion polls and broadcast of paid airtime.
- A women's march in Bissau represented an important contribution to peace and stability in the country.

However, some shortcomings should be noted:

- The growing political tension contrasted with the peaceful and orderly environment observed in the first round of the elections, and serious accusations were made by the contenders against each other;
- Two serious incidents left a total of five persons dead during an unauthorized march on 24 June and an attack against government buildings on 16 July. No clear explanation has been given so far by the government regarding these incidents;
- Regretfully, the two candidates focused their ethnic-based campaign speech in discussing the past instead of the future, thus frustrating the electorate in its search of information and not contributing to the expected commitment in favor of national reconciliation;
- The political tension that characterized the second round campaign was reflected in an increased exchange of informal, mainly oral, accusations of misbehavior during the campaign by the candidates. No formal written complaints were received by the electoral officials, courts or the EU EOM about these or other more serious incidents.

- In sharp contrast with the first round, there was no civic or voter education campaigns during the second round, except for some radio spots on voting procedures broadcasted on an irregular basis;
- In Bissau and in some other areas of the country, like Bafatá and Gabú, private radio stations accepted paid air time for candidates in a clear violation of the Electoral Law. Moreover, the language used by both candidates in these paid air time increased the already high political tension;
- The lack of financial and technical resources remained as the main obstacle to the independence and impartiality of the media. Similarly to the first round of elections, some editors were involved with candidates and regrettably many journalists were once more recruited by the candidates to provide special coverage;

The Polling Day

Election day was largely peaceful and orderly. No cases of intimidation were reported or observed throughout the day. All the polling stations observed were operational within an hour of opening time. Despite the non delivery of electoral material on time to some polling stations in region of Tombali, and the shortage of ballot boxes seals in the polling stations in general, the electoral officials generally moved swiftly to resolve problems in this regard.

The voting process was assessed as “good” or “fair” in 99 percent of polling stations visited. The secrecy of the vote was well maintained. In a very positive development, candidate representatives were present in all polling stations observed and played a major role in protecting the integrity of the process. There were no major problems observed in the voting cycle, from the arrival of the voter at the polling station through the return of his/her punched voting card. No problems were observed or reported in relation to the conduct of the security forces.

Counting was assessed as “good” or “fair” in 95 per cent of polling stations observed. No major problems in the counting and reconciliation in the polling stations observed were reported or observed, and no complaints were filed or reported to have been filed regarding the counting process. The counting was held in the presence of observers and candidates’ representatives. The results forms were signed by 97.5 percent of the candidates’ representatives in the polling stations observed, who also received a copy of the results. In 80 per cent of polling stations visited the results were immediately publicly posted once the count had been completed.

Concluding Remarks

The EU EOM would like to thank the election and state authorities, candidates, political parties, security forces, media and civil society, and especially the people of Guinea-Bissau for the invaluable co-operation received throughout the deployment of the mission. The EU EOM would also like to recognize the efforts and commitment demonstrated by the National Election Commission and the 12,000 election officials responsible for the election. The Mission also commends the role played by candidate representatives, present in almost all polling stations, who contributed to ensuring the integrity of the process on election day.