



The European Union Election Follow-up Mission welcomes the efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2022 Election Observation Mission to São Tomé and Príncipe.

21 June 2024, São Tomé - The European Union Election Follow-up Mission (EFM) is in São Tomé and Príncipe to promote discussion – and action – by key national stakeholders working towards strengthening democracy, to raise awareness of areas where electoral reform remains unaddressed and to assess the status of implementation of the recommendations offered by the 2022 EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM). The EFM is headed by Maria Manuel Leitão Marques, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission 2022.

The EFM met various electoral stakeholders, including the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Constitutional Court, the Public Prosecutor and other relevant institutions, political parties, civil society and media representatives. On 20 June, the EFM organised a round table with various electoral stakeholders, where participants discussed ongoing electoral reforms.

At a press conference held today, Mrs Leitão Marques said: *"In the spirit of the strong partnership between the European Union and São Tomé and Príncipe, we welcome the results achieved so far in their follow-up to the 2022 EU EOM recommendations, and the efforts made despite the country's many difficulties. We call on you to continue with the appropriate measures to make progress on electoral reform, including voter registration, the strengthening of the National Electoral Commission, and the implementation of the Parity Law ahead of the next elections in 2026."* The 2022 EU EOM made twenty-two recommendations, including six priority recommendations for potential improvements in the way elections are regulated, managed and conducted in São Tomé and Príncipe.

MEP Maria Manuel Leitão Marques noted that: *"What I observed during my visit is a positive step in the right direction. I am optimistic to see how the government, civil society and the political parties strive to improve the electoral process."*

The head of mission emphasised that two years before the 2026 general elections the window of opportunity for comprehensive and effective legal reforms becomes narrower, and encouraged the government and all stakeholders to accelerate this work. Recommendations on eliminating existing inconsistencies and ambiguities in electoral laws, transforming the National Electoral Commission into a permanent and independent body, and establishing a reliable and cost-effective mechanism for updating the voter register, among others, were highlighted as key to ensuring a level playing field for all contestants ahead of the 2026 elections.

The head of mission also stressed the importance of transparency in the electoral reform process, as well as inclusion and cooperation of electoral actors, including civil society organisations. Concluding the press conference, Mrs Leitão Marques said: *"The EU and the Member States will continue to support electoral reform initiatives in São Tomé and Príncipe."*

A comprehensive final report from the Election Follow-up Mission will be published in the coming months. The full archive of election observation reports and EU recommendations can be found at <http://database.eucom.eu>.