



**EUROPEAN UNION**  
**ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION PAKISTAN 2018**  
GENERAL ELECTIONS, 25 July



*Press release*

**Positive changes to the legal framework were overshadowed by restrictions on freedom of expression and unequal campaign opportunities**

Islamabad, 27 July 2018

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Pakistan has concluded that positive changes to the legal framework were overshadowed by restrictions on freedom of expression and an unequal opportunity to campaign. Media outlets and journalists suffered from restrictions which, the mission stated, have resulted in self-censorship.

Positively, the EU EOM praised the work of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) over the last few years. It complimented the ECP on the many initiatives that it had taken to improve accountability and transparency, including the participation of women and minorities. The mission said that levels of confidence in the ECP had undoubtedly increased due to regular consultations with political parties and civil society organisations.

Presenting the mission's preliminary statement in Islamabad, the EU Chief Observer, Michael Gahler MEP (Germany), said: *"Despite positive changes to the legal framework with the new Elections Act, and a stronger and more transparent Election Commission, we consider that the electoral process of 2018 was negatively affected by the political environment."*

On 25 July, over 120 EU observers observed the opening, voting, counting and tabulation processes at 582 polling stations and tabulation centres in 113 constituencies in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad.

Voting was assessed as well-conducted and transparent. However, counting was somewhat problematic, with staff not always following procedures. In the polling stations observed, security personnel were present inside and outside all polling stations. However, as should be the case in a civilian exercise, the mission observed that it was the presiding officers who were in charge.

The EU EOM commented that, although there were several legal provisions aimed at ensuring a level playing field, there was a lack of equality of opportunity. Candidates with large political appeal and financial means, the so-called "electables" were reported to often dominate the campaign. Uneven rules on campaign spending further undermined candidates' equal opportunity.

The head of the European Parliament's delegation to the election observation mission, Jean Lambert MEP (United Kingdom), fully endorsed the preliminary statement of the EU EOM. She then addressed a number of issues relating to election day, including access to polling stations for voters with disabilities, and the participation of women in the elections.

*"We appreciate the efforts made by the Election Commission to aim for greater inclusion in the electoral process, particularly through the Gender and Disabilities Working Group,"* said Ms Lambert. *"We look forward to further progress. After all, the five per cent quota for women candidates is just a starting point, and more in winnable seats would be welcome."*

Unlike previous election observation missions to Pakistan, the EU EOM faced unprecedented delay in the deployment of its observers. According to Mr Gahler, this had repercussions on the mission's ability to observe and thoroughly assess some areas of the electoral process, including the candidate

*Serena Hotel, Khayaban-e-Suhrwardy, Islamabad*

nomination process, the campaign environment and the work of the election administration at local level.

EU observers are continuing their observation in districts across the country. The mission will observe tabulation, the official announcement of results, as well as any complaints and appeals.

The EU EOM is the largest international observation mission in the country for the elections. It assessed the extent to which the electoral process complied with international and regional commitments for elections, as well as with the laws of Pakistan. The mission will remain in Pakistan until September. A final report, including recommendations for future elections, will be published afterwards.

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**Note to Editors:**

*The [European Union Election Observation Mission](#) (EU EOM) to Pakistan arrived in Islamabad on 24 June. It was deployed after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) welcomed the presence of an observation mission for the general elections.*

*The EU EOM comprises observers from all 28 EU member states. It consists of a core team of 10 election analysts based in Islamabad, and 60 long-term observers (LTOs) who were deployed to districts a week before election day. A delegation of seven Members of the European Parliament also joined the mission, as did 41 diplomatic staff from EU member states' embassies, plus those from Norway, Switzerland and Canada.*

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