



**EUROPEAN UNION
ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
KINGDOM OF BHUTAN, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, MARCH 2008**

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**Elections in Bhutan showed a clear commitment of voters
and state institutions to support democratic change**

Thimphu, 25 March 2008. The National Assembly elections are a clear step towards democratic transition in Bhutan, and mark a successful and orderly change of political system to a constitutional monarchy, concludes the preliminary assessment of European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM).

“The serene atmosphere on election day fully confirms what has been observed during the last month by our mission, the clear commitment and good will of everyone involved in the electoral process: voters, candidates, election staff, and representatives of media,” said Javier Pomés, Chief Observer of the EU EOM. *“The election process generally met international standards for democratic elections, but fell short in certain areas. There are no perfect elections anywhere in the world, and also elections in Bhutan have shortcomings that will need to be addressed”.*

The EU EOM noted that a large number of voters were not registered where they live, but in their hometowns, requiring voters to travel long distances to exercise their right to vote. Nevertheless, the turnout of 79,4% indicates a genuine commitment to participate in elections. Voting and counting were well conducted in the polling stations observed.

The legal framework for elections provided a level playing field for contestants. The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) did a remarkable job in a country complicated by geography, but both parties commented that at times the ECB was overly severe in its application of the campaign regulations. Only candidates were allowed to campaign, and they were also prevented from discussing citizenship and security clearance issues, while many voters, particularly in the Southern areas, wanted to discuss them.

Both BBS TV and Radio gave equal access to all candidates in a very regulated manner in their election programs, and media has in general treated candidates equally.

“A final report containing detailed recommendations for the future will be published within two months of the completion of the entire process,” Pomés added.

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