



PRESS RELEASE

Asunción, 2 May 2023 – The European Union Election Observation Mission – Paraguay 2023 presented today, at a press conference, a preliminary assessment on the observation of the 30 April elections.

This press statement is a preliminary analysis of the pre-election period and voting day, observed in all the departments of the country by 124 observers from the European Union, Canada and Norway, who visited 383 polling stations.

During the presentation of the preliminary assessment, the Chief Observer, Mr. Gabriel Mato, said: “We are grateful for the welcome the mission has received from Paraguayans. We have deployed throughout the country to observe these elections that have evolved without major incidents on election day and with transparency.” The Chief Observer added that: “Obviously there are challenges that need to be addressed to improve future electoral processes that will be the object of our recommendations. We will remain in Paraguay following the tabulation and the completion of the electoral process.”

A delegation from the European Parliament, led by Mr. Jordi Cañas, joined the Mission and adhered to its preliminary assessment. Mr. Cañas declared: “Our presence in Paraguay is a sign of deep respect and interest that this great country generates in the European Union. We observed a calm election day, despite the long queues and the context of polarisation.” Mr. Cañas stated: “Paraguay has important challenges to face in the future to unlock its enormous socio-economic potential.”

The main conclusions of the European Union Election Observation Mission at this stage of the process are:

- The elections took place in a highly polarised environment where distrust in state institutions and political structures prevailed. Recent appointments to key state institutions – Superior Tribunal of Electoral Justice (TSJE), the Public Prosecutor and the Supreme Court – increased public confidence in more accountable institutions.
- Amendments were introduced to the legal framework governing elections, addressing some of the shortcomings identified by previous EU EOMs. Nevertheless, other important issues, such as measures for women’s political participation, an adequate legal framework for national election observers and the decriminalisation of defamation in favour of civil laws in line with international standards on freedom of expression and media remain unaddressed. The participation of women candidates was around 33 per cent of the total number of contestants, which means a decrease with respect to 2018 figures (39 per cent).
- The election administration at central level, the TSJE, demonstrated professionalism and transparency in handling the election process. Political parties had access to all stages of the preparations and could present their concerns to the electoral authorities. Most concerns were addressed. However, questions related technical aspects of the process related to election technology were, at times, left unanswered.
- The EU EOM assessed the overall conduct of polling as good and described the process as transparent. The three main political forces were represented in the composition of the polling stations. Nonetheless, EU observers reported cases where assisted voting took place contrary to legal provisions, such as voters being assisted without a visible disability. The EU EOM directly observed seven cases of vote buying and five cases of indications of vote buying and organised transportation of voters. Transmission of preliminary results was assessed as good or very good, well-organised and transparent in the 40 cases observed.

- Campaigning was low-key and devoid of policy proposals. EU observers attended 92 campaign events throughout the country, mostly small. Fundamental freedoms were generally respected and candidates could campaign without restrictions. The preferential vote contributed to the disappearance of a party platform or a party manifesto, given that the competition between candidates of the same list led to individualised campaigning.
- Despite the significant number of media organisations in the country, private ownership is concentrated in three main media groups, each with clear political editorial lines dominating the media landscape. While *La Nación Media Group (La Nación)* and *Canal Trece* were highly critical of the *Concertación* candidates, Zuccolillo Group (*ABC Color* and *ABC Cardinal*) used a negative tone towards the *ANR – Partido Colorado* candidates. The *SNT* and *Telefuturo* television channels provided a more balanced coverage of contestants.

The EU EOM is following the latest events and the concerns raised by some political parties. The EU EOM encourages any aggrieved parties to refer their concerns officially to the responsible authorities through peaceful means.

The EU mission will remain in the country to observe the completion of the electoral process and, within the next few days, will present a preliminary declaration with further details, including on the tabulation of results.

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