



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Vote buying practices affected the voters' free choice and resulted in a lack of level-playing field.**

Beirut, 17 May – “Although preparations were affected by limited financial and human resources, the election authorities delivered the 15 May parliamentary elections”, explained Mr. György Hölvényi, Chief Observer of the European Union Electoral Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Lebanon, when presenting the mission’s preliminary statement at a press conference today in Beirut.

On election day, the EU EOM deployed 167 observers to all 26 minor districts of the country. Overall, the EU EOM visited 658 polling stations. In this regard, Mr. Hölvényi underlined that: “the atmosphere was mostly calm, but a number of localised tensions were reported. Often, the insufficiently trained polling staff could not prevent an intrusive behaviour of candidate agents and the secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed.”

The EU preliminary report stated that elections were overshadowed by widespread practices of vote buying and clientelism, which distorted the level playing field and seriously affected the voters’ choice. The campaign was vibrant, marred by various instances of intimidation, including in front of and in polling stations and on social media, and instances of campaign obstruction. The online space was distorted also by prevalent information manipulation. The legal framework for campaign finance suffers from serious shortcomings concerning transparency and accountability. While the freedom of speech was generally respected, the media failed to provide equal visibility and balanced coverage.

“The European Union is ready to collaborate and support the newly elected Parliament as well as the new government towards a path of urgently needed reforms”, highlighted Mr. Hölvényi.

Mr. Brando Benifei, Head of the European Parliament Delegation, which observed the polls as part of the EU EOM, declared: “I am glad that in spite of everything, the elections took place at the end of the previous parliamentary term. However, democracy goes beyond elections. The structural political and economic reforms, which Lebanon needs to tackle the socio-economic crisis, the widespread corruption and the political stalemate, cannot be postponed any longer”, he added. “To this end, I would like to strongly urge all political forces in the newly elected parliament to focus on the well-being and the aspirations of the Lebanese people instead of pursuing short-term political gains.”

Following the invitation of the Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, the EU EOM has been present in Lebanon since 27 March 2022. The EU mission will stay in the country to observe the remainder of the electoral process and within the next few weeks will present a public final report containing recommendations on possible reforms for future electoral processes in the country.

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