



## Professionally organised presidential run-off

Malé, 2 October 2023

The Chief Observer, Nacho Sánchez Amor, a Member of the European Parliament from Spain, presented the preliminary findings today of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) on the 30 September run-off presidential election in the Maldives. He related that the EU EOM had assessed the process in the round, from the re-registration of voters through to the casting of the vote and the compilation of results.

*“The presidential run-off was organised in an efficient and professional manner. Enhanced transparency in election administration fostered public trust in the credibility of the process. While political freedoms of candidates and supporters were largely respected, reports of vote-buying were made against both sides, pointing to the need to improve transparency in campaign financing”,* said Mr. Sánchez Amor at a press conference in Malé today.

The campaign for the run-off election was quite personal. Candidates canvassed voters individually, meeting them on their door-steps and in their communities. Lavish financial pledges were made by the candidates, often directed towards the individual benefit of voters. These included waiving student loans, raising salaries and social welfare allowances, reducing rents for social housing and increasing the price for fish. Allegations of vote-buying circulated widely, indicating the significant role which money played in the campaign.

There was a significant increase in the number of applications for voter re-registration for the run-off poll, a facility whereby voters are allowed to vote away from their registered addresses, which the Election Commission of Maldives (ECM) handled with great speed. The ECM increased voter information activity and engaged more with political parties, achieving greater transparency and trust in their work.

On election day, polling staff worked professionally and efficiently, in accordance with procedures, from the opening, through polling, to the counting of votes. The secrecy of the vote appeared to be well protected. However, overly strict instructions for determining invalid votes have increased the number of rejected ballots without taking into account the clearly expressed intent of the voters.

*“This was another very well organised election day which our observers assessed positively. The credit goes to the election administration and its polling staff for the smooth running of the election. Voters are also to be commended for their participation in large numbers”* said Mr. Sánchez Amor.

The diligent work of the ECM was acknowledged, particularly in the context of the additional pressure imposed on the institution by the decision of the People’s Majlis to call for a referendum at the end of October. There was also a huge volume of work generated by the large number of applications for re-registration, which were dealt with in a short space of time. Despite the pressures of the varied work-load, the ECM did a praiseworthy job in the conduct of the election.

The Public Service Media (PSM) continued to give preferential treatment to the President, blurring the boundaries between official functions and campaign activities. While PSM offered free airtime equally to both candidates during prime time, PSM News TV allocated more news coverage to the incumbent, at 64 per cent, of the total for contestants, over Dr. Muizzu’s 36 per cent. Private TV channels continued to exhibit bias according to their alignment with various parties.

There was a rise in divisive discourse on social media, with X/Twitter and Meta platforms being the key vehicles through which both genuine, as well as misleading information, was disseminated. These included cases of dubious polls, accusations of ID card falsification in the context of re-registration, and religion-related narratives.

The EU deployed 36 observers from EU Member States as well as Canada, Norway and Switzerland who visited 119 polling stations in 56 islands, including in Malé and in 14 atolls across the country.

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