

Message of Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy, on the elections in the Kingdom of Bhutan on 24 March 2008

"I am pleased to hear that the first-ever National Assembly elections in Bhutan have demonstrated a clear commitment of the Bhutanese people and state institutions to support democratic change.

The almost 80% high turnout of the voters gives an unquestionable support, but responsibility as well, to the next government in its job to continue the democratic process by enacting the new Constitution and other fundamental legislation in favour of the people of Bhutan.

As the EU Election Observation Mission sent by the European Commission stated in its Preliminary Statement, voting and counting were well conducted in the polling stations observed; and the election process generally met international standards for democratic elections, but fell short in certain areas.

I am sure that the Bhutanese government will address carefully the findings of the mission and build upon its recommendations notably with regard to candidacy requirements, free campaigning and appeal modalities.

The European Union, as in the past, also in the future will support Bhutan on its way of democratisation."