

Brussels, 21 February 2008

European Union to observe first National Assembly Elections in the Kingdom of Bhutan

The European Commission will deploy a 15-member strong EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the first elections of a National Assembly in Bhutan scheduled to take place on 24 March 2008. The EU EOM, led by Mr. José Javier Pomés Ruiz, Member of the European Parliament, will go out on 22 February and will stay for a period of seven weeks on the ground. The EU attaches great importance to the process of democratic transition in Bhutan, including the elections and the adoption of the constitution.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, said: "The elections for the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Bhutan are a milestone in the country's history: they will allow the Bhutanese people to exercise their democratic right to vote and to determine their own future. On this basis, the new Parliament will have to enact the new Constitution, and continue the path of democratic transition, paying special attention to preserving the national cultural identity and values of Bhutan."

The National Assembly elections will be the first multi-party general elections to take place in Bhutan, which had no parliamentary monarchy until now. The elections are part of a gradual top-down peaceful movement to democracy led by the monarchy. Over the last few years a written Constitution was drafted, several new constitutional bodies were established, and the National Council (the upper house of the Parliament) was elected. The National Assembly elections on 24 March will now complete this process.

The Election Observation Mission will consist of a Core Team of 6 election experts including the Chief Observer to be deployed on 22 February 2008 to co-ordinate the assessment of the entire election process and 9 Long Term Observers (LTOs) to be deployed one week later to assess the campaign period, the pre-election preparations around the country and to observe voting, counting and the tabulation of results. It is planned that the EU EOM will remain in the country for up to 10 days after election day to observe the post-election period.

EU Election Observation Missions are an important instrument for building confidence in the democratic processes of a country and are deployed in line with the EU's commitment to promote democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. The EU has made available some € 1 million from the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), for this mission.

The European Commission is one of Bhutan's most important development partners, assisting the country in meeting the Millennium Development Goals by providing support to Renewable Natural Resources, Trade Facilitation and Good Governance.

For additional information, see also:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/index.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/electoral-support/index_en.htm