



Press release

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A peaceful and technically well-managed electoral process marred by an uneven playing field

The European Union election observation mission (EU EOM) has concluded that the presidential election was largely free of violence and technically well-managed, but that unregulated campaign spending, abuse of state resources and media bias affected the level playing field.

Presenting the mission's preliminary statement in Colombo, Chief Observer Marisa Matias said: "While the campaign on the ground was largely peaceful and calm, the playing field in the traditional and online media was affected by instances of bias, hate speech and disinformation. It was further affected by the misuse of state resources by both frontrunners and the absence of campaign finance regulations."

Ms. Matias added: "The participation of Sri Lankans was very high. This was their day to exercise their right to democratic choice, and I hope that our observation has in some way contributed to their confidence in the process."

While fully endorsing the preliminary findings and conclusions of the observation mission, the head of a delegation of Members of the European Parliament, Ms. Isabel Santos, said: "We have observed well organized and peaceful elections. However, action is needed to reinforce the legal framework, in particular regarding campaign finance transparency, and to level the playing field for candidates and parties in the media."

"It was very moving to see Sri Lankans side by side exercising their democratic right, irrespective of their origin, religion or social status. This is a sign that they want to work together. Politicians and leaders need to understand this and act to unite the country."

On election day, EU EOM observers visited 329 polling stations and more than 25 counting centres. The mission will remain in country until mid-December, observing any post-election complaints and appeals. Around two months after the completion of the process, Ms. Matias will return to Sri Lanka to present the mission's final report, with recommendations for future improvements to the electoral process.

The EU EOM was invited to observe the election by the Election Commission of Sri Lanka and undertakes its work in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

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