

25 June 2010

HR Catherine Ashton statement concerning the 2010 elections in Ethiopia

The EU High Representative (HR) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission issued a statement on the legislative elections in Ethiopia, which indicated that these elections 'were an important moment in the democratic process in the country', while also mentioning that 'the European Union recognises the challenging environment in which these elections took place'. This statement makes no reference to the assessment of the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), concluding that 'the electoral process fell short of certain international commitments, notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of a level playing field for all contesting parties'.

Does the HR consider that the conclusions of the EU EOM were not worth mentioning? Does the HR think that issuing such a void statement, in contrast with the conclusions of the EU EOM, does not undermine the credibility and coherence of the EU voice in external affairs and its aim of promoting democracy and the rule of law pursued through the deployment of election observation missions?

Does the HR believe that 99 % of seats in favour of the ruling party is a credible electoral result in any democratic society? Furthermore, would the HR accept results of elections that 'fell short of certain international commitments, notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of a level playing field for all contesting parties' as 'an important moment in the democratic process' if such elections had taken place in the any of the EU Member States?

Finally, could the HR indicate if the Commission, the Council and/or the EU Delegation in Addis Ababa have made any diligences in order to put pressure on the Sudanese authorities to immediately release the political prisoner Birtukan Mideksa, leader of the main opposition party, who was rearrested in 2008 simply for speaking in Europe about the negotiations that preceded the political pardon that had served to release her and other political prisoners in 2007?

16 July 2010

Answer by the High Representative/Vice-President on behalf of the Commission

The statement of the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) does not diverge from the findings of the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). Rather than contradicting the Preliminary Statement of the EOM, the HR/VP is in agreement with the EOM on positive aspects of the electoral process, such as the peaceful conduct of the elections and the commitment of the Ethiopian people to the democratic process, as demonstrated by the high voter turnout. While the Preliminary Statement is more detailed, including on the problems encountered during the elections, the HR/VP does not contradict the EOM. The HR/VP has called for all political actors in Ethiopia to address the problems encountered and to commit to further strengthening democracy. While there is no intention to detract from the seriousness of the situation regarding the elections in Ethiopia, a balance must be struck between criticism of shortcomings in the electoral process and maintaining constructive dialogue, to maximize the possibility of cooperation in bringing about future improvements in the field of human rights and democracy.

The HR/VP recognises the problems associated with the elections in Ethiopia. The final report of the EOM will provide a thorough analysis of both positive and negative aspects of the electoral process and will contain a comprehensive set of recommendations for bringing future Ethiopian elections into compliance with international standards. The Commission and the Member States intend to explore how the final report, when it becomes available, can be used as a reference document for future dialogue.

The matter of the arrest of Ms Birtukan Midekssa has been repeatedly raised through high-level bilateral contacts and in the context of the EU's dialogue with Ethiopia and her case continues to deserve the HR/VP's special attention. Now that the Ethiopian people have elected their representatives for the federal and regional parliaments, the conditions are right for the authorities to reconsider Ms Midekssa's case, and to deal with this question and other human rights issues in line with Ethiopia's ambitions as a modern state.

The Commission has posted a message regarding the situation of Ms Birtukan Midekssa on the website of Directorate-General Development and on the website of the EU Delegation to Ethiopia:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/ethiopia_birtukan_midekssa_KDG_A_2082.pdf.