



Renforcer la réforme démocratique dans les pays du voisinage méridional

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Electoral processes and democratic consolidation in the countries of the southern Mediterranean

*Inclusive electoral processes organised with integrity
as a step towards successful democratic governance*

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Conclusions

General Observations

An electoral process which is transparent at every stage, and the holding of free elections with an open outcome, constitute the cornerstone of sound governance and offer democratic assurance for citizens.

Although legal and normative instruments are necessary prerequisites here, to be fully effective they need the support of values, ethical conduct and other factors which – while not necessarily secured by law – are also crucial to the success of the process as a whole.

In addition to the legislative component, a corpus of conditions must therefore obtain in order to ensure elections which will consolidate democracy and guarantee the development of a society founded on human rights, equal opportunities, justice, equity, democracy and security.

Striving for “integrity” in electoral processes notably presupposes a shared, responsible commitment on the part of all stakeholders who contribute to these processes.

The Lisbon Forum therefore discussed the role of each of the actors and instruments of the electoral process, reflecting on the situations and experiences of the countries of the Southern Mediterranean with those from Europe and Latin America with a view to identifying proposals for specific actions to be implemented at the various stages of the process.

At the end of the proceedings and with regard to each of the subjects addressed, the Forum drew up the recommendations outlined below identifying priorities that should guide follow-up activities.

Legislative and standard-setting processes relating to elections should promote cohesion and integration and correspond to the following three priorities:

The electoral law should be stable and, to this end, its fundamental principles should be enshrined in the constitution, whereas issues relating to electoral procedures and administration should be able to benefit from a degree of flexibility in order to adapt as best possible to different situations.

The integrity, transparency and independence of electoral administration bodies are vital in order to guarantee proper administration of the electoral process.

Electoral reforms carried out in response to the impact of each election should be undertaken by appropriate bodies capable of taking into consideration any deficiencies or errors.

Political parties and their participation in the electoral process

Political parties should perform their task in a way which fully respects integrity and internal party democracy, particularly where equality of opportunity is concerned. In order to do this, structures should be reinforced and they should have adequate human and financial resources.

During the electoral cycle in particular, complete transparency should be demanded, and parties have a duty to respond to the expectations and demands of citizens.

Furthermore, citizens should be made more aware of democratic life and encouraged to participate in active citizenship.

Participation of women in the electoral process

The participation of women in the electoral process is made possible by participatory democracy and equal representation.

In this context, the quota system is an effective constraint, albeit insufficient to achieve parity.

It is therefore appropriate to give high priority to awareness-raising and information activities and to exchanges of experience at every level, in order to combat stereotyping, give women a higher profile and involve men in initiatives promoting equal opportunities.

Financing of political parties and election campaigns

In order to protect the integrity of the electoral process and to retain the trust of citizens, absolute priority should be given to setting up a comprehensive legislative framework in compliance with international standards and with the principles of equity and transparency, and the implementation of which can be guaranteed by relevant and applicable rules and through effective sanctions.

The law must also be conceived and applied as an instrument guaranteeing and facilitating respect for fundamental rights, such as the right to vote, access to information, equality of opportunity and the participation of minorities.

Responsibility for monitoring the financing of political parties and election campaigns should be shared by the independent regulatory authorities, civil society (through election observation), the media, political parties and citizens themselves. To this end, it is important to ensure that mechanisms are set up which facilitate close co-operation between institutional and non-institutional actors, so they can ensure effective monitoring of political financing.

Ethics and electoral processes

The electoral process should be conducted – at every level and at each of its stages – in the interest of the community, showing respect for others, and independent of any influences, whatever their origin.

Every citizen should be made aware and duly informed of the implications of the electoral process for democracy, so that he or she may exercise his or her rights and duties fully.

Political parties must weigh up their share of responsibility and the civic duty bestowed upon them to introduce, to respect and to require of each of their members inalienable ethical conduct.

National and international observation of elections

Knowledge of electoral processes and of the political context in which voting operations are observed and elections assessed is essential to understand the stakes of elections and to strengthen democratic processes.

International observation of elections helps to strengthen international co-operation in this sphere, to ensure compliance with – or possibly to improve – international standards and to encourage exchanges of experience and transfers of knowledge.

National election observation should also enable civil society to gain better knowledge and understanding of electoral processes, in order to appropriate the process and attest their faith in it. To this end, it is important for NGOs active in this field to be able to have the requisite resources to ensure dialogue throughout the process between civil society and all other actors.

Civil society, its role and its participation in the different stages of the process

With regard to the situation of the South Mediterranean countries, the Forum identified three priorities relating to the place and role of civil society in electoral processes.

It seemed essential to note the need for a new civil society to emerge – one that is responsible, independent and has a spirit of citizenship – which could make a cross-cutting contribution to reform processes and/or to the democratic transitions under way.

It is also important to take account of the vital role which NGOs should be able to play in encouraging democratic participation and citizenship. Furthermore, NGOs have a duty to facilitate and/or engage in informing citizens about political manifestos, the importance of equitable access to the media and the need to prevent abuses.

In order for NGOs to be able to play their role fully and in total independence, it is also essential for them to be given a legal and institutional framework.

The role of the media

The Forum noted that there was a significant deficit in terms of trust, widespread in the countries of the South Mediterranean, with regard to public trust in the media, public trust in the authorities, media trust in the authorities, and vice versa.

Furthermore, it was noted that there was a demand and a significant need for opinion-shaping media, i.e. media capable of dealing with information objectively while at the same time offering their own analyses and interpretations of the facts.

On the subject of the contribution and undeniable benefits brought by the emergence of new media and citizen journalism, it was underlined that this must be based on the rules and ethics of a professional framework.

General Conclusions

At the end of the proceedings, the Forum expressed a wish for these recommendations to be seized by different actors – at both national and international level – subjected to attentive examination, and followed by practical implementation and concrete action.

In this context, the role of international organisations is important, whether European, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, or international, like the League of Arab States, the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) or International IDEA, and co-operation

amongst them should be encouraged. Where activities relating to the participation of civil society in electoral processes are concerned, the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe should be a preferred partner.

The discussions on the major issues raised by electoral processes bear witness to a convergence of the different viewpoints which have been expressed and which the Lisbon Forum – and the 2014 Forum in particular – has placed in the spotlight. That convergence should be maintained irrespective of any difficulties and obstacles which may slow down a co-operation process which needs to be preserved and developed.

It is in this spirit, and with that in mind, that the Lisbon Forum calls on the leaders of the countries of the South to identify the priority issues which they would like to see tackled.

In this context, participants welcomed with satisfaction the openness of Morocco and Tunisia to host follow-up meetings in their respective capitals.

Participants thanked the Portuguese authorities, the Moroccan authorities and the Aga Khan Development Network for their hospitality at the 2014 Lisbon Forum, as well as the European Union for the support it had given to the organisation of the Forum under the “Strengthening democratic reform in the southern neighbourhood” programme.

Finally, participants welcomed the holding of Lisbon Forums, the platform that they offered and the opportunity that they afforded for maintaining and developing a productive dialogue between countries of Europe and neighbouring regions, including with Southern Mediterranean countries, with a view to practical co-operation in fields of mutual interest.