

**Statement by Mr. Domenec RUIZ DEVESA,  
Chair of the European Parliament Election  
Observation Delegation  
for the Legislative Elections in Iraq**

*(12 October 2021)*

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am Domenec RUIZ DEVESA. I am the Chair of the Delegation of the European Parliament that has had the honour to observe the legislative elections of Iraq. It is a great pleasure to speak to you today.

We are the only election observation delegation present in the country composed of elected parliamentarians. From seven countries and five different political groups.

I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for their work and cooperation: Mr Hölvényi, Mr Tomac, Mr Andrews, Mrs Neumann, Mr Campomenosi and Mr Gyöngyösi.

The European Parliament represents 450 million European citizens. We are committed to help strengthening democracy all over the world.

During the last 70 years, democracy has provided Europeans the peace, stability and prosperity we have enjoyed and we believe it can do the same in Iraq.

We have observed these legislative elections, integrated in the Election Observation Mission of the European Union. I also thank our colleague, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, Chief Observer of the EU mission, **for her work and cooperation.**

We **fully endorse the preliminary findings and conclusions** of the Mission she leads.

During our stay in Iraq, **we met** with several representatives of political parties participating in the elections; with diplomatic missions; with activists and civil society organizations. We also met with the **Independent High Electoral Commission.**

On **Election Day**, we observed voting in Baghdad, Karbala and Hilla.

We commend the men and women that went to vote on that important day, and the work of the electoral authorities, the polling station workers and the security forces that made possible a peaceful Election Day, and in general the electoral process.

These elections have had the **lowest turnout in the recent history of Iraq.**

Many interlocutors pointed out at a possible high abstention, which has finally materialised. They underlined as

factors for this: the ramping corruption; the weak institutional capacity; and the lack of will by the political elites to deliver on the concrete policies areas.

Creating jobs and new economic opportunities or developing the health and education systems are issues that are important to Iraqi citizens. Yet, only the young activists and politicians we met spoke to us about policy issues and not about dividing lines.

We are impressed by the courage of a young generation of Iraqis that, over the recent months and years, have peacefully expressed their frustration with Iraqi politics. The general lack of action on the demands of the *Tishreen* movement might also explain the low turnout.

In this context of frustration and apathy, it is relevant to stress that elections are an important factor of democratic change, but not the only one.

As from now, the resulting Parliament, the new government, Iraqi citizens, especially the youth, and religious leaders need to **work together to build a better and more prosperous and peaceful Iraq**. Today, cooperation beyond sectarian lines is more important than ever.

**On the operational side of Election Day**, we witnessed **well-organised elections**. The rules of the election process were generally followed, even if the training of the staff of the polling stations seemed uneven.

Although the **secrecy of the vote** was not always fully ensured, we recognize the efficient technical voting structure. In this regard, the **fingerprints scan** requirement might have had an impact in disenfranchising a number of citizens who turned out to vote.

Focusing **now** on the **electoral system**, we take note that many of the 2018 recommendations of the EU experts have been included in the new electoral law. Yet, it would greatly benefit from more **transparency** and more **inclusiveness**, in order to build more **trust** in democracy, in politicians and political parties, and in the institutions.

Let me start speaking about **transparency**.

We commend the authorities for requesting an **audit** of the previous voting system. This is important to build confidence but it should be public.

Transparency is also a key issue when it comes to **campaign finance**. This has been referred to us by many of our interlocutors, and rightly so. Citizens have a right to know how much are parties and candidates are spending, as well as the origin of the resources. Under the current legal framework, campaign finance is unlimited. This results in an **uneven playing field between candidates**.

On the need for more **inclusive election**, there are three areas we would like to mention.

First, **women** need to be able to participate more in politics. We welcome the existence of a 25% quota for women in Parliament. This should be considered as is a minimum and not a ceiling (!), as has been interpreted by political parties. Moreover, politicians must be free from violence and intimidation, and free from rumors fabricated to destroy their reputation and their families. A tactic of intimidation that specifically targets women.

Second, violence, or the mere threat of it, cannot be a tool for political gains in a democracy. **Armed non-state actors** should not be a part of the democratic life in the country, in line with letter and spirit of the constitution. Iraqi society needs to move away from a highly militarized society and **move towards a well-organized state, nourished by a vibrant citizenship.**

Also, in a context of latent violence, social media platforms must eliminate hate speech and fake news posts even more swiftly. Their cooperation with the IHEC and the Communication and Media Commission should be strengthened.

Third and last, the representatives of **minorities** we have met have expressed their concern over their representation. The seats they have reserved by law must be occupied by Members of Parliament that effectively represent them. The new Parliament will have an opportunity engage in an open dialogue with these minorities to improve the current system.

Dear friends,

Allow me to conclude with two brief remarks.

Today, we want to commend on the professional work that UNAMI carries out in the country led by our former colleague, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert. UNAMI's work is fundamental for Iraq, for the advancement of its democracy and for its citizens.

From our part, the European Parliament, through our delegation for relations with Iraq, will continue to cooperate with Iraq and its citizens.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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