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Observation of the parliamentary elections in Morocco (7 October 2016)

Election observation report

Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau

Rapporteur: Mr Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER, United Kingdom, European Conservatives Group

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1. Introduction

1. On 21 June 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted [Resolution 1818 \(2011\)](#) on the request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco. It emphasised the importance of organising free and fair elections as the cornerstone of a true democracy and expressed the expectation that it would be invited to observe future parliamentary elections.

2. The Moroccan Parliament was the first to receive this status of partner for democracy, which was granted before the country adopted its new Constitution by a referendum on 1 July 2011. On the basis of the partnership framework, the Parliamentary Assembly was invited and observed the parliamentary elections held on 25 November 2011.

3. The development of this partnership continues to be closely followed by the Assembly, which adopted [Resolution 1942 \(2013\)](#) and [Resolution 2061 \(2015\)](#) on the evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Morocco.

4. On 26 May 2016, Mr Driss El Yazami, Director of the Moroccan National Human Rights Council (CNDH), sent an invitation letter to the President of the Assembly inviting the Assembly to observe the elections to the House of Representatives on 7 October 2016. At its meeting on 24 June 2016, the Bureau of the Assembly decided to observe these elections, set up an ad hoc committee comprising 11 members and appointed Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (United Kingdom, EC) as its Chair.

5. In line with the co-operation agreement signed on 4 October 2004 between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), a representative of the Venice Commission was invited to join the ad hoc committee as a legal adviser.



6. The membership of the ad hoc committee, based on the proposals of the Assembly's political groups, can be found in Appendix 1.
7. The ad hoc committee visited Morocco from 3 to 9 October 2016 and held talks *inter alia* with political party members, the President of the CNDH, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, of the High Council and High Authority for Audiovisual Communication, as well as representatives of the international community present in Morocco and of the media and civil society. The programme of the ad hoc committee is set out in Appendix 2. The ad hoc committee wishes to thank the staff of the Council of Europe office in Morocco.
8. The ad hoc committee wishes to thank the Moroccan authorities for their help in organising this visit.
9. On polling day, the ad hoc committee split into seven teams which observed voting in Rabat and its region, as well as in the towns and regions of Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech and Tangier.
10. The ad hoc committee concluded that the Ministry of the Interior had organised the poll with integrity and in full transparency. The press release prepared at the end of the elections is reproduced in Appendix 3.

2. Political context and legal framework

11. The Kingdom of Morocco is a constitutional monarchy. The King still has effective influence in politics, but he shares this power with the representatives of the parliament. The new Constitution adopted in 2011 was proposed by King Mohammed VI himself and approved by referendum. Article 1 describes the political system as “a constitutional, democratic, parliamentary and social monarchy”.
12. The Constitution was adopted in the aftermath of the “20 February” 2011 popular movement, which can be seen as part of the Arab Spring movements, and represents a significant step towards democratisation in that it significantly increases the powers of parliament.
13. The executive power is exercised by the government, the head of which is appointed by the King “from within the political party arriving ahead in the elections of the members of the House of Representatives, and with a view to their results” (Article 47). The King also appoints, on a proposal from the head of government, the members of the government; and enjoys a high level of decision-making power on long-term and strategic issues, such as foreign policy, large infrastructure projects or the status of Western Sahara.

2.1. Parliament

14. The parliament is bicameral, comprising a lower house – the House of Representatives – with 395 members elected every five years by universal suffrage, and an upper house – the House of Councillors – with 120 members elected indirectly every six years by representatives of professional bodies, employees, the General Confederation of Business (CGE) and regional and local authorities. The elections for the House of Councillors took place in September 2015.
15. The voting process for the House of Representatives is complex and is governed by the Institutional Law on the House of Representatives (LOCR) and other pieces of legislation, including the Law on general electoral registers, referendum operations and the use of public audiovisual media during election and referendum campaigns, the organic law on political parties and the organic law laying down the requirements and arrangements for independent and impartial observation of elections.
16. The 395 members of the House of Representatives are elected by direct universal suffrage under a list system, broken down as follows (Articles 1 and 2 of the LOCR):
 - 305 members are elected in 92 local constituencies established by decree according to a principle geared towards geographical balance while taking account of spatial aspects. At least one constituency is established per prefecture, for which a number of seats determined by decree are allocated, ranging from two to six. More than one constituency may be established in certain prefectures or provinces;
 - 90 members are elected to a nationwide constituency with a dual quota: lists of candidates for this constituency must include two sections: the first comprising 60 women and the second 30 young men and women of a maximum age of 40 years on polling day (Article 23 of the LOCR). The law was changed in 2016 allowing the possibility for women to be included on the second list which was, for the 2011 elections, reserved exclusively for young men.

17. Election is by proportional representation according to the rule of largest remainders, without cross-voting or preferential votes. A further change introduced in the electoral law for the 2016 elections is the reduction of the threshold, for both national and countrywide constituencies, to 3%. Officially, this change in the threshold was adopted to bring Morocco into line with international standards and reference was made to Assembly [Resolution 1547](#) (2007) on the situation of human rights and democracy in Europe.

18. The members of the House of Representatives are elected for a five-year term. Any member of the House of Representatives who relinquishes the political affiliation under which they stood for election or membership of their parliamentary group or grouping, forfeits their office. As far as immunity of parliamentarians is concerned, Article 64 of the Constitution stipulates that no member of parliament may be prosecuted, subject to a search warrant, arrested, detained or judged on grounds of an opinion expressed or a vote cast by them in the exercise of their duties, except where the opinion expressed challenges the monarchic form of the State or the Muslim religion or constitutes a violation of the respect due to the King.

2.2. Political landscape

19. Morocco's political landscape has been marked in the last decade by the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), which is moderately Islamist, and the decline of traditional parties such as the Istiqlal Party (PI) and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP). The PJD electorate is mainly made up of conservative, middle-class and urban constituencies and presents itself as an anti-establishment party.

20. Recent developments have also confirmed the trend towards the fragmentation of political parties, which means that it is always necessary to form coalition governments. The PJD won the parliamentary elections in November 2011 with 27.08% of the votes cast and gained 107 seats.

21. In accordance with the Constitution, Mohammed VI appointed the Secretary General of the PJD, Abdelilah Benkirane, to head the government. Mr Benkirane governed the country in the period 2011-2016 via two different coalitions. Immediately after the 2011 elections, he appealed to the parties of the Koutla,¹ and formed a coalition between the PJD, the Istiqlal, the Popular Movement and the Party of Progress and Socialism, which lasted until 2013. In 2013, the Istiqlal Party left the coalition and Mr Benkirane was obliged to change the coalition, forming a government with the National Rally of Independents (RNI),² a centre-right party and other smaller parties.

22. In the most recent regional and local elections in September 2015, the PJD achieved a good score, taking the lead in the regional councils (25.6% of seats), ahead of the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), founded in 2008 and perceived as being close to the monarchy, 19.4%. The PAM is a largely rural party that tends to perform better in rural areas. Landowners and rural notables have traditionally favoured parties perceived to have closer ties with the monarchy and guarantee political and social stability. The symbol of the party is a tractor, to reinforce this "agricultural" link. But the PAM's electoral basis also stretches to the most advanced layers of Moroccan society, committed to the modernisation of the country.

23. The PJD came first in five of the 12 regions in the country, in particular Casablanca, Rabat and Fez. The PJD strengthened its position among middle-class and urban voters, even though they do not necessarily share its conservative ideology.

24. The good results obtained by the PJD and the emergence of the PAM as the second party in the country in the 2015 regional and local elections were the ingredients and the challenges for the campaign for the 2016 parliamentary elections. In fact, the results of the Benkirane governments were questioned by a large part of the opposition parties. The political spectrum in Morocco seems to be evolving towards a polarisation around two parties, the PJD and the PAM, and the electoral campaign reflected this polarisation.

25. To minimise this polarisation of the campaign the government adopted two changes in the LOCR. The first one, mentioned earlier, consisted in lowering the threshold to 3% to allow a party to get the chance to win political representation and the second was to include the possibility for parties to form alliances. *De facto* two alliances were created, the most relevant one among several extreme urban left-wing movements, gathering into the Front of the Democratic Left (FDG).³

1. Koutla means coalition in Arabic and regroups, since the 70s, a group of parties opposed to the Monarchy, namely the Istiqlal (Conservative and Nationalist), the [Socialist Union of Popular Forces](#) (Socialist) and the [Party of Progress and Socialism](#) (Socialist).

2. The RNI party was founded in 1978 by [Prime Minister Ahmed Osman](#), brother-in-law of [King Hassan II](#).

3. Formed by the Unified Socialist Party, the Party of the democratic and socialist avant-garde and the National Ittihad Congress Party.

26. The polarisation of the political environment was also reflected in the election campaign. The PJD has evoked, throughout the whole election campaign and even beforehand the role of the “power” or “tahakoum”⁴ as an obstacle to the implementation of its government programme.

27. During the election campaign, an “anti-PJD” march, without a clear politically labelled promoter, was organised in Casablanca on 18 September 2016. On that occasion, around 8-9 000 people gathered to protest “against the islamisation of the society”.

28. Only one party, the Istiqlal, included two salafist candidates in its lists, in Fez and Tangier, but neither was elected. The PJD tried to include a well-known salafist preacher from Marrakech in its list for the Marrakech-Gueliz constituency, but this candidacy was rejected by the Ministry of the Interior. The person in question did not avail himself of his right to appeal to the court of first instance against the decision to reject his candidacy, a right guaranteed by Article 87 of the LO CR. On 3 October, the Ministry of the Interior arrested 10 women, allegedly related to Daesh, who, according to the authorities, were preparing suicide attacks on election day in various Moroccan cities.

3. Administration of elections, voter lists and candidate registration

29. Elections are organised by the Ministry of the Interior and monitored by the governmental commission for the elections formed by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice. In practical terms, the Ministry of the Interior manages the electoral process. In the aftermath of the 18 September Casablanca protest, the Minister of Justice, Mr Moustapha Ramid, from the PJD, denounced a lack of consultations with Mr Mohamed Hassad, Minister of the Interior.

30. The elections were organised in 92 electoral constituencies, through 43 314 polling stations, of which 3 884 were central offices. Each polling station was managed by a president and three members of the board, the youngest being the secretary.

31. Any Moroccan citizen over 18 years of age has the right to vote, on condition that he or she has full civil and political rights and does not present any of the disqualifying criteria provided for in the law. Morocco has an active registration system, according to which a citizen should register to the competent authorities, in order to exercise his/her right to vote.

32. According to the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, 15 702 592 Moroccans were registered on the electoral lists, the breakdown being as follows: 55% men and 45% women. A similar distribution could be observed with 55% of urban registered voters and 45% rural voters. 73% of the electorate is composed of people aged under 54.

33. The number of registered voters is relatively low considering that the number of Moroccans of age to vote is around 25 million and that the registration process is quite simple. In fact, Moroccan citizens who meet all the legal requirements but are not yet registered on the general electoral registers must submit their applications to register directly with the offices of the local administrative authorities closest to them or via the website on general electoral registers (www.listeselectorales.ma).

34. This procedure also applies to voters who have changed address, who must re-register on the general registers. According to the Ministry of the Interior, the introduction of registration via the Internet, started in 2015 for the regional/local elections, has improved the process and increased the number of registered voters.

35. In addition, a voter could receive information on his/her polling station either by post or by consulting the Internet or sending a text message to 2727 indicating his/her national identity card number in order to receive the necessary information.

36. Under Article 6 of the Law on general electoral registers, Moroccan citizens living abroad may also apply to register. Those concerned must submit their applications to the relevant administrative board or Moroccan embassies or consulates in their place of residence. According to the last census of 2014, approximately 3 million Moroccans are living abroad. Those who registered had the possibility either of travelling to Morocco and casting their vote personally or of using a proxy vote. The turnout of the citizens living abroad has always being low and a change in the legislation concerning their voting system should definitely be considered.

4. A word used to define “the power, the Ministry of the Interior, the Court”.

37. The electoral census issue has traditionally been very controversial in Morocco. For decades, there has been a great discrepancy between the figures for the population of voting age and the electoral registers. Several political parties have called for an automatic registration system, but the government has opposed this on technical grounds. More likely a proper electoral census would only serve to highlight the disaffection with politics among a large section of the population, especially young people.

38. Attention should also be drawn to the great public disaffection with political parties in general, which is reflected in a rather low turnout at elections. In 2011, the official turnout of 45% was presented as a success compared to the previous period, even though this figure should be put into perspective given the active registration system. Disaffection is also expressed through unusually high levels of invalid votes (22% in 2011).

39. As far as the registration of lists of candidates from political parties and coalitions was concerned, the political parties were allowed to register their lists of candidates as of 14 September. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, 30 political parties submitted lists of candidates within the legally stipulated time limits in order to participate in the elections of 7 October 2016. Two lists without political affiliation were also submitted.

40. According to the LOCR, a candidate to the House of Representatives must meet a number of conditions. Those who may not stand for election include: members of the House of Councillors, naturalised Moroccan citizens for five years after their naturalisation, persons whose mandate has been revoked by a final court decision, persons sentenced by a final court decision to a term or suspended term of imprisonment of any duration for one of the offences set out in the law (vote buying, threats, undue pressure or influencing), persons holding certain positions.

41. According to the Ministry of the Interior, 1 410 lists were submitted for both local and national circumscriptions, for a total of 6 992 candidates. 25 lists competed for the national constituencies (lists of women and young people) with 22 250 candidates and there were 1 385 lists at local constituency level with some 4 742 candidates, namely an average of 15 lists per constituency.

42. The President of the CNDH and the representative of the Ministry of the Interior informed the members of the Assembly's ad hoc committee about the voting and counting procedures, the declaration of election results, as well as the most important changes in the new legislation governing these elections.

4. Election campaigning, campaign funding and media coverage

43. Election campaigning began on 24 September and, in accordance with the LOCR, had to cease at midnight on 6 October, a few hours before polling stations opened.

44. The law prohibits the carrying out of opinion polls and the publication of the results of polls which have a direct or indirect link to the parliamentary elections during the period starting fifteen days before the date fixed for the beginning of the referendum campaign or electoral campaign, until the end of the voting process. This measure was questioned by several parties and some of them organised unofficial polls. A change in the legislation on these matters should be adopted before the next elections.

45. The financing of the electoral campaign was partially covered by the State budget. The total disbursed by the national budget amounts to 200 million dirhams, roughly 20 million euros. This figure should be divided into several parts: a first one of 750 000 dirhams (€75 000) per party. If a party does not gain any seats, it is obliged to reimburse the sum. A second one will be allotted proportionally to the number of votes and to the number of seats obtained by each party in the national and local constituencies.

46. At local constituency level, if a woman is elected on a party list, her party will receive a bonus equivalent to four times the sum received for a seat. The personal expenses of each candidate were capped at a maximum of 500 000 dirhams (€50 000) per candidate.

47. Each party is obliged to present, before 8 November 2016, to the Court of Auditors in Rabat or at its regional branches, a report of the expenses incurred for the electoral campaign by each candidate and to provide an audit for those expenses. Those who do not abide by this rule will be stripped of their seat in the House of Representatives.

48. During the meetings with NGOs and media representatives, the ad hoc committee's interlocutors⁵ reported several concerns, in particular:

- the low number of women in the local constituency lists and those present in very secondary positions or difficult electoral districts;
- the lack of transparency in the preparation/choice of the party lists;
- cases of convicted persons participating as candidates, since in the majority of the cases they are not stripped of their civil rights;
- the lack of real control of party financing and spending, accounts audit performed by party-affiliated structures;
- allegations of vote buying by payment of school fees or school equipment;
- cases of corruption among civil servants not properly addressed by the political parties;
- cases of physical aggression and interference by public officials.

49. It was not in the mandate of the ad hoc committee to make any judgment regarding the criticism and examples of possible irregularities. The report to be prepared by the CNDH on the general election process will certainly provide a more precise picture of the irregularities. The ad hoc committee considers that it is up to Morocco's relevant judicial bodies to take the appropriate legal measures to address the concerns identified.

50. When meeting party and civil society representatives, the Assembly delegation emphasised the importance of the Moroccan citizens' active participation in the parliamentary elections of 7 October 2016, which should strengthen their trust in and respect for the democratic process and give the newly elected parliament greater legitimacy.

51. The representatives of PAM were the only party representatives who met with the ad hoc committee. PJD and USFS representatives declined at the last minute. In this regard, the Assembly delegation regrets that these party representatives were not able to meet the delegation and present their point of view on the election campaign.

52. The PAM representatives used this opportunity mainly to present their political platform for the elections. The main features of their programme are the secularisation of society and the modernisation of the country, which is lagging behind, in particular in the education and health sectors, and the promotion of a modern economic and production sector. They also presented their vision of the enhancement of the role of women in society. PAM took the decision to include on their national constituency list one man and 29 women, to increase the possibility of having a greater number of women in the future parliament.

The media

53. Generally speaking, the media made considerable efforts to inform voters about the election system and encourage them to turn out to vote. Radio and television spots organised by the Ministry of the Interior were broadcast free of charge every day.

54. The media coverage of the elections is essentially governed by the Law on audiovisual communication and other specific legislation on elections. On 21 July 2016, the High Council for Audiovisual Communication adopted a decision "on the guarantees of political pluralism in the audiovisual media during the 2016 legislative election period".

55. The ad hoc committee had a very interesting meeting with the members of the High Council and of the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA). HACA is an autonomous State institution which oversees the respect of pluralism, balanced access to media during the election period, including women's participation in electoral debates (minimum 30% of airtime) and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

5. NGOs: Transparency Maroc (Director of the Observatory), Moroccan Association of Human Rights (MAHR), Amazigh Citizen Network, Adala Association, Democratic Association of Women from Morocco (AMDH), Organisation marocaine des droits de l'homme (OMDH), Citizen School for Political Studies (ECEP) (Director); Media: *L'Economiste*, *Tel Quel*, *Le Matin*.

56. The committee had the opportunity to visit the HACA premises and met with those who are responsible for controlling on a 24/7 basis the radio and television programmes and who can suggest the adoption of different measures including the disconnection of a programme or the request to halt a political or commercial advertisement.

57. Access to public media for the political parties is regulated on the basis of 50% of the time equally distributed among the parties which already have a parliamentary group (meaning at least 20 seats), 30% to the parties which already have seats in parliament and the 20% left to be distributed among the parties not represented in parliament.

5. Polling day

58. Polling day was calm; voters were able to make their choice freely from the lists presented by parties of different political sensibilities.

59. The seven Assembly teams observed the elections at 90 polling stations in Rabat and its region, as well as in the towns and regions of Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech and Tangier.

60. The polling stations were located mainly in schools and municipal buildings in rural areas.

61. The ad hoc committee members' assessment of the conduct of voting, including vote counting, was very positive, and the teams found no irregularities.

62. Nevertheless, certain shortcomings were observed in the polling stations visited:

- the design of voting slips, with just one sheet including the local and national constituency lists, was confusing and slowed down the vote-counting process;
- polling stations were often relatively difficult to access for people with reduced mobility;
- people who were unable to read, mainly in rural areas, found it difficult to follow the voting process without being assisted;
- there were few women among polling station officials; of the 90 polling stations visited, only 18 of them were chaired by women.

63. According to the final results issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the turnout was 43%, namely 6.8 million of the 15.7 million people entitled to vote. In 2011, the turnout was 45%, namely 6.03 million of the 13.4 million people entitled to vote.

64. The following parties won seats in the House of Representatives:

PARTY	Seats 2016	Seats 2011	Difference
PJD	125	107	+ 18
PAM	102	47	+ 55
ISTIQLAL	46	60	- 14
RNI	37	52	- 15
MP	27	32	5
UC	19	23	- 4
USFP	20	39	- 19
PPS	12	18	- 6
MDS	2	1	- 1
FGD	2	0	+ 2
PUD	1	0	+ 1
PGVM	1	0	+ 1

The results include the seats obtained under the national constituency lists which provide 90 seats, 60 for women and 30 for young people under 40 years of age.

Some aspects of the results of the elections should be underlined. First the PJD has confirmed its position as the first party of Morocco, with a slight increase in seats, from 107 to 125. However, it still needs to form a coalition with other parties to govern the country.

Secondly PAM enjoyed a spectacular growth, becoming the second party and increasing its number of seats by 217%. This result confirms the polarisation of the Moroccan electorate around these two parties, as observed in the aftermath of the 2015 local/regional elections.

The Istiqlal Party lost 25% of its seats. According to some analysts, this was *inter alia* because of its choice to include salafist candidates in its lists. The USFP lost almost 50% of its seats. The RNI lost a substantial number of seats.

Moroccans elected 81 women as members of the new House of Representatives. 71 were elected on the national constituency lists [60 on the all-women list and 11 on the young persons lists (9 from PAM and 2 from the PJD)] and 10 on the local constituency lists (7 from PAM and 3 from PJD). Women will thus represent 21% of the total number of parliamentarians. It is a slight increase from 2011 when 67 women were elected, namely 17% of the total number.

65. According to the Constitution, the King asked Mr Benkirane to form a new government. The new parliament was inaugurated by the King on 14 October.

6. Conclusions

66. The Parliamentary Assembly's ad hoc committee for the observation of elections to the Moroccan House of Representatives concluded that the parliamentary elections held on 7 October 2016 took place in a calm atmosphere, with voters able to make their choice freely from the lists presented by parties of different political sensibilities.

67. The ad hoc committee highlighted the professionalism of the Ministry of the Interior and of the Ministry of Justice which organised the poll with integrity and in full transparency. It commends the professionalism and courtesy of the polling station officials met by the delegation during its visit.

68. The ad hoc committee welcomes the changes in the legislation opening the young people list to women and the choice made by some parties to include a majority of women in their young persons lists; but regrets that these and other legislative changes were made only at a late stage.

69. The ad hoc committee noted with regret that the current voters active registration system and the awareness campaign did not produce a higher turnout than in 2011, particularly among young voters, and it noted the surprisingly high amount of spoiled ballot papers.

70. The ad hoc committee considers that the legal framework should be improved to allow Moroccans living abroad to be better represented in parliament and increase their participation in elections.

71. The ad hoc committee thinks that the creation of an independent/central electoral commission should be considered, as a useful tool able to solve some of the existing problems concerning the participation and organisation of elections.

72. The ad hoc committee invites the Moroccan authorities to carry out an in-depth analysis of the organisation of the parliamentary elections on 7 October 2016. The ad hoc committee is convinced that this work should be carried out in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, of which Morocco is a member, with a view to improving the country's electoral legislation as well as certain practical aspects of the organisation of voting and, more generally, the entire electoral process before the next elections are held.

73. The ad hoc committee stresses the need to reinforce co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the newly elected parliament within the framework of [Resolution 1818 \(2011\)](#) on partner for democracy status.

Appendix 1 – Composition of the ad hoc committee

Based on the proposals by the political groups of the Assembly, the ad hoc committee was composed as follows:

- Chairperson: Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER (United Kingdom, EC)
- **Group of the European People’s Party (EPP/CD)**
 - Nicole DURANTON, France
 - Senad ŠEPIĆ, Bosnia and Herzegovina
 - Adão SILVA, Portugal
- **Socialist Group (SOC)**
 - Francesco VERDUCCI, Italy
 - George FOULKES, United Kingdom
 - Josette DURRIEU, France
- **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**
 - Andrea RIGONI, Italy
 - Adele GAMBARO, Italy
- **European Conservatives Group (EC)**
 - Ian LIDDELL-GRAINGER, United Kingdom
- **Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)**
 - Tiny KOX, Netherlands
- **Venice Commission**
 - Oscar SÁNCHEZ MUÑOZ, Expert
 - Sergeï KOUZNETSOV, Head of Division
- **Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly**
 - Alessandro MANCINI, Deputy to the Head of Secretariat, Parliamentary Project Support Division
 - Franck DAESCHLER, Principal Administrative Assistant, Election observation and Interparliamentary Co-operation Division

Appendix 2 – Programme of the election observation mission (Rabat, 5-9 October 2016)

Wednesday 5 October 2016

- 08.30-09.00 Meeting of the ad hoc committee:
- Opening of the meeting and presentation of the mission by: Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Head of the delegation
 - Background and political situation: Mr Mehdi Remili, Head of the Council of Europe office in Rabat
 - Electoral legislation: Mr Óscar Sánchez Muñoz, Venice Commission
- 09.00-10.30 Meeting with representatives of international organisations (Ambassador of the delegation of the European Union as well as ambassadors of countries represented in the delegation: Italy, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom)
- 10.30-11.30 Meeting with media representatives
- 11.00-13.00 Meeting with NGO and civil society representatives
- 15.00 -16.00 Information session on the electoral process organised by the National Council of Human Rights (CNDH), and meeting with Mr Driss El Yazami, President of the CNDH
- 16.00-17.00 Meeting with Mr Mehdi Bensaid, member of the “Partnership for democracy” delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, representative of PAM
- 17.30-18.30 Meeting with M. Mohammed Gallaoui, Ms Rabha Zeidguy et Ms Khadija El Gour, members of the Board of the High Council of Audiovisual Communication, and other members of the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication

Thursday 6 October 2016

- 09.00-10.00 Meeting with Mr Hassan Aghmari, Director of the election department, Ministry of the Interior
- 10.30-11.30 Meeting with the European Union election evaluation mission
- 11.30-12.30 Observation of the vote, practical and logistical issues
- Meetings with the drivers and interpreters for the ad hoc committee teams
- 13.00 Pre-deployment of the teams observing in the regions

Friday 7 October 2016

- All day Observation of the opening of polling stations, the voting, the closing of polling stations, the counting and recording of results

Saturday 8 October 2016

- 08.30 Debriefing meeting of the ad hoc committee
- 11.00 Press conference of the ad hoc committee

Appendix 3 – Press release issued by the election observation mission

Partnership for Democracy with the Parliament of Morocco, legislative elections well administered but with a low turnout

Strasbourg, 08.10.2016: At the invitation of the National Council of Human Rights (CNDH), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) observed for the second time the elections to the House of Representatives of Morocco on 7 October 2016.

The Moroccan Parliament was the first non-European parliament to obtain in 2011, the status of “Partner for Democracy” with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and committed itself to do everything possible in order for the elections to be conducted according to international standards.

The PACE delegation, led by Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, United Kingdom (EC), included 10 members from 6 European countries and visited Morocco between 5 and 8 October. It met with some of the candidates, the representatives of the Minister of the Interior, the President of the CNDH, and several representatives of civil society, media and international organizations. On Election Day, seven teams of observers were deployed and observed the vote in Rabat and its surrounding area, as well as in the regions of Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech and Tangier.

The delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe welcomes the professionalism of the Ministry of the Interior which organized the poll with integrity and in full transparency. It commends the professionalism and courtesy of the members of the polling stations that the delegation met during its visit. Moroccans called to organise these elections within a modified legislative framework, have risen to this important challenge.

The delegation noted that some aspects of the electoral process could be improved, including through seeking advice from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, where Morocco is a full member. Namely:

Cases of electoral fraud were reported, even though the members of the Committee didn't see them and any case should be investigated; The creation of an Independent/Central electoral Commission could be considered;

The delegation welcomes the changes in the legislation opening the young people list to women and the choice made by some parties to include a majority of women in their lists of young people; it regrets that these and other legislative changes were made only at a later stage;

It regrets that the current voter registration system and the awareness campaign have not produced a turnout higher than in 2011, particularly among young voters, and notes the surprisingly high amount of spoilt ballot papers. The late release of party programmes/manifestos might have been one of the reasons for the low turnout;

The fact that the voting/representation of Moroccans living abroad is organised only by proxy voting could be discussed or reconsidered.