

MINUTES OF THE BI-ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS FOR ELECTION OBSERVATION

Brussels 10 – 11 December 2018

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Brussels 10 – 11 December 2018

Summary

The bi-annual meeting of the National Focal Points (FPs) for election observation took place in Brussels on 10th and 11th December 2018. A total of 35 participants from EU Member States (MS), partner countries and institutions attended the meeting.

Key areas which have gained increased importance for EU EOMs were discussed throughout the meeting with particular focus on selection and evaluation of observers and observation activities planned for 2019. Additionally, topics for potential future analysis such as social media and election digital technology were also discussed. EODS introduced recent measures to support the follow-up for EU EOMs, highlighting the importance of new guide shared with heads of EC delegations, procedures for consistent monitoring of implementation of recommendations by future EU missions and the searchable repository of recommendations which is currently finalised. A reporting manual for EOMs has been also developed and is currently being tested in the field. The need to develop methodology in the area of social media was emphasised and planned steps to be taken were discussed, including the foreseen expert seminar on social networks being organised by EODS and the testing of a social media expert which will be in the core team (CT) for Nigeria.

EOMs deployed since the last FP meeting have been in Pakistan, Madagascar, Mali and Zimbabwe. **EOMs planned for 2019** include El Salvador, Nigeria and Senegal, which are already under large scale preparation, followed by Malawi, Tunisia and Mozambique.

Following the exchange of views by the participants in the group discussion format, a number of conclusions were reached:

1. **Selection of observers** – the large variety of practices by FPs reflects a necessary level of flexibility to different national contexts.
2. **Evaluation of observers** – while the evaluation process is generally accepted by all stakeholders as a useful tool, FP must take into account the context such as the difficulties in assessing work done as a team in how they use evaluations. The importance of evaluations shouldn't be overemphasised as observers may be too worried to raise any issues for fear of being seen as a trouble maker. It was also noted that assessing areas such as cultural awareness could be considered as a part of observer evaluation process.
3. **Regional Training Hubs** - EODS will, in cooperation with the EC, send a note to all FP explaining the possibilities and processes for EODS support for regional training initiatives. It was also concluded that course fees charged to the participants for trainings supported by EODS should be avoided and, if not possible, limited to the minimum covering essential costs.

EODS Phase II training activities since the last FP meeting have included a Press Officer training, the annual DCO workshop, the Belgian regional training and an Election Analyst workshop. The EODS events planned for 2019 will include an Online Campaign and Social Networks Expert Seminar, trainings for Political/Campaign Analyst, Media analysts and Election Analysts or Observer Coordinators, as well as thematic trainings on Security, ICT in elections and Data management in EU EOMs. EODS will also work on the development of briefing and training modules on dealing with and preventing harassment and contribute to regional trainings as required.

The next FP meeting will take place in Sofia in the summer of 2019.

Main points of discussion and conclusion


10 December Sessions

Session I – Opening and Welcome

The European Commission (EC) representative highlighted the importance of security within EU EOMs which has led to the safe return of all observers deployed by EU. He also noted the standard operating procedures which were put in place to provide clear lines of responsibility and systemise the handling of security emergencies. As well as this long-term progress was emphasised, such as in reducing the costs and waste produced by EU EOMs. This includes locally purchased equipment now being donated to civil society after missions and high technology equipment being rented by the service provider, since an assessment of EOMs sustainability in 2013. In addition, 30 per cent reduction in the average cost of EU EOMs between 2011 and 2016 has been achieved. There has also been an increased importance given to preventing harassment, through further development of ethical aspects of EOM guidelines providing clear mechanisms for dealing with these issues.

The EC representative thanked all his colleagues for their dedicated work, including the support of the focal points.

The European External actions service (EEAS) representative discussed some key developments since the summer FP meeting and key challenges such as the three election days observed within the space of three days.



From the issues discussed at the recent Declaration of principles meeting, He drew attention to serious financing problems facing some international observer organisations, to highlight the uncertainty of EOMs financing in the face of budget negotiations and upcoming European elections.

The EEAS representative highlighted some key areas of ongoing development for EU EOMs:

- Follow-up: to support its increased importance, a detailed practical guide on follow-up has been provided to heads of EU delegations and a searchable database of recommendations is in final stage of development.
- Reporting: a style guide has been developed to increase quality of reporting
- Social Media: having a core team (CT) member with social media expertise will be tested in Nigeria although this cannot yet be made a regular post due to the need to develop the methodology in this area.
- Visibility: The groundwork has been laid to now be able to implement the suggestions from the previous FP meeting in Lisbon. There is now a focal point for this area assigned in EEAS strategic communications department. There is a better coordination between EEAS StratComms and press officers, including a pre-deployment briefing on ensuring media produced by the mission is usable as part of EEAS' larger social media footprint, which can then be amplified by the FP.

In October 2018, a High-Level Conference on the Future of International Election Observation was held by the European Parliament and EEAS, key outcomes of the conference and the progress in these areas since was shared:

- Prevention of electoral violence: the need to work more closely with the peacekeeping community in this area. In EOMs there is pre-deployment training for Core Team members in conflict sensitivity when deployed to countries with a high likelihood of violence.

- Election technology and Social Networks: there is a need to develop methodology in these areas. (During the December 2018 DoP meeting, the EC received a mandate of international observer organisations to take the lead on this development.)
- Cooperation with UN and AU: working closely to improve election observation. In Madagascar the EU EOM worked closely with the AU mission.

Sessions II – Update on EU EOM Activities and Q&A

All participants

The discussion addressed thematic issues and specific comments from each recent mission and the key points raised were:

✓ **The Service Provider (SP)**

Several issues were brought up which the EC representative will raise at the bi-annual meeting of Service Providers in the days following the FP meeting:

- Despite recognition of the good work of the SP in the context of a complicated situation in Mali, it was noted by observers that the vehicle tracking was not working in some places.
- Issues from Madagascar were also emphasised, notably problems with mobile data capacity for accessing the E-Day application and the need for better vehicles in remote areas for long periods.
- In Zimbabwe there was confusion with the SP's instructions relating to how much money to bring and if observers could get more money in country, and so observers felt unsafe carrying large amounts of cash.

✓ **Social Media**

- A CT position with social media experience will be tested in Nigeria, although social media is likely to play a large role in these elections there is uncertainty as to how much analysis of this can be used in the final report as it is unclear what it will be appraised against.
- There is a need to develop methodology and tools for observation in this area.
- The expert seminar on social networks being organised by EODS will help with the development of such tools.

✓ **EC Election Roster**

- The rewriting of the roster has been put on hold due to a change of priorities to focus on the repository of recommendations and checking if it could be done using existing commission programmes.
- Following the suggestion at the last FP meeting, FPIs are updated on CT appointments.
- Deletion of roster profiles can currently be done only by the individual concerned; the issue of deceased observers will be considered.

✓ **Other Key Issues Raised**

- New colleagues from EC and EEAS were introduced.
- Regular updates on missions will be provided to FPs as the monthly EOM updates for FPI and EEAS internal use will be shared.
- Drivers salaries were confirmed as being well above local salary levels. Drivers are paid by the car rental companies and additionally receive a bonus from the EOM, which is paid by the EOM directly to them.
- Interpreters security was addressed and it was highlighted that interpreters are always accompanied by observers and the same security rules apply for observers and local staff.
- An observer on wheelchair was deployed in an OSCE mission. As a result of beforehand discussion and preparations, and with the support of the other observer-team mate, this was a successful first experience which was shared by one FP.

FPIs remarks/questions – FPI/EEAS feed-back

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FPI pointed out that

observers who are not recommended for breach of code of conduct cannot apply for EOM missions for five years.

- One FP asked for a clarification of the restructuring transfer of the election observation team. The potential synergies were highlighted between election observation and other civilian missions that are already managed by the EC.
- One FP drew attention to the uncertainty of the future budget after new financial framework negotiations. It was remarked that FPs should call upon their national negotiators and MEPs to protect the election observation budget as they know the importance of election observation and they may be a source of continuity of MS interest after the European Parliament elections.
- Observers should receive list of what is included in their visibility kit before they leave for EOM, which was not done in Zimbabwe.
- Standards for security were discussed but it was highlighted that vast variations in context do not allow for any standardisation.
- Security procedures: A focal point forwarded the criticism from his observers over perceived over-bureaucratic security arrangements in Zimbabwe. The EC explained that observers need to plan their movements well in advance in order to allow the security expert to assess potential risks.

Session III – Regional Training Hubs and other support to MS training initiatives

Presentation of Belgian Experience

Focal Point and EODS

- In November 2018, the Belgian Focal Point and EODS piloted the Regional Training Hub initiative discussed at the previous focal point meeting in Lisbon.
- A five-day LTO training open to participants from other MS was held in Brussels in November.
- One FP wanted to organise an LTO training to increase rotation of observers and needed to involve other MS in order to get this level of EODS support.
- These other countries were chosen as they are neighbouring, so easier for participants to travel from, and not to organise their own training. Therefore, these MSs had more to gain from involvement in on FP initiative.
- The process started with this FP contacting EODS before summer holiday. Subsequently the other MSs involved were contacted and invited to suggest candidates who were then selected in autumn. EODS did most of the organisation including selecting trainers and preparing the course content, while the FPs mainly liaised with EODS and organised logistics such as the venue, and selected participants.
- The Belgian FP noted that it was a positive experience and that they were happy with the structure and the involvement of participants.
- The advantages of having participants from other MSs were emphasised, including encouraging communication in English and sharing from a variety of experiences and backgrounds.
- It was noted that the Belgian FP had almost no budget for this event, participants had to cover their own costs but the training was provided for free (venue arranged by FP and trainers by EODS). It was also noted that the participants investing in the costs of the training may mean they were more motivated.
- The benefit of having the national FPs or their representatives participating in the event encouraged the active engagement of participants and meant FPs could see how the participants were responding to the training.

Discussion

- Attention was drawn to the ease of having EODS involvement in Brussels compared to cost of bringing people from EODS to other MSs, however it was highlighted that in kind support such as elaboration of agenda can be done remotely and that there has been FPI agreement of potential financing for providing trainers for regional training.

- EODS, together with FPI3, will draft a document with guidelines, which explains the opportunities for EODS support to regional training initiatives after the discussion of this topic in the experience sharing session.
- There would also be the possibility of conducting trainings in French and Spanish. An alternative model was tested for the EODS Press Officer training, where the main teaching was conducted in English while the participants could choose for the practical and written exercises which working language they wanted to be used (English/French/Spanish).
- FP from Sweden mentioned they would also want to include information on OSCE specific admin and logistic tasks and challenges and if this would disqualify them from such EODS support and it was highlighted that there are not many differences in areas of assessment and methodology between EU and OSCE as well as the fact the trainers provided had a lot of experience with both organisation.

11 December Sessions

Session I - The EODS Project

Project Director and Training Coordinator

They provided an overview of EODS Phase II that started in February 2017. They presented the main areas of EODS work since the last meeting in Lisbon: methodological support; training activities and regional coordination. The recent an ongoing activities included:

- Developing Standard Operating Procedures for CT positions, so far legal and political/campaign analyst SOPs have been completed and DCO and Election Analyst are being prepared.
- A reporting manual has been developed as a response to the Court of Auditors recommendation to improve quality of EOM reporting. This manual includes standard templates and practical stylistic suggestions and rules aiming to improve consistency. The draft will continue to be tested in the field but has already received positive feedback.
- A follow-up guide has also been developed as a response to the Court of Auditors assessment to ensure systematic follow-up and to improve recommendations. The guide is targeted to EC delegation and includes methodology and requirements such as regular reporting on the state of implementation of recommendations.
- A searchable repository of recommendations is being developed with the support of EODS and will soon entre the pilot phase. The purpose is to improve institutional memory, follow-up the status of implementation, allow the possibility of analysis and research and foster consistency.
- There is ongoing work to the Eday app and updates to the case law database.
- Trainings and workshops: Since the last FP meeting, EODS has run a Press Officer training, the annual DCO workshop, the Belgian regional training and an Election Analyst workshop.

Planned training activities for 2019 include:

- Online campaign and social networks expert seminar
- Security in EU EOMs beginner/advanced training
- ICT in elections advanced training or seminar
- Election analyst or observer coordinator beginner training
- Political/campaign analyst beginner training
- Data management in EU EOMs advanced training
- Media analysts (ENG/FR/ES/PG) beginner training
- DCO annual meeting - workshop
- Support FP training for STOs
- Training on election analysis in EOMs for the League of Arab States
- Development of briefing and training modules on dealing with and preventing harassment
- Contribution to regional trainings

FPs remarks/questions – EC/EEAS/EODS feed-back

- A question was raised if best practices would be included in the repository of recommendations and it was pointed out that while there would be a comment section on how recommendations have been implemented, the Carter Center database of International standards and related best practices already covers this well and it is best not to duplicate efforts.
- One FP noted that these new measures relating to follow-up should be explained to COHOM. The EEAS explained that he had been to COHOM to explain how we are following up court of auditors including assessing implementation of recommendations. He is also organising training for all delegations on how to follow up to EOM recommendations.
- While the close to 50/50 gender balance of EOM observers and core teams this year was appreciated as a positive outcome, there was an enquiry for an update on the issue of gender imbalance of the service provider. The EC noted that this had been brought to the SP's attention and would be again discussed at the bi-annual meeting of Service Providers. He drew attention to the improvement of balance on the previous year but also mentioned that there are objective reasons for part of this imbalance due to the fact security experts often have former military or police experience, which have traditionally been male dominated fields.

Session II – Focal Points Experience Sharing

Topic I: Selection of observers.

Main conclusions of group 1

- Lots of flexibility and variety among FP practices was identified, with the minimum conditions from the EC serving as the only standard basis of requirements, such as for language skills and experience.
- Circulating information about missions varies from expecting potential observers to check the EC website to using the FP organisations website and social media.
- While most FPs use mailing lists to communicate about upcoming missions, there is variety from including everyone in the roster, including everyone who asks, some have criteria such as language skills needed and some have the criteria of a perfect CV in the roster.
- Selection by the FP is always based on the basic requirements from the call for observers but may also include e-learning or traditional courses.
- Some countries try to have personal knowledge of observers but recognised it is difficult to keep institutional memory with changing staff.
- In terms of evaluation some FPs require de-briefing presence, some a written report and some both.
- At de-briefing/in reports some FPs ask about other observers and pass on issues to EC and other FPs.

Discussion, all participants

- Some FPs would like to see more trust from Brussels if FPs advocate for first-time STO or LTOs.
- Rotation of observers and variations between countries was raised but it was noted that flexibility is needed given different sizes of countries and rosters and the needs of missions.

Topic II: Evaluation of observers. Main conclusions

Main conclusions of group 2

- It was noted that in general, the system is accepted by all stakeholders thus FP and observers had few concerns.
- FPs judged that the professional level of observers has increased as a result of these evaluations.
- Evaluations are seen as a performance appraisal of observers, an incentive for highest standard work and disincentive for poor performance.

- There was consensus within this group that that evaluation is a powerful and helpful tool for selection.
- There was consensus within this group that new evaluation system has improved with the removal of the “highly recommended” classification.
- Limitations were seen as including difficulty in providing evidence for negative comments; difficulty for CT knowing what is going on in the field; frustration with assessment based on work of the team when the contribution to the work may vary significantly.
- Some evaluations are seen as too generic and it would be helpful if they are more precise.
- There was a suggestion that guidelines for evaluation could be given to coordinators.
- It may be useful to also assess cultural awareness, although it is important to be careful with how it is assessed.
- It was noted that expectations of evaluations shouldn’t be too high, the main role is to identify those who are not good enough for the role.

Discussion, all participants

- Some observers feel they didn’t want to raise any issues so not to be seen as a trouble maker and therefore risk get a lower mark.
- How FPs respond to evaluation is important and it was noted that FPs take the context into account. It was also suggested that observers are much more likely to feel stressed about evaluations if the FP puts a lot of emphasis on getting high marks.

Topic III: Regional Training Initiatives. Main conclusions

Main conclusions of group 3

- It was clarified that trainings organised by the FPs are recognised and considered when observers are selected. Yet, at present, it was felt that there was no need for a certification exercise..
- In order to receive EODS support for a training activity, the training must be recognised by the national focal point.
- There was a suggestion of EODS creating a database of all official trainings endorsed by the focal points, with the emphasis that it is important to distinguish official and recognised trainings from those just trying to make profit.
- It will be useful for FPs to know the needs of other states from the previous survey, the results of which will be distributed by EODS once finalised.
- EODS can also give support and guidance for national training.
- Selection at commission level looks at training, therefore FPs should promote more training opportunities, but there was also a concern that training requirements may make it more difficult for newcomers to get a first selection.
- A short note to be sent by EODS explaining possibilities of support for regional training initiatives and how it works.
- The main problem is funds to cover costs, especially of participants from other countries.
- The idea of these regional trainings was mainly intended to help small countries who don’t have means to organise their own trainings.

Discussion, all participants

- The challenge of how to attract regional interest for these training hubs was raised but it was noted that these need not be limited to cooperation between neighbouring countries and may also take a language dimension or help address the needs of a group of countries that aren’t neighbours.
- There was debate on whether these courses should be free of charge to participants, or if FPs could charge a small fee to cover costs.

Session III - Closing Remarks

The EEAS representative highlighted the process of exchange and the importance of these meetings for bringing together actors who see EOMs from different perspectives. It was noted that having these meetings every six months was useful given the turnover of FPs and the rate of development of EU EOMs. The upcoming missions currently in preparation are El Salvador, Senegal and Nigeria. These missions will be followed by Malawi, Tunisia and Mozambique.

The EC representative noted that this meeting had been successful thanks to the participation and interactive nature, and especially the sharing of honest feedback. Another important aspect of these meetings was their function as a framework to transfer knowledge to new FPs. Attention was also drawn to the need to keep clear channels of communication, especially on issues which often require timely reactions. He announced that the next FP meeting will be held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in summer 2019.

ANNEX I – AGENDA

Venue: Hotel Aloft

10 December 2017

Time	Subject	Speakers
12:30 - 14:00	Registration and Lunch	
14:00 – 14:45	Opening and Welcome	EC and EEAS
14:45 – 16:00	Update on EU EOM activities and Q&A	EC and EEAS
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee Break	
16:15 – 17.30	Regional Training Hubs and other support to MS training initiatives: Policy and Practices, Lessons Learnt and Follow-up	EODS and Focal Points
18.00 – 20.00	Tour	
20.00	Dinner	

11 December 2017

Time	Subject	Speakers/Facilitators
9:00 - 10:00	EODS Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update on activities since the last FP meeting ▪ Presentation on statistics of trainings and EU EOMs 	EODS
10:00 – 11:15	Focal Points experience sharing in groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Topic one – Selection of observers ▪ Topic two – Evaluation of observers ▪ Topic three – Regional training initiatives 	Focal Points
11:15 – 11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30 – 12:15	Focal Points experience presentation of group discussion and brainstorming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Topic one – Selection of observers ▪ Topic two – Evaluation of observers ▪ Topic three – Regional training initiatives 	Focal Points
12:15 – 12.45	Closing Remarks	EC - EEAS
12.45	Lunch	