

EP OFFICE OF
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European Union Election Observation Mission, Montenegro
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The EU regularly organizes election observation missions to support the democratic transition of developing countries. International observers at elections serve multiple goals: they ensure the election's integrity and increase the locals' confidence in democracy. The European Union's Elections Observer Missions (EOMs) are not just for the day of the election. An EOM includes, apart from an observation mission itself, electoral assistance projects and financial contribution to the elections.

For the presidential elections in Montenegro, the EU's EOM team was led by Fabio Massimo Castaldo of the EFDD group. Tamás Meszerics was one of the five Members of the European Parliament participating in the mission, which was carried out in co-operation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. During the election day, Mr Meszerics observed with the European Parliament delegation in the capital, Podgorica.

The international observers concluded that fundamental freedoms were respected in the Montenegro elections on April 15. The observers' report notes that candidates were allowed to campaign freely, although the governing party candidate held an institutional advantage. Public broadcasters granted interviews and airtime for opposition candidates, who had the chance to voice their opinions. Although there were two televised presidential debates, the incumbent candidate did not participate in any of them. Given the lack of a spending limit, candidates with more financial resources were able to voice their opinions more.

There were also several allegations of pressure on voters to support the candidate of the ruling party. Montenegrin citizens filed over 1,000 complaints: the allegations ranged from forgery of supporting signatures to the misuse of state resources. On the other hand, the international observers praised the orderly and peaceful manner the elections took place and welcomed recent changes in the electoral law incorporating recommendations from the Europe Venice Commission and from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

While the EOM's feedback on the elections was generally positive, the Head of the European Parliament delegation, Mr Castaldo remarked that "work is still needed on the laws governing elections, and on electoral reform in general. The relevant political actors in Montenegro will need to work together to effectively address these shortcomings, as a step along the path toward realizing their European aspirations."