



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Dili, 20 April 2022

Smooth polling and a swift count conclude a well-administered election day

This second preliminary statement of the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) is delivered before the completion of the entire electoral process. Critical stages remain, including final results and the adjudication of possible petitions, which the EU EOM remains in the country to observe. The EU EOM is at present solely in a position to comment on observation undertaken to date, and will later publish a final report, including full analysis and recommendations for electoral reform. The EU EOM may also make additional statements on election-related matters as and when it considers it appropriate to do so.

Summary

- On 19 April, the Timorese went to run-off polls to elect their president for a five-year term. The elections were competitive, and the campaign was largely peaceful, with an uptick in personal attacks in social media in the final days. Polling preparations were well-administered by the electoral authorities and election day was calm and orderly. EU observers assessed voting and counting processes positively. The strong presence of candidate agents and national observers lent transparency to the process.
- José Ramos-Horta and Francisco Guterres “Lú-Olo” competed in a campaign in which fundamental freedoms were respected. Candidates dedicated more efforts to direct voter outreach rather than to large political rallies. Lú-Olo built his campaign around government unity, with support from *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (FRETILIN) and the other political parties represented in the government coalition. Ramos-Horta, backed by *Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor* (CNRT) and a broad alliance of political parties and former candidates, criticised the government for inactivity and mismanagement and Lú-Olo himself for violating the constitution. Both candidates promised new financial subsidies for the population and improved social programmes.
- The National Election Commission (CNE) and the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE) were committed to transparent elections, and stakeholders were largely confident of their impartiality and professionalism. The Electoral Management Bodies showed expertise in implementing the elections and cooperated with electoral stakeholders throughout the process.
- Logistical election preparations were adequate and generally on time. EU observers visited 164 polling stations in 12 municipalities and the Special Administrative Region of Oecusse-Ambeno. Overall, EU observers assessed voting and counting processes as good or very good in all observed polling stations and described the atmosphere as peaceful. The EU EOM remains in country to follow the remaining phase in the electoral process, including the tabulation of results and the adjudication of possible petitions.
- EU EOM media monitoring did not detect paid advertising on any of the monitored radio and television stations. Voter education spots were broadcast on public *Rádio-Televisão Timor-Leste* (RTTL) starting five days before election day. During the run-off campaign, RTTL TV provided equitable editorial coverage to Lú-Olo and Ramos-Horta, while private *Grupo Media*

Nacional (GMN TV) continued to overwhelmingly feature Ramos-Horta. RTTL TV provided slightly more news coverage to Lú-Olo, while GMN TV news featured Ramos-Horta twice as much as Lú-Olo.

- EU EOM monitoring of candidates' Facebook pages, support pages, and political party pages revealed that content generally received little user engagement and did not generate debates or significant exchanges. The Lú-Olo Facebook page posted content about the constitutional framework and powers of the president, adding messages about offers of financial support to families, the elderly, and local administration officials. CNRT posts promoted Ramos-Horta and many past activities of Xanana Gusmão, and in the last days of the campaign posted personal attacks against Lú-Olo, Taur Matan Ruak, Mari Alkatiri, and Naimori Bucar.
- The two contestants appeared to compete on a level playing field, with similar campaign resources. Campaign finance rules are not entirely in line with good practice as they do not foresee limits for donations or expenditure, and there is no requirement to report on in-kind donations. Proactive oversight and transparent reporting are prerequisites in sound accounting for political finance, especially as candidates receive public funds for the political campaign. Despite legal requirements and contrary to good practice, audits of candidates' finance reports have not always been published in the past.
- EU observers followed some 62 campaign events and noted that despite an increase in the active participation of women speakers at these events, women as supporters attended in lower numbers. Furthermore, in comparison to the first round, there was little attention given to women's empowerment.

Preliminary findings

1. Background

On 19 April, Timorese went to run-off polls to elect a president for a five-year mandate. These were the fifth presidential elections observed by the European Union. Two independent candidates competed in the run-off, both supported by political parties. Incumbent President Francisco Guterres "Lú-Olo" was supported by his party *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (FRETILIN). Seasoned politician and former President José Ramos-Horta was supported by Xanana Gusmão and his *Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor* (CNRT).

2. Campaign Environment

Shortened run-off campaign, promises of financial support and improved social programmes

Ramos-Horta and Lú-Olo competed in a campaign in which fundamental freedoms were respected. Candidates conceded to a request by the Timorese Episcopal Conference to shorten the campaign period by three days in respect of the Easter days. In addition to national campaign calendars, contestants also presented the CNE with local calendars in several municipalities. EU observers noted that campaign schedule changes were not being notified within the established deadlines. The campaign revealed strategy adjustments and re-alignment of messages, with fewer large rallies and more efforts to reach voters through village-level meetings and door-to-door campaigns. Following final rallies in Dili and Liquiça, the CNE hosted a candidate debate broadcast live on RTTL.

Lú-Olo's campaign was a display of governmental unity. In addition to FRETILIN General Secretary Mari Alkatiri, Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak (*Partidu Libertasaun Popular*, PLP) and Naimori Bucar (*Kmanek Haburas Unidade Nasional Timor Oan*, KHUNTO) also lent support to the incumbent. With the Prime Minister joining the campaign, promises of financial support for families and veterans became part of Lú-Olo's messaging. Ramos-Horta received support from

CNRT networks, *Partidu Demokratiku's* (PD) Mariano Assanami Sabino Lopes, other first round candidates, and smaller political parties. Restoring constitutional order remained an important theme. The candidate promised better education, improved health services, increased family allowances, and good international relations, while accusing the government of inactivity, mismanagement and corruption, and Lú-Olo himself for violating the constitution. Both candidates promised recognition and facilities for martial and ritual arts groups, with Taur Matan Ruak being the most active in this regard.

Candidates appeared to compete on a level playing field, with similar campaign resources. It is evident that both candidates enjoyed the structural and financial advantages that come with the backing of political parties. Limits on donations or expenditures and a requirement to report on in-kind donations could bring campaign finance rules more in line with good practice. Proactive oversight and transparent reporting are prerequisites in sound accounting for political finance, especially as candidates receive public funds for the election campaign. Audits of candidates' finance reports were not always published in the past, despite the legal requirement to do so.

3. Election Administration

Impartial and independent election bodies deliver well-administered polls

The CNE and the STAE delivered well-administered and inclusive elections. Both institutions showed independence and professionalism in their work. Overall, they enjoyed stakeholder confidence.

The election management bodies continued their inter-institutional dialogue and informal conflict mitigation efforts. They also engaged in consultations with candidates, local authorities, youth groups, civil society, police, and the media on electoral preparations.

EU observers reported on efforts made in voter education at the grassroots level with door-to-door information campaigns. As in the first-round, there was an uptick in voter information spots in the final days ahead of the polls. Due to Easter, the CNE and STAE conducted fewer press conferences and TV interviews, however regular updates were posted to institutional Facebook pages.

4. Traditional Media

Public broadcaster RTTL TV provided equitable editorial and news coverage to the candidates, while private GMN TV favoured the Ramos-Horta campaign

Public broadcaster *Rádio-Televisão Timor-Leste* (RTTL TV) provided equitable editorial coverage (including news, live and other programmes) and news coverage to Ramos-Horta and Lú-Olo, and in a neutral or positive tone. Public radio RTL featured Lú-Olo in 58 per cent of the total editorial coverage allocated to candidates, and he also received 75 per cent of the news coverage. Public TV and radio fulfilled their legal obligation to provide equal free airtime to both candidates, however Ramos-Horta featured twice as much as Lú-Olo who did not fully take up the offer of free airtime. RTTL's free 3-minute electoral programme, *Our President*, featured both candidates, while its hour-long programme, *Esklusivu*, featured the prime minister and Ramos-Horta, but not Lú-Olo, who did not use this opportunity. Overall, the public TV fulfilled its legal obligation to provide balanced and unbiased coverage, while public radio provided significantly more airtime in its primetime programming to Lú-Olo. Voter education spots were broadcast on public RTTL TV and radio starting five days before election day.

Private *Grupo Media Nacional* (GMN TV) editorial and news coverage continued to favour Ramos-Horta, who received 71 per cent of the total news coverage allotted to candidates compared to 29 per cent of Lú-Olo's. *Rádio e Televisão Maubere* (RTM) hardly covered the campaign in its regular programming. However, it almost exclusively covered Lú-Olo's campaign live, in violation of the

requirement to grant equal opportunity and treatment to all candidates. RTM did not provide free airtime to Ramos-Horta, while Lú-Olo declined to participate in GMN TV's free programmes *Grande Entrevista* and *Talk to Me*.

Community radios are an important source of information in rural areas, yet neither candidate availed of offers for free airtime, reducing voters' ability to make an informed choice. Municipal-level CNE and STAE staff continued to participate in interviews on community radios to share election-related messages.

Campaign silence was respected in the monitored traditional media.

5. Digital Communication and Social Media

Contestants adapted social media strategies for the run-off, placing more paid advertisements and occasionally departing from the calm and respectful tone observed in the first round

Following the first round, most candidate Facebook pages and candidate support pages thanked voters for their support and posted updates about endorsements from the eliminated competitors and their supporting parties. While electoral material continued to be posted between the two campaign periods, the pace of social media campaigning picked up once the candidates' ballot placement order was drawn and the official campaign period started on 2 April.

The two candidates adjusted their social media strategies for the second round. The Lú-Olo campaign posted messages about various measures to offer financial support to families, the elderly, and local administration officials. Martial arts groups were also promised support in the form of premises as well as regulation of their activity. Ramos-Horta used his personal page to campaign more actively than in the first round, posting numerous live videos from campaign events, while his support page *Vota Dr. José Ramos-Horta* posted a series of videos of testimonials from supporters, including one from a person with disabilities. Initially, the CNRT Facebook page posted content about previous activities of Xanana Gusmão and a few posts promoting Ramos-Horta, but the last days of the campaign were devoted to personal attacks against Lú-Olo, Taur Matan Ruak, Mari Alkatiri and Naimori Bucar.

As in the first round, content generally received little user engagement and did not generate debates or significant exchanges. There were some cases of information manipulation, but these mostly failed to gain traction. Contestants contracted more paid advertising than in the first round. CNRT was by far the most active, with most of its advertisements promoting Xanana Gusmão. The Meta platform classified the Timorese elections as low-risk and, in the absence of any engagement from the Timorese institutions, none of the platform's tools for safeguarding elections were activated in Timor-Leste. As such, Meta's Facebook Ad Library did not display data about the budgets and audiences of political advertisements, a key measure to increase transparency of online campaign spending.

6. Participation of Women

Women attended campaign events in lower numbers than during the first round, and there was little attention given to women's empowerment

EU observers followed some 62 campaign events and noted that women attended campaign events in lower numbers than during the first round. However, there was an increase in the active participation of women as speakers at campaign events. During the first round, women speakers were present at 19 per cent of observed campaign events for Lú-Olo and 12 per cent for Ramos-Horta. For the run-off, women's participation as speakers increased to 25 per cent for Lú-Olo and to 33 per cent for Ramos-Horta. Although there was an increase in the active participation of women as speakers, there was little attention given to women's empowerment. The eliminated KHUNTO

presidential candidate, Armanda Berta dos Santos, took up the role of interim Prime-Minister, as Prime-Minister Taur Matan Ruak was campaigning for Lú-Olo, and as such she was unable to participate in campaigning for the second round. None of the other three former women presidential candidates was actively involved in campaigning for the run-off candidates.

7. Citizens' Groups and Observation

National observers and monitors contributed to a transparent electoral process

The STAE accredited some 798 national and 151 international observers. The *Observatório da Igreja para os Assuntos Sociais* (OIPAS) deployed the largest number of long-term (25) and short-term observers (375), in addition to hundreds of volunteers. The disability organisation RHTO, *Belun*, *Fundasaun Mahain*, *La'ó Hamutuk*, and the University of Dili deployed observers. The Ombudsperson's Office for Human Rights and Justice, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Inspectorate General monitored voting and counting throughout the country.

The Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) sent an 11-member observation mission, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) sent two observers, and the Victoria University Alumni sent 12 observers. Several embassies in Dili participated in a diplomatic watch exercise.

8. Election Day – Polling and Counting

Voting was well-implemented, while counting was swift and according to procedures

EU observers visited 164 polling stations throughout the day in 12 municipalities and the Special Administrative Region of Oecusse-Ambeno. The election day was peaceful, orderly, and calm.

Opening was observed in 18 polling stations with voting initiating on time. EU observers evaluated the performance of the polling staff positively in all cases. A high number of poll workers were young, and the EU observed their improved performance in the run-off.

Throughout the day, polling stations were observed to be well-staffed, and voting procedures were respected. EU observers assessed the overall conduct of polling operations as good and very good in all observed polling stations. The layout in all observed polling stations ensured the secrecy of the vote, and 88 of observed polling stations were accessible for persons with disabilities. Candidates' agents lent transparency to the process with their presence in all 130 observed polling stations, however the rule of one agent per candidate was not always followed. Candidate agents and observers were able to follow procedures without undue restriction. National observers were present in 36 of the observed polling stations. EU observers considered the transparency of voting procedures positively in all observed polling stations.

To encourage participation, the government also offered transportation for voters to travel from Dili to the municipalities.

EU observers assessed the counting process as good or very good in all 16 observed polling stations. Procedures were mostly adhered to in observed polling stations. A copy of the polling station results protocol was shared with candidate agents for verification of these against the official results.

The EU EOM will continue to follow the tabulation of results processes at all municipal tabulation centres, as well as the CNE national tabulation of results.

9. Complaints and Electoral Offences

A small number of election disputes were lodged in relation to campaigning

Only two formal complaints were presented to the CNE. Lú-Olo complained his opponent campaigned outside the permitted timetable. Ramos-Horta protested against the physical

obstruction of the venue for his closing rally and that following the rally stones were thrown at his supporters. These complaints are being investigated by the competent authorities. The CNE also reported that throughout the campaign period it worked with police to solve minor election-related disputes.

The European Union was invited by the Government of Timor-Leste to observe the 2022 presidential elections. The EU EOM is led by Domènec Ruiz Devesa, a Member of the European Parliament from Spain. The mission comprises a core team of eight analysts who have been in Timor-Leste since 14 February, and 24 Long Term Observers (LTOs) who have been present since 22 February. In addition, the mission was joined by seven Locally-Recruited Short Term Observers from the EU member states diplomatic community resident in Timor-Leste and neighbouring countries. Observers were drawn from 18 EU member States. The EU EOM assesses the whole electoral process against international obligations and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Timor-Leste. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, endorsed at the United Nations in October 2005.

An electronic version of this Preliminary Statement is available on the Mission website www.eueom-timorleste.eu. For media enquiries, please contact Maria Telleria, EU EOM Press Officer Tel. +670 7715 3494 / Email: maria.telleria@eueom-timorleste.eu