



EPDE c/o European Exchange, Erkelenzdamm 59, 10999 Berlin

The President of the Parliament of Italy
Mr. Roberto Fico
Cc The Chairs of the Political Factions of
the Parliament of Italy

Per email

**European Platform
for Democratic Elections**

c/o
European Exchange gGmbH
Erkelenzdamm 59
10999 Berlin, Germany
Tel +49 30. 616 71 46 40
Fax +49 30. 616 71 46 44
info@epde.org

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Politically biased election observation in Azerbaijan

Dear Mr President, dear ladies and gentlemen,

During the early Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan held on 9 February 2020, several members of the Italian Parliament have been active as international election observers in the country. During their stay in Azerbaijan Ms Rossana Boldi (Lega Nord), Ms Maria Rizzotti (Forza Italia), Mr Osvaldo Napoli (Forza Italia), and Mr Ettore Liccheri (Five Star Movement) gave overwhelmingly positive public assessments of the elections. Their findings contradicted the conclusions of the international election observation mission of the ODIHR-OSCE and of the independent local citizen election observers' organization "Election Monitoring and Democracy Study Centre" (EMDS) – the local EPDE member organisation¹. EPDE has recently published a research on politically biased election observation of these elections in Azerbaijan. In this research you may find more background information on this non-official mission².

The Code of Conduct for International Election Observers states that international election observation missions must be of sufficient size to "determine independently and impartially the character of election processes in a country and must be of sufficient duration to determine the character of all of the critical elements of the election process in the pre-election, election-day and post-election period."³

The assessments presented by the Italian lawmakers stood in sharp contrast to those rules. Moreover, by deliberately contradicting the findings of the ODIHR-OSCE long-term election observation mission, the lawmakers aimed at misinforming the Azerbaijan audience about the real international perception of the electoral process. This can be seen as an attempt to damage the reputation both of the international observation mission of ODIHR /OSCE and of the Parliament of Italy.

¹ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/445762>

² <https://www.epde.org/en/documents/category/observe-the-observer-16.html>

³ Declaration of principles for international election observation and code of conduct for international election observers, <https://www.ndi.org/DoP>.

EPDE has reasons to believe that the lawmakers were accredited as international election observer on invitation and financed through the Authorities of Azerbaijan, which calls into question the strict political impartiality as required by the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers.

EPDE therefore kindly asks you to provide information on the following:

- Whether the lawmakers were members of an official delegation of the Italian Parliament?
- Whether the lawmakers have informed the Italian Parliament about their intention to observe the Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan?
- Whether the lawmakers have informed the Italian Parliament who has organized and financed their participation at the elections in Azerbaijan?
- Ms Maria Rizzotti, being also a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe additionally counteracted the Code of Conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)⁴ - in particular the General principles of behaviour (§ 5) and the Rules of conduct (§ 7-14). Does the Italian Parliament intend to start investigation into this situation of conflict of interest?

We kindly draw your attention to the fact that the participation in a non-official mission for the purpose of observing elections may be a reason for exclusion of the respective parliamentarians from any further election observation missions organised by the PACE and that PACE (based on § 13 of the “Guidelines for the observation of elections”) may reject any candidates appointed by their political groups for the participation in official election observation missions.

Ms Rossana Boldi, being a former member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2006-2013) additionally may be subject to sanctions from the side of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe based on § 16 of the PACE’s Code of Conduct.

EPDE is a network of independent citizen election observers in Europe aiming to defend the integrity of elections and to improve civic oversight over electoral processes. EPDE is concerned about ongoing efforts of some states to whitewash fraudulent elections with the help of international politicians who participate in politically biased “election observation missions”. We encourage all affected European Parliaments to protect their international reputation and to monitor the integrity of international activities of their members. We encourage Parliaments and political factions to adapt their Rules of Procedure and Codes of Conduct accordingly in order to inform and prevent their members from intentionally or unintentionally participating in such harmful activities.

We would be glad to receive answers from your side on the upon-mentioned case and stand ready from our side to provide any further information on the topic if needed.

Yours faithfully,



Stefanie Schiffer
Chair EPDE

⁴ <http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/APCE/pdf/Procedure/CodeOfConduct-EN.pdf>