

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3842/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Attacks on democracy in Mauritania

On 7 November 2003, presidential elections were held in Mauritania.

Having refused to allow any international observation, the Mauritanian authorities unilaterally set the date with a total lack of transparency, in contravention of the country's own laws and in an atmosphere of repression.

According to the official results the outgoing president, Maaouyia Ould Taya (who has been in power for 19 years), has been re-elected in the first round for a six-year period, having received two-thirds of the votes cast.

The three main opposition candidates have called for the election result to be annulled and for a re-run of an electoral process which they have described as 'null and void' on account of 'widespread rigging' and 'judicial violence' against Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah (the outgoing president's predecessor and main rival) who, on the eve of the election, was arrested, together with the director of his company - the MP Ismael Ould Amar - whom the Mauritanian authorities have stripped of his parliamentary immunity, in contravention of the Constitution and the National Assembly's rules.

In addition to Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla, the following were arrested during the same month: his family members Sidi Ahmed Ould Haidalla (known as Bazra), on the 3rd day of the month; Sidi Mohamed Ould Haidalla, on the 4th; Yakoub Ould Haidalla, on the 9th, and Abdoulaye Barro (known as Wazir), on the 8th; his colleagues Ely Ould Sneiba, Mohamed El-Hafedh Ould, Mohamed Vall (known as Haba), Mohamed Yedhih Ould Breideleil and Devaly Ould Cheïne, on the 6th; Ismael Ould Seigua, Mohamed El-Hacen Ould Lebatt and Sid'Ahmed Ould Ahmed Kerkoub, on the 9th; Sheikh El Mokhtar Ould Horma Ould Bebana, on the 16th; Saïd Ould Elarby Ould Zergane and Sheikh Diko, on the 17th; and the militants Mohamed Vadel Ould Radhi, Abdel Khader Ould Mohamed and (on the 13th) Mohamed Lemine Ould Bellamech.

Mohamed Ould Baba was taken hostage instead of his brother, Sid' Ahmed Ould Baba.

Those arrested are still in custody and are being secretly detained in Beïla prison on the outskirts of Nouakchott, in isolation and with no rights as regards receiving visitors and meeting their own lawyers.

1 December saw the opening, by means of an emergency procedure, of the trial involving the detainees, who stand accused of undermining the state security and collaborating with foreign powers, thereby exposing Mauritania to the threat of war and constitutional destabilisation.

In view of the EU-Mauritania relations which the Community supports financially by means of aid amounting to EUR 104 million over the 2001-2007 period (even though it gets nothing in return by way of respect for basic human rights or the upholding of constitutional government and democracy), would the Commission say whether it is aware of the facts set out above? What action does it intend to take in this connection?