Press release | 02.04.2012

Elections in Burma

An important signal, but democratisation needs more than a single by-election

Yesterday, the Burmese people cast their vote in the country's first by-election since Burma opened to the international community. **Barbara Lochbihler**, member of the GREENS/EFA group in the European Parliament and Chair of the Human Rights Committee, comments:

"The landslide victory of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party NLD is a clear signal to the ruling class: the people of Burma want to put an end to the military's terrorism. Even the hardliners of the military regime will have to accept that the time of political change has come.

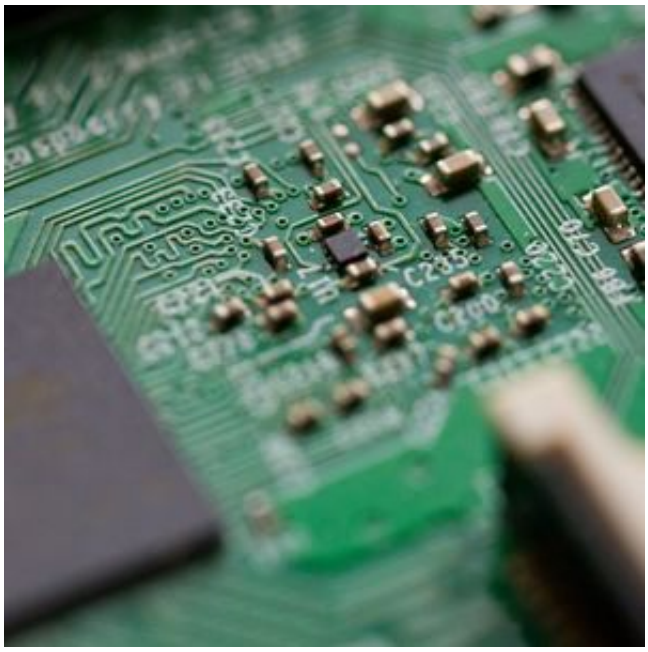
"President Thein Sein's democratisation process, however, has only begun, and no one can be sure of its success. The army still detains almost absolute power. In yesterday's by-elections, only a few members of parliament were replaced, which means that most parlamentarians continue to belong to the old order. The influence of Suu Kyi, her party and other opposition forces will be marginal. The regime remains in control and the 2008 pro-military constitution will be difficult to amend. The army budget has risen continuously, even in recent times of supposed democratic change, and there are no signs that the numerous human rights violations will be investigated.

"Still, voices in favour of lifting EU sanctions immediately are getting louder. This would be too early. Of course, the EU should support the country's opening process. But lift its trade sanctions after one single by-election? This would create the wrong incentives! Instead, the EU should adapt its policy step by step, and consider lifting sanctions only if Burma proves that its determination and willingness are genuine and sustainable. After all, it is all but a foregone conclusion that reformers such as President Thein Sein will, in the longer run, be willing and able to defend themselves against a military regime that has not ceded much of its power yet."

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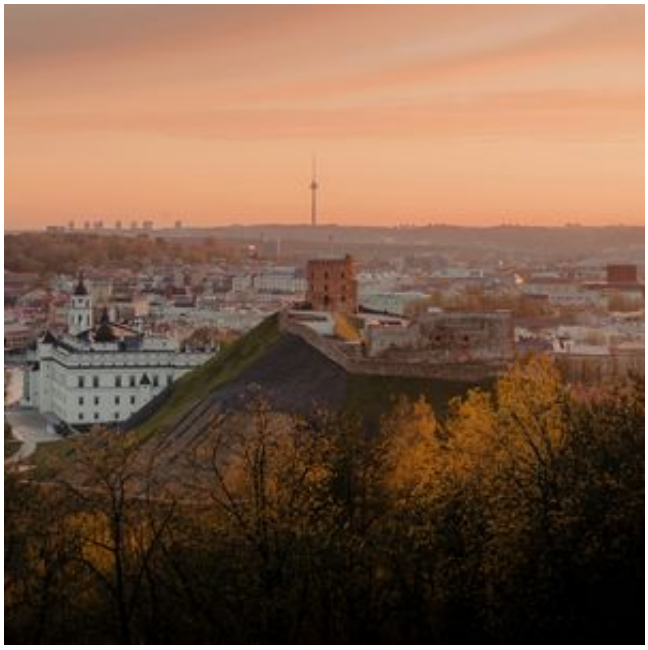
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Barbara Lochbihler

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