

# EU expects proper democratic way in establishing a 'strong' EC in Bangladesh

[bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/11/17/eu-expects-proper-democratic-way-in-establishing-a-strong-ec-in-bangladesh](http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/11/17/eu-expects-proper-democratic-way-in-establishing-a-strong-ec-in-bangladesh)

Senior Correspondent bdnews24.com

Published: 2016-11-17 21:06:11.0 BdST Updated: 2016-11-18 00:26:19.0 BdST

**The visiting European MPs expect a “proper democratic” process to be followed in forming a “strong” Election Commission in Bangladesh to hold the next general elections in a “fully participatory” way.**

At a press briefing on Thursday, they also urged the government “not to narrow down the fundamental citizen rights” while ensuring security, and strike a “right balance between security and guarantee of freedom of expression.”

The six-member trade delegation of the European Parliament, led by Bernd Lange, chair of the Committee on International Trade, has been visiting Bangladesh from Nov 14.

The delegation discussed political issues during its meetings with Parliament Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Political Adviser to the Prime Minister HT Imam, and Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, among others.

“Of course the political situation is quite stable (now). But of course as you are going on to hold the next general elections...you have to establish the EC. We hope it’ll be done in a proper democratic way,” Lange said, replying to a question.

He, however, did not give any specific suggestions on how Bangladesh would form the EC, saying that it was clear in the country’s constitution.



But he gave the European example, where the 28-country EU ensured “multiparty experts commission” that, Lange said, “guarantee independence and guarantee strong mechanisms for fair elections”.

“And this could be also the mode for establishing the Election Commission here,” he said, adding that during their visit the delegation members had heard there might be a sub-committee to find the “best independent experts” to hold free and fair elections.

The current EC that held the last parliamentary elections without the opposition BNP has its term running out in Feb next year. The President forms the EC, but there are no set rules how the members will be picked. The current EC was formed through a search committee.

Jean Lambert, chair of the delegation for relations with the countries of South Asia, while replying to another question said the EC must be “strong and capable so that people can trust them even if they take decisions that the political parties do not like”.

Ensuring the “integrity” of the elections was the EC’s job, she said. She expects the next elections to be “inclusive and fully participatory”.

“And that depends on the decision of the various political parties and also their ability to participate in the election campaign,” she said.

She said during the meetings with the government interlocutors, they also touched upon the “rights of digital expression”.

In the wake of the July 1 terrorist attack in which European citizens were also killed, the chair of the delegation, Lange said their perspective was that there must be a “right balance” between ensuring security, on the one hand, and guarantee of freedom of expression, not narrow down fundamental citizens’ rights, on the other hand.



The visit of the delegation was aimed at assessing the progress achieved in improving health and safety as well as labour rights in export-driven sectors such as ready-made garments.

They also discussed “opportunities and challenges” in EU-Bangladesh trade and investment relations, according to the EU delegation office in Dhaka.

The Chair of the Delegation praised the progress made by Bangladesh in attaining economic development and improvement in standards for the benefits of workers.

The other members of the visiting delegation, Anger Jongerius, Hannu Takkula, Adam Szejnfeld and Boleslaw Piecha, and EU head of the delegation in Dhaka Ambassador Pierre Mayaudon were also present at the press briefing.

During the visit, the delegation also called on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. It also held meetings with the garment manufacturers association, BGMEA leaders, and members of civil society among others.

They also launched a dialogue on the future of EU-Bangladesh trade relations once Bangladesh evolves from an LDC to a middle-income country. Then, a new arrangement for value-added trade relations needs to be agreed.

The delegation also visited a number of factories in Tongi and Joydevpur in Gazipur. They will leave Dhaka on Friday.