[BE] Report on the impartiality of Flemish public broadcasting reports

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The Flemish Media Regulator (VRM) recently published a report on the impartiality of news reporting by VRT, the public broadcaster of the Flemish Community of Belgium. The report was drawn up at the VRM's request by the University of Antwerp's *Media, Middenveld en Politiek* (Media, Civil Society and Politics – M²P) unit.

The report is based on monitoring of television news, current affairs and election programmes broadcast by VRT during 2024 and compares the results with those of the private broadcaster VTM.

The monitoring exercise covered the news programmes available in the *Elektronisch Nieuwsarchief* (Electronic News Archive – ENA) database, as well as metadata. It did not use samples, but took all news programmes into account.

The authors highlight the fact that 2024 was an unusual year marked by European, national, regional and local elections, the US presidential elections, as well as conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. They note that the results, in line with previous studies, demonstrate a "logic of power" characterised by a focus on political themes and political figures holding an executive office. However, more media attention than in the past was focused on party presidents. In addition, the far-right and far-left opposition parties in the Flemish Parliament received more coverage than in previous years. Although they received more speaking time than before, the report's authors point out that, compared with the governmental coalition parties, this was still below the level merited by their share of the vote. However, this was not the case where election broadcasts were concerned: here, the extreme-right Vlaams Belang party came second in Flanders in terms of speaking time (19.5%).

On the matter of whether the questions asked by journalists during election broadcasts are more critical of or favourable to the politicians interviewed, the report states that neither of these trends is more common than the other.

The study also looks at various indicators for categorising over 2,000 questions put to politicians. These indicators are the number of questions asked, the number of times the politician is interrupted by a journalist while replying, the number of times a question is repeated, the number of questions explicitly

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criticising his or her political party's position and the number of closed questions asked.

All political parties, including the radical ones, appear to be treated equally. The study does, however, highlight certain differences in approach between VRT and its private competitor, VTM. VRT uses traditional political journalists to ask questions, whereas VTM tends to use people from outside the world of journalism, who speak more freely.

Impartiality of VRT news reporting 2024

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