Council of Europe: Recommendation on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns

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The Council of Europe adopted on 9 September 1999 a Recommendation encouraging member States to ensure the free and fair coverage of elections campaigns by the media. It contains a catalogue of measures that are considered valuable in upholding democratic election standards and preserving freedom of expression at election time, whilst at the same time acknowledging the value of self-regulation by the media in this area. The Recommendation formulates as a general prescription that broadcasters (both public and private) should cover elections in a fair, balanced and impartial manner, ensuring that all significant viewpoints and political parties are heard of in the broadcast media.

The Recommendation also addresses the question of the granting of free air-time to political parties/candidates on public broadcast media, taking account of a number of important issues, such as the need to ensure that such an obligation is not detrimental to the financial equilibrium of the public broadcasters concerned. As regards paid political advertising, the Recommendation highlights that when such a practice is permitted in a member State, it should be subject to minimum rules: equal conditions/rates should be offered to all parties and the public should be made aware that the message has been paid for.

In order to avoid undue influence on the electorate, the manner in which the results of opinion polls are disseminated by the media is also dealt with in the Recommendation. It is suggested, for instance, that the media should provide the name of the party or the organisation which commissionned and paid for the poll, and identify the organisation conducting the poll and the methodology employed.

The Recommendation covers in a non-prescriptive manner the main issues that arise in this area during an election campaign and may therefore serve as guidance to journalists, politicians, courts and other players in the campaign.

Recommendation (99)15 on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 9 September 1999 at the 678th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

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