[LV] Monitoring Surreptitious Advertising before Local Elections

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The National Broadcasting Council of Latvia is participating in a joint project with a NGO to monitor surreptitious political advertising in connection with the forthcoming Municipal Elections on 12 March 2005. The Council has set up a special commission to monitor radio and television broadcasts for hidden political advertising. Although political advertising is permitted in Latvia, it must be clearly identified and indicate who has paid for it. The experience of previous elections raised doubts as to whether broadcasters were always observing this rule. During this round, programmes will be monitored and recorded by a media monitoring company, which will present its results to the Council's commission on a weekly basis. The commission will then evaluate those programmes considered to have a high risk of containing surreptitious advertising.

A general problem is that Latvian legislation does not specify how surreptitious political advertising may be identified. The Radio and Television law contains a general definition, which is identical to that in the Television without Frontiers Directive. This definition will also be applied to political advertising. The criteria for the current monitoring procedure have been defined in the commission's terms of reference as part of the joint project with theNGO.

The results of the work done by the commission should prove useful in evaluating the legitimacy and efficiency of criteria for identifying surreptitious political advertising and they will be included in future legislation. Parliament is currently working on a new draft Law on Pre-Election Agitation, which will also define the criteria for identifying hidden agitation. This law will be adopted after the Municipal Elections.

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