[GB] Regulator Ends Ban on Appeals for Donations by Television Broadcasters

IRIS 2007-2:1/21

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Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, has decided, after consultation, to end the ban on television channels broadcasting appeals for donations to make programmes or to fund their services. Previously such appeals were permitted by radio broadcasters and by those broadcasting television to the UK from abroad; part of the reason for the change is to establish a more level playing field. The change will be particularly relevant to religious, ethnic minority, local and community channels, although it is not envisaged that donations will be an adequate sole source of funding for any channel and the overall economic benefit to the industry is likely to be limited. The change is implemented with immediate effect through amendments to Ofcom's Broadcasting Code and associated Guidance.

There was a general consensus in the responses to the consultation that safeguards would be necessary if the ban were to be ended so as to protect the interests of the vulnerable, although there was no agreement as to the most appropriate safeguards and the mechanisms for enforcing them. In the Code amendment, Ofcom has specified that the audience must be informed of the purpose of the donation and of how much has been raised as a result of the appeal; donations must be accounted for separately and used only for the purpose for which they were made. The Guidance specifies that broadcasters must not create unrealistic expectations of what the donations will achieve and must not improperly exploit the susceptibilities of viewers. Acknowledgements to those who have donated may be made on air, but are subject to the provisions of the Code and must not be given undue prominence; where a donation is made conditional on such an acknowledgment, this will not be considered to be a philanthropic donation but instead treated as product placement and prohibited under rule 10.5 of the Code. Records of donations must be kept and made available to Ofcom on request, and appeals must not be used as a way of avoiding the prohibition of political advertising and sponsorship.

Ofcom, "Broadcast Appeals for Donations to Make Programmes or Fund Services", Press Release of 13 December 2006

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/12/nr_20061213a

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