[BG] Media Coverage of the Election Campaign for Members of the European Parliament

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On 22 February 2007, the Parliament passed the *Zakon za Izbirane na Chlenove na Evropeyskiya Parlament ot Republika Balgaria* (Act on the Election of Members of the European Parliament by the Republic of Bulgaria). The Act provides the opportunity for Bulgarian citizens to be elected members of the European Parliament for the first time. The Act was promulgated in the State Gazette (issue 20 of 6 March 2007) and entered into force on the same day. Chapter 6 of the Act regulates the media coverage (press and electronic media) of the election campaign.

According to the Act, the press and the private radio and television broadcasters shall provide equal conditions and prices for advertisements and broadcasts of all political parties, coalitions of political parties and initiative committees of independent candidates registered for participation in the elections. The service fees should be announced not later than 40 days before the election date. The fees for each publication or broadcast shall be paid in advance (Article 62).

The chief editors of periodical newspapers/magazines and of broadcasts who publish materials offending the rights and reputation of candidates are obliged to give a right to reply in the first publication following the written request of the candidate. The right of reply shall be published on the same place and without further editing. The reply shall be published free of charge (Article 63).

The election programmes of the radio and television broadcasters shall commence 30 days before the election date and shall end 24 hours before that day.

The coverage of the election campaign by the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) and the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) may take the form of video clips, debates, news in brief and other forms. Their management shall observe the principles of equality and impartiality in the coverage of election campaigns. The teams and topics of each debate are determined by the directors general of the BNT and the BNR as well as designated representatives of the political parties, coalitions and initiative committees. During the election coverage the use of commercial advertisements is strictly forbidden. Candidates and representatives of political parties, coalitions and initiative committees are also not allowed to take part in

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commercial advertisements (Article 67).

The order of participation in the election campaign is determined by the Central Election Commission on a selection by a drawing of lots. The drawing is conducted in the presence of representatives of the political parties, coalitions and initiative committees as well as of representatives of the BNT and the BNR not later than 31 days before the election day (Article 68).

The election campaign shall start and end in the form of video clips of the parties, coalitions and initiative committees. The duration of the video clips shall not exceed one minute each(Article 69).

The BNT and BNR are obliged to organise at least three debates lasting in total at least 180 minutes. At least a half of the time is designated for the political parties and coalitions represented in the Parliament. The terms and conditions of the debates are agreed among representatives of the political parties, coalitions and initiative committees and representatives of the BNT and BNR (Article 70).

Similar rules for the coverage of the election campaign are established for regional radio and television centres (Article 71). Other radio and television broadcasters, including cable channels, may also offer broadcasting time to political parties, coalitions and initiative committees under certain conditions (Article 72).

In the case of a violation of the procedure for carrying out the election campaign, the radio and television broadcasters may be challenged by the political parties, coalitions and initiative committees within 24 hours after the broadcast. The applications shall be submitted to:

1. The Central Election Commission when the broadcaster holds a national license; or

2. The Regional Election Commission in the town of registration of the regional broadcaster.

The applications shall be reviewed within 24 hours after their submission. The decision of the competent commission is final and cannot be further appealed (Article 75).

Закон за избиране на членове на Европейския парламент от Република България

Election of Members of the European Parliament by the Republic of Bulgaria Act, State Gazette issue 20 of 6 March 2007

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