[BG] Media Coverage of Local Elections

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On 28 October 2007 local elections will be held in Bulgaria. The main legislative act that regulates the media coverage of local elections is the *Закон за местните избори* , published in the State Gazette No. 66 of 25 July 1995 (Local Elections Act). On 3 August 2007 major changes to the Act were passed by the Parliament (published in the State Gazette, No. 63 of 3 August 2007).

The Act provides that all candidates who are registered for participation in the elections shall have equal access to the mass media during the election campaign. 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 election campaign, to be covered 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 formats.

The management of the BNT and the BNR is obliged to observe the principles of equality and objectivity during the election campaign. The teams and topics of each debate are to be determined by the directors general of BNT and BNR and designated representatives of the candidates. The teams and topics shall be approved by the Central Elections Commission (CEC) not later than 31 days before the election day.

The public operators shall guarantee the political parties and coalitions access to television and radio time necessary for holding at least three debates lasting at least 180 minutes each. At least half of that time shall be allocated to the political parties and coalitions, which are represented in the Parliament, while the rest of the time shall be reserved for all other parties and coalitions, who have no elected representatives in Parliament. The election campaigns at BNT and BNR shall start and end using a format of video clips from the political parties and coalitions, having a duration of not more than one minute each.

The regional radio and television centres of BNR (in the towns of Blagoevgrad, Varna, Plovdiv, Sofia, Stara Zagora and Shumen) and those of BNT (in the towns of Blagoevgrad, Varna, Plovdiv and Ruse) shall allocate at least 60 minutes of their programme time for political debates. The order of participation in the election campaign of the candidates shall be determined by the CEC (for national programmes) or the regional election commissions (for regional programmes),

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decided by the drawing of lots not later than 31 days before the election day.

The debates, video clips and news in brief broadcast by BNT, BNR and their regional centres shall be paid for by the candidates in accordance with a tariff to be adopted by the Council of Ministers at least 40 days before the election day.

The other radio and television broadcasters, including cable channels, may offer broadcasting time to the candidates under equal terms. The owners of these broadcasters and their representatives shall publish the terms and conditions for coverage of the election campaign in writing. The terms and conditions shall be submitted to the CEC (for national broadcasters) and to the regional election commissions (for regional broadcasters) not later than 10 days before the commencement of the election coverage via broadcasting.

When the reputation and public prestige of a candidate are damaged by a broadcaster the candidate has the right of reply. Any request for the right of reply shall be submitted to the radio and television operators not later than 24 hours after the respective programme has been broadcast.

The candidates may file claims if there is a violation of the procedure for carrying out the election campaign coverage by the radio and television broadcasters. The claims shall be asserted within 24 hours after the relevant broadcasting event and reviewed by the CEC (for national broadcasters) or by the regional election commissions (for regional broadcasters) within 24 hours after their submission. The decision of the competent commission is final and is not subject to further appeals.

Закон за местните избори

http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc.php?IDNA=2133624320

Updated version of the Local Elections Act

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