[ME] PSB Adopts Rules for Media Coverage

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The Council of the Radio and Television of Montenegro and the councils of local PSB have adopted the Terms and Conditions for the Presentation of Candidates and their Programmes for the forthcoming extraordinary parliamentary elections, scheduled for 29 March 2009.

According to the Broadcasting Law they were obliged to adopt and publish the terms and conditions of the representation of political parties, candidates and their respective programmes, not later than 15 days after the elections have been scheduled. The due date for publishing was 10 February 2009 and they are available on the website of the Montenegrin Broadcasting Agency, as well as on the website of the national public broadcaster. The adherence of the public broadcasters to the aforementioned obligations is intended to contribute to the transparency of the elections, enabling every citizen to be timely, accurately and impartially informed on all phases of the electoral procedure.

The rules are the same as those that were used during the presidential elections in 2008 set up by OSCE experts, with minor changes in the number and scheduling of political debates. An innovation concerning political marketing stirred up a public debate. At the same meeting of the national PSB Council the newly appointed general director of Televizija Crne Gore (TVCG) asked the Council to support his attitude not to allow political advertising to those parties who have unpaid debts for the broadcasting of campaign material from previous elections. As the general director said, the total debt amounts to around EUR 200,000 and the debtors are solely opposition parties.

Three opposition parties running for the forthcoming elections identified by TVCG's general director as debtors protested against this decision. These parties agreed that the PBS would thus jeopardise the electoral process by not offering the complete picture to the public during the pre-electoral campaign. They also added that all political parties should be offered free political advertising in the election campaign since, according to the new Law on Public Broadcasting Services of December 2008, PBS is financed directly from the national budget. The centre for democratic transition (CDT), a non-governmental organisation that conducts the civic monitoring of the elections, said that for the sake of the electoral process, any politicisation of financial issues between the Radio Televizija Crne Gore (RTCG) and political parties should be avoided, pointing out

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that the contracting parties should solve all issues regarding contractual rights and obligations through court or other legal procedures, not by public appeals.

The president of the Montenegrin Parliament said that RTCG as a public broadcasting service should be contributing to democratic elections in Montenegro, and not make them more difficult.

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Rules and Procedures adopted by PBSs

http://www.ardcg.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=54&Itemid=26

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