

[MT] Broadcasting Authority Launches Referendum Programme Scheme

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The Broadcasting Authority on 12 April 2011 launched a scheme of political broadcasts for the two principal campaign movements participating in the divorce referendum campaign. The divorce referendum was held on Saturday 28 May 2011. Two main campaign movements were established this year to campaign respectively in favour and against the introduction of divorce legislation in Malta.

According to the said scheme - which was broadcast on the main television and radio stations of the public service broadcaster - each movement was allocated equal airtime. The two movements in question were: the "Marriage without Divorce Movement" and the "Yes for Marriage, Yes for Divorce Movement". The scheme began on 27 April and ended on 26 May 2011. No broadcasts took place on Friday 27 May or Saturday 28 May 2011 as these were the days of reflection.

The scheme consisted of three parts: (a) debates; (b) press conferences; and (c) political spots and party productions.

Insofar as debates were concerned, two debates were held, one of 60 minutes and another of 45 minutes. There were also two press conferences of 60 minutes duration allocated to each campaign movement. In each press conference, six journalists from local media were invited to participate by putting questions to the campaign movement's representative. Finally, the scheme allocated 60 minutes per campaign movement in terms of both spots and productions. These productions were shorter than five minutes each, whilst spots could not be shorter than 30 seconds each, but not longer than one minute. The logo of the relevant campaign movement was visible on screen in both spots and productions. The campaign movements were entitled to air not more than 30% of the time amounting to 18 minutes in the last week of the campaign, that is, between Sunday 22 May and Thursday 26 May 2011.

Apart from the above scheme, the Broadcasting Authority launched another scheme on 26 April 2011 of divorce referendum broadcasts for political parties. Only two political parties participated in this scheme: Alternattiva Demokratika (The Green Party), which was allocated 10 minutes of political spots, and the Malta Democratic Liberal Alliance, a tiny liberal party, which was granted 1 minute of political spots. The other two main parties represented in Parliament - the

Nationalist Party and the Labour Party - decided not to participate in this scheme of political broadcasts even though the Nationalist Party was against divorce legislation and the Labour Party did not take a stand on the matter. Azzjoni Nazzjonali (National Action), a tiny right-wing political party, did not participate in this scheme either.

The referendum was held on Saturday 28 May 2011 and the result was 52.67% in favour of the introduction of divorce legislation and 46.4% against. Hence the referendum approved the proposed divorce bill. Now it is up to Parliament to proceed with the enactment of the Divorce Law.

