[GB] Regulator Fines Iranian News Channel for Breach of Broadcasting Code

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The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the UK communications regulator, has imposed a fine of GBP 100,000 on Press TV, an Iranian news channel broadcasting in English on the Sky platform under a Television Licensable Content Service licence issued by Ofcom. The fine was for breach of provisions of Ofcom's Broadcasting Code requiring broadcasters to avoid unjust or unfair treatment of individuals or organisations in programmes and that any infringement of privacy in programmes must be warranted (Rules 7.1 and 8.1).

The case concerned a broadcast in July 2009 by Press TV of a news item concerning an attack on a Basij base in Tehran by the supporters of the unsuccessful presidential candidate. The report included interview footage of Mr Maziar Bahari stating that he had sent a report about the attack to Channel 4 News and Newsweek. The report did not make it clear that Mr Bahari was being held in an Iranian jail because he was suspected of being a spy. He had not consented to giving the interview. It should have been clear to Press TV that the interview was being given under duress, but this was not made clear to viewers. It also amounted to a serious and unwarranted infringement of Mr Bahari's privacy whilst he was in a vulnerable state. It unfairly inferred that Mr Bahari was a biased journalist who might have been involved in the attack.

Ofcom's adjudication against Press TV was sent to it in May 2011, however the broadcaster continued to include the interview in later news footage and referred viewers to a website criticising the adjudication. The decision was referred to Ofcom's Broadcasting Sanctions Committee for consideration of the imposition of a financial penalty under s. 237 of the Broadcasting Act 2006. The committee held a hearing at which the company was represented and noted that in the past a fine had been imposed where breaches were serious, persistent, repeated deliberate, reckless or negligent. It considered that the breaches were serious and that a penalty of GBP 100,000 was appropriate.

Ofcom, Decision by the Broadcasting Sanctions Committee: Press TV Limited for breaches of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, BSC 68(11), 1 December 2011

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/content-sanctions-adjudications/press-tv.pdf

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