[BE] Flemish Commercial Broadcaster Infringes Sponsorship Rules

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The programme ‘De Vlaanders’ is broadcast on Stories TV, a Flemish commercial broadcaster.This programme provides local news from two Belgian provinces, Oost- and West Vlaanderen. This programme is followed by a weather forecast. On 10 January 2012, after the weather forecast, the following sponsorship billboard was broadcast: ‘De Client (kapsalon)/Close-Up (kledingzaak)/Loewe (audio/video/TV)’ (De Client (hair dresser)/Close-Up (fashion shop)/Loewe (audio/video/TV). According to Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media (Flemish Media Regulator - VRM), this practice infringes Article 91 (1) Mediadecreet (Flemish Broadcasting Act), which prohibits the sponsoring of news and current affairs programmes.

According to VRM, the programme should be labelled as a news programme. In the past, VRM has often judged that the provision of facilities, such as clothing, should be classified as sponsoring. Although the news programme was not immediately followed by the sponsoring billboard, VRM emphasised that the colours and the design of the weather forecast are similar to these of the news programme and that the presenter of the news programme announced the weather forecast in the following way: ‘‘...and we will take a look at the weather maps”. Furthermore, VRM found that there was a clear link between the news programme and the sponsors. For example, Loewe television screens were used in the decor of the news programme. As a result, the VRM concluded that the broadcaster violated Article 91 (1) Flemish Broadcasting Act. Given that the broadcaster no longer shows this sponsoring billboard, VRM decided not to impose a fine. Instead, VRM issued a warning.

VRM t. NV Vlamex, Beslissing 2012/010, 14 mei 2012

http://www.vlaamseregulatormedia.be/media/18997/2012-010.pdf

VRM v. NV Vlamex, Decision 2012/010, 14 May 2012

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