[IE] Presenter's Comments Breached Broadcasting Act

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Damien McCallig
School of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway

At their January 2013 meeting, the Compliance Committee of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) upheld a series of complaints made by viewers of Tonight with Vincent Browne, broadcast by TV3. The complaints were made in accordance with section 48 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 and, those complaints upheld claimed that the broadcast breached the requirement for fair, objective and impartial treatment of current affairs.

The complaints relate to a current affairs programme that focused upon the forthcoming US Presidential election and was broadcast on 23 October 2012. The statements cited by the complainants, were comments by the presenter that the State of Israel is "the cancer in foreign affairs", that Israel "polarises the Islamic community of the world against the rest of the world" and that with the creation of Israel the Jews "stole the land from the Arabs". The presenter subsequently, on 25 October 2012, clarified his comments by stating he was not anti-Semitic and was referring to Israel's foreign policy.

In dealing with the complaints the BAI accepted that broadcasters have discretion in the treatment of current affairs and such treatment can be challenging, robust and lively but this must be handled in a fair, objective and impartial manner. The BAI also acknowledged that a critical examination of the relationships between the State of Israel and its neighbouring countries is a legitimate topic for a current affairs programme. The comments by the presenter in this case, however, were included without any apparent context or relevance to the discussion of the then forthcoming US Presidential election and were not balanced by contributions from the programme guests.

The BAI concluded that the broadcast failed to meet the requirement for fair, objective and impartial treatment of current affairs. With respect to further complaints that the presenter's comments were anti-Semitic and likely to encourage acts of terror against Israel, the Compliance Committee was satisfied that this was not substantiated by the programme content and that there was nothing to indicate that the comments made were of this nature or that they incited or promoted criminal activity.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Broadcasting Complaints Decisions (February 2013)

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