[BG] CEM report on the 2014 European Parliament elections

IRIS 2014-8:1/11

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On 10 June 2014, the Council of Electronic Media ("CEM") published its report on the 2014 European Parliament elections. The Election Code of Bulgaria for the first time requires the identification of both the free of charge political campaigning and the paid forms of political campaigning (Article 179 of the Election Code). The monitoring has demonstrated, as regards TV programmes, that there is a trend to distinguish in a clearer manner paid content from non-paid content.

Part of the media service providers (Nova television, bTV, TV 7, Bulgaria on air, Eurocom Tsarevets, bTV Action, TV Plus) have fulfilled the requirement under Article 180 of the Election Code to disclose on their Internet sites information regarding the contracts concluded with both political parties, coalitions and initiative committees that have registered candidates and/or other contractors with regard to the election campaign including the cases where the contract is concluded by an intermediary. As a result of the monitoring, it was established that there were providers (Eurocom, Plovdiv Trace Television), who have not disclosed the information concerning their contracts, whereas in other places the relevant data did not concern the specified time-limits or were incomplete. All these irregularities make the assessment difficult, whether the campaigning forms in the programmes represent paid or non-paid content (TV Europe, Channel 3).

As a positive trend, as regards some of the TV programmes (bTV, TB7, News 7, Nova television, Bulgaria on air), it could be demonstrated that the time on air provided for the non-paid participation of the candidates in the European Parliament elections and the political parties representatives outweighs the time that was provided for the paid participation (the criterion for this assessment is the calculated time on air in minutes). Calculated according to their number, the scope of the paid material is greater than the scope of the non-paid material. This is the trend in the case of BNT.

On 13 May 2014, the Central Election Commission ("CEC") suspended an election video clip of the political party Ataka, in which the world is portrayed as divided into two value systems - the Euro Atlantic ones, coloured in blue, and the Orthodox ones, coloured in red. In the clip there is a contrast between the Euro Atlantic and the Orthodox Christian values, which is placed for the purposes of

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illustration at the side of the former sins such as paedophilia, incest and intervention and values like traditions, family life and religious belief.

The CEC determined this was a violation of the prohibition to use agitation materials, which run counter to morality in the course of the European Parliament elections, and suspended the broadcasting of the above-mentioned clip both in the electronic media and on the Internet.

There was one more video clip concerning a child participation in political agitation. The clip showed people, who the political party Ataka provided with free of charge medical treatment. At the end of this clip there is a child that addresses a political message towards the leader of the political party Ataka (“He should win and lead Bulgaria”). The video clip was broadcast on Nova television, bTV and Alfa TV. The CEC established that there was an infringement of the law, in particular that in an election video clip a child is used to make political messages, and suspended the further use of that agitation material. Consequently, the clip was edited and modified, whereupon the child participation was removed from its content.

The CEM report also assesses that the election campaigns in the electronic media as a whole were not very active. They were focussed more on domestic discussions and issues rather than on messages and topics of European nature.

Доклад за Евроизбори 2014 г.

http://www.cem.bg/controlbg/551

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