[BG] CEM’s Report on monitoring of pre-election campaign

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On 11 December 2015, the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) announced the results of its monitoring during the pre-election campaign for local elections and a national referendum. The monitoring was carried out on 17 public programmes created by public suppliers of media services: 14 with national and regional range by the public service broadcaster Bulgarian National Television (BNT) and the Bulgarian National Radio; one programme of the Political Party Attack, Alpha Television; and two radio programmes implemented by the Municipalities Burgas and Veliko Tarnovo (The Voice of Burgas and Veliko Tarnovo Municipal Radio). The monitoring also comprised 36 programmes of commercial suppliers of media services: 20 television and 16 radio programmes.

CEM’s judgment is that the pre-election campaign addressed several questions of home and foreign general policy and media storylines: the prices of electricity, the refugee crisis, the war in Syria, the dialogue between USA, Russia, and the EU, and so on. To a great extent, they are the ones that cultivate the voters’ attitude immediately before the last stage of the pre-election race.

No drastic cases of hate speech and sex-based discrimination were noted in this campaign. The media showed their active critical position against the vote control and corporate vote. The journalistic investigations carried out and the critical materials on topics and cases have direct or indirect influence on the vote carried out, both concerning particular candidates and main political subjects nominating them. However, long before the start of the pre-election campaign, the investigations of the private national televisions BTV and Nova TV regarding the wealth of the Mayors of Pazardzhik, Haskovo, and Botevgrad, and regarding the exercise of official power by the Mayors of Balchik, Petrich, Kresna, had direct or indirect influence on the vote carried out.

The media coverage of the referendum was rather stifled, even compared to the campaign for local elections. It had no active presence as to its meaning and contents. The opinion of political forces whose decision premised this result did not ring out clearly. More active participation had the representatives of Initiative Committees supporting the Yes or No to the question worded for the referendum.

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For the whole period of this campaign, the journalists generally respected the European requirements for a pre-election campaign. There were exceptions, including the politically committed media, Alpha TV and SKAT. Furthermore, the programming was not balanced, and the presentation of political ideas and platforms was in favour of one party and coalition only. The pre-election messages frequently become negative against the other participants in the elections. One thing that is typical for both programmes is that some of the hosts of permanent programmes for current politically-related issues are candidates for mayors and municipal councillors, and this position gives them greater presence in the pre-election campaign of the respective media.

Generally the suppliers of media services fail to accommodate the audience of persons with hearing and visual impairments. However, there are exceptions to this, including the public television programme BNT 1, which provides sign language interpretation during the afternoon debates, and the information campaign of the Central Election Commission; the possibility for persons with hearing difficulties to perceive the materials related to the institution's information campaign is provided for.

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