[GB] Urdu language TV channel breached election reporting rule

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On 20 November 2017, Ofcom determined that two news programmes broadcast during the UK General Election in June 2017 breached the election silence rule under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, which prohibits discussion and analysis of election and referendum issues when polls are open. Channel 44 is a cable television channel. It broadcasts Urdu language news and current affairs programmes in the United Kingdom. The licence for this service is held by City News Network (SMC) Pvt Ltd ("City News" or "the Licensee"). Two complaints were received about two programmes which referred to the Conservative and Labour Parties while polls were open during the day of the General Election on 8 June 2017.

The matter engaged Ofcom's duties under the Communications Act 2003, Section 319 as expanded upon in Section Six of the Broadcasting Code. This requires that special impartiality requirements are observed in particular during elections. Under Rule 6.4, the discussion and analysis of election issues must finish when the polls open, taking into account the audience's and the broadcaster's right to freedom of expression set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The purpose of this rule is to ensure that broadcast coverage on the day of an election does not directly affect voters' decisions.

The programmes included various statements from supporters of the Conservative Party and Labour Party setting out reasons why voters should vote for each party. In particular, an interviewee in News from Westminster called upon viewers to vote for candidates who would represent British Pakistanis and British Muslims.

In Ofcom's view, the two programmes contained various statements constituting discussion and analysis of election issues. Thus, Ofcom's decision was that there had been a clear breach of Section 6.4. of the Code. However, in its disposal, Ofcom took into account the Licensee's apology and the fact that its reporters would be required to complete training on election reporting before being permitted to report on elections in future.

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