[MT] Interview with the Leader of the Opposition deemed to be fair and impartial

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On 26 March 2021, the Broadcasting Authority decided on a complaint by the Nationalist Party filed under Article 34 of the Broadcasting Act. This article stipulates that any party that feels that it has been unfairly treated in a broadcast, has the right to complain and ask the regulator to intervene.

The complaint concerned a current affairs programme broadcast on the public service television station, which consisted of a one-on- one interview with the Leader of the Opposition. In its complaint, the Nationalist Party (PN) alleged that the journalist/presenter opted for a hard-line approach in the way he addressed his questions to the Opposition Leader whereas he was more lenient towards the Prime Minister in another edition of the same programme anchored by the same journalist. The PN further contended that the journalist concerned made it a point to ask some awkward questions to the guest and acted on a number of inferences as if they were fact. The complainant asked the regulator to rule in its favour and decree that the programme in question constituted a case of partiality.

Given the current restriction in place, the Authority asked the parties to make their submissions virtually during a sitting held on 11 March 2021. During its submissions, the Secretary General of the Nationalist Party argued that while his party was all in favour of investigative journalism and the right for journalists to ask questions, this was a case of two weights and two measures as the leader of the Opposition was treated very differently to the Prime Minister by the same journalist. The complainants argued that even the tone and attitude of the journalist were contrasting during the two broadcasts.

Meanwhile, the state broadcaster, represented by its Registered Editor and the Chairperson of the Editorial Board, refuted these allegations and stressed that both party leaders were treated equally as contemplated by the Constitution and the provisions of the Broadcasting Act. Both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were afforded equal time during two separate editions of the current affairs programme.

After discussing the submissions, the Broadcasting Authority concluded that the complaint filed by the Nationalist Party was not justified given that the state broadcaster had made it a point to transmit two programmes within the same

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series to include a one-on-one interview with the Prime Minister and another with the Leader of the Opposition. According to the regulator, this constituted balance and impartiality as required by law.

The Broadcasting Act further argued that journalists have every right to ask awkward questions to their guests especially considering that this was a current affairs programme. The regulator also opined that the line of questioning, including follow-up questions, depended on the themes being discussed and it was unrealistic to expect the journalist to ask the same questions to the two guests in separate editions of the programme.

By way of conclusion, the Broadcasting Authority deemed that the complainant, in this case the Nationalist Party, had no grounds for a remedy as contemplated by law. In its decision, published on its website and communicated to the parties concerned, the regulator concluded by reiterating the importance that all journalists, particularly those working for the public broadcaster, should always strive for integrity so as to ensure that they are perceived to be impartial in their work.

Deċiżjoni rigward ilment imressaq mill-Partit Nazzjonalista kontra PBS Ltd rigward il-programm Insights li xxandar fit-22 ta' Jannar 2021

http://www.ba-malta.org/tvm-insights-22-ta-jan-2021

Decision on a complaint lodged by the Nationalist Party against PBS Ltd regarding the Insights program broadcast on 22 January 2021

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