**April 2022 No.4**

**Conference Held on “Electoral Integrity in the New Information Environment”**

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At the beginning of the event, AAAVMS Director Zoran Trajchevski referred to the importance of media coverage during electoral processes and the Agency’s activities for monitoring broadcasters’ media coverage of the elections during such periods. He also emphasized the position in favour of abolishing the financing of political parties’ paid political advertising (PPA) from the State Budget funds, or, if this is not possible, the parties should receive funds for PPA according to an equality model.

  On the second day of the Conference, the AAAVMS and Italy’s Regulatory Authority for Communications (AGKOM) shared their experiences in terms of monitoring media content and paid political advertising aired by the broadcasters. The Head of the AAAVMS’ Programme Affairs Sector, Emilija Janevska, explained the process and activities related to the monitoring of paid political advertising aired by the broadcasters and the challenges the Agency had been facing during the electoral cycles. She also presented AAAVMS’ viewpoints regarding the provisions of the Electoral Code concerning paid political advertising. The State Commission for Preventing Corruption also shared its experiences in the area of ​​transparency of the political parties, election campaigns and political marketing’ funding, including online advertising.

Some of the recommendations that emerged from the Conference refer to ensuring empowered institutions that would be conducting fair and efficient elections and to enhansing the institutions and political parties’ transparency so as to reduce the disinformation related to them. A need was stressed for cooperation among the regulatory bodies and for capacity- and skills-building among their employees, as well as for raising the citizens’ awareness of critical thinking. Editors and journalists should observe public officials and political parties and, should these fail to fulfill the promises they give, call them to responsibility. A need was perceived for thorough revision and amendment of the Electoral Code, especially in the area of ​​paid political advertising, so as to eliminate ambiguities and ensure a stable regulatory framework that would establish legal certainty, without amending the Code before the holding of elections. At the same time, the way in which internet portals function and the manner of advertising through these media should be legally regulated as well.

The Member of AAAVMS’ Council, Zoran Fidanoski, reminded the present of some of the obligations broadcasters have during electoral periods and made a retrospective of several electoral cycles in terms of the results of the monitoring of media coverage of the elections and the role of the regulatory authority in these.

The participants in the event also discussed the impact of digital disinformation on electoral integrity and the ways to deal with them. The other speakers shared experiences and good practices from the European countries in dealing with disinformation and fake news in the election campaigns, stressing the importance of regulation and self-regulation in the media during electoral processes, the editorial independence, and media reporting free from political and economic interests.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAAVMS) and USAID organized a conference titled “Electoral Integrity in the New Information Environment”, which was held in Skopje, on 5 and 6 April 2022. The Conference was dedicated to media and their regulation during electoral processes.

The Conference was aimed at encouraging discussion among civil society organizations, associations and institutions from the country and relevant stakeholders from the European countries on election-related issues, so that recommendations for improving the current situation could be offered based on their experiences.

**Supervisions over Broadcasters, Print Media Publishers and Operators of Public Electronic Communication Networks**

**Broadcasters**

Three regular administrative supervisions were carried over all 109 broadcasters that air TV or radio programme, concerning various legal requirements that they were obliged to implement by 31 March 2022. The first supervision referred to the broadcasters’ obligation to publish data on their ownership structure, editorship and funding sources in the previous year as part of their their own programmes, and to submit footages of these announcements to the Agency within 15 days from the day of the announcement. This supervision detected no violations by any of the media outlets

The second supervision was concerning the obligation to submit data on the ownership structure, responsible editor/s, the financing sources in the previous year, the total revenues and expenses resulting from the provision of their business activity and the average viewership or listenership in the previous year, on a duly filled special form designed by the Agency. The supervision showed that only Radio Kapitol FM from Skopje had not met this obligation in full.

The third supervision was about the obligation to submit to the Agency reports on the implementation of the requirements specified in the radio or TV broadcasting licenses, the implementation of the programme concepts in particular. The supervision showed that only Iris TV from Shtip had failed to meet this legal obligation.

As regards the obligations concerning language use in the programmes, broadcasting of at least 12 hours of television programme daily and broadcasting of at least 30% of programme originally created as Macedonian audio or audiovisual works daily, the rules for broadcasting audiovisual commercial communications, protection of juvenile audience, use of value-added telephone services and telephone voting, broadcasting of games of chance and providing quizzes or other forms of prize-winning participation, regular programme supervision was carried out over Alfa TV, Alsat – M TV, Kanal 5 TV, Telma TV and Sitel TV. The supervision established that, on 22 March 2022, Sitel TV had aired a rerun and a premiere editions of the entertainment and documentary show titled “Brza Kujna (Fast Kitchen)”, which had not been marked as programme containing product placement.

These same media outlets were also subjected to regular administrative supervision concerning their obligations to publish Impressums, information that should be made available to the users and the broadcaster's identification signs. The supervision established that, on 22 March 2022, Alsat-M TV had failed to publish Impressum in some of the programmes it had aired, which it is obligated to do at an appropriate place for each content of the programme service.

An ad hoc programme supervision was carried out ex officio over G-TV Televizija regarding the obligations relating to the language use in the broadcaster's programmes. The supervision found that G-TV Televizija had aired an episode of the cartoon "Pink Panther" (Pinkozoic Era) originally, in English, without having provided a translation into Albanian, Macedonian or Turkish, i.e. the languages in which the media outlet broadcasts its programme according to the license.

After the deadline for achieving compliance with the law had expired, a control programme supervision was carried out over the programme of Alfa TV in order to determine whether this television channel had acted upon the public warning measure, issued due to non-compliance with the rules for protecting juvenile audience. The supervision showed that Alfa TV had abided by the public warning measure in full.

**Print Media Publishers**

The Agency carried out regular administrative supervision over 20 print media publishers in order to determine whether they had published data on their ownership structure in at least one daily newspaper, once a year, no later than 31 March 2022, and whether they had submitted clippings of the announcements within 15 days from the day of publication to the competent regulatory body. The supervision showed that all print media publishers had acted in accordance with the Law on Media.

**Operators of Public Electronic Communication Networks**

As regards OPECNs’ obligation to include, free of charge, the programme services of the public broadcasting service in the programme packages they retransmit, as well as the obligation to register their programme services with the Agency and provide subtitles for the programmes they resubmit, regular programme supervision was carried out over the following operators: Kablekall, Multimedia-Net, Biv Piramida, Kombo 2003, Skrembl and Antena AS KTV. The supervision found no violations of these obligations arising from the LAAVMS.

**Public Warning Measures Imposed**

At its 16th session, held on 27 April 2022, the Agency Council issued two public warning measures, one against Sitel TV due to violation of its obligations relating to product placement, and the other one against Alsat - M TV due to failure to publish Impressum data.

At its 15th session held on 15 April 2022, the Agency Council issued seven public warning measures. Public warning measures were imposed on Kanal 5 TV and Sitel TV due to broadcasting covert audiovisual commercial communications of products, broadcasting of advertising spots and teleshopping spots which falsely present a product’s nature and characteristics, thus misleading the public and being against the interests of the consumers, as well as because of the visual and audio presentation of persons who regularly work as presenters of news and current affairs shows. A public warning was issued against 24 Vesti TV for broadcasting an entertainment and documentary show that had not been marked as program containing product placement, although the products of certain sponsors had been directly included in the action of the show and had been recommended and promoted specially through visual and verbal excessive highlighting.

**AGENCY FOR AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES OF THE**

 **REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA**

**ul. Makedonija br. 38, 1000 Skopje**

**tel (02) 3103400, fax: (02) 3103401**

**е-mail:** **contact@avmu.mk** **, website:** [**www.avmu.mk**](http://www.avmu.mk)



