

Political Advertisement and its Influence on Elections and Media

Analysis and Recommendations

The research has been prepared by an initiative group consisting of Lasha Tughushi, Natia Kuprashvili, Zviad Koridze and Nino Rukhadze within the EU/UNDP supported project “Professional Media for Elections”. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the authors and may not reflect the views of the European Union, the United Nations or UNDP.

The research is based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of 2013 presidential elections, survey of PR specialists of the political subjects and managers of broadcasting organizations, as well as analysis of legal documents.

The research has analyzed the practices of political advertisement dissemination and offered recommendations aimed at improving media environment from that perspective.

Main findings of the project

- Obligation to place free political advertisement imposed on private broadcasters does not provide equal conditions for political subjects, damages interests of especially low income channels and creates a reason for disproportion of advertisement and other programs in a broadcasting net.
- The rule for definition of qualified political subjects is discriminatory in respect to local broadcasters.
- The cost of political advertisement significantly differs between Tbilisi based companies (thousands of GEL per minute) and regional broadcasters (from a few hundred to a few thousand GEL).
- Increase of political parties’ financing does not cause increase of advertising costs.
- Qualified subjects in most cases completely use free air time and almost never purchase paid political advertisement.

- Existence of free political advertisement is one of the major reasons for high cost of paid political advertisement.
- Legal regulations of political advertisement placement contradict to other laws.
- External advertisement market is monopolized and is hardly accessible to majority of political subjects.
- Practice of developed democracies shows that while regulating the placement of political advertisement, the countries in most cases differentiate between public and private broadcasters and in case of existence of free political advertisement, mostly impose that obligation on public broadcaster.

Recommendations

- The Parliament of Georgia shall introduce amendments to regulations concerning placement of political advertisement in the way to establish equal conditions and make political advertisement accessible to political subjects on one side and avoid damaging small, low income channels on the other.
- The obligation for placement of free political advertisement shall be revised, while the state budget shall ensure that the broadcasters are paid in two possible ways:
 - ❖ **Cost of the so called free political advertisement shall be calculated according to financial statements of broadcasters, which shall be compensated from the central budget.**
 - ❖ **The election subjects shall be provided with special advertising vouchers according to zonal placement, where 60% of vouchers will be distributed among the regions. The election subjects will have an opportunity to place political advertisement on the desired channels. To avoid significant increase in cost of advertisement, the law shall define upper level of paid political advertisement cost.**
- The rule for defining the qualified election subjects shall be changed, so that, from one hand, it is fair for political parties with the rating above the election minimum

rate and on the other - it makes sure that local broadcasters are in an equal position with national broadcasters.

- Regulations of political advertisement placement shall be brought in consistency with tax and civil codes.
- The Parliament shall introduce amendments through public discussions and consultancy with political subjects and media.
- Demonopolization of external/outdoor advertising market shall be ensured through legislative changes; it is also recommendable to charge advertising companies with such obligations in a pre-election period that will make placement of external/outdoor advertisement more accessible for political parties.