



## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS '2013 AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA

### SUMMARY

The goals of the present analysis are to study the way media informed the audience during the pre-election campaign in April - May 2013 on five pre-selected topics, how they stimulate the change in public attitudes and to what extent encourage citizens to participate more actively in the political process. The analysis was initiated by the Bulgarian School of Politics "Dimitry Panitza" and was part of the project "The Role of Media in Increasing Civic Participation in Public Life", financed by the Balkan Trust for Democracy. It was prepared by Assoc. Professor Maria Neikova, PhD, based on the data provided by the sociological agency ESTAT Ltd. The present summary contains only the main results and recommendations from the analytical report. The full paper is available in Bulgarian.

The five pre-selected topics were based on the Glasovodiel online tool (<http://www.glasovoditel.eu/>), which was developed by the Centre for Liberal Strategies, in partnership with the Bulgarian School of Politics. The topics were as follows:

1. Belene Nuclear Power Plant;
2. Income taxation;

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3. Electricity distribution companies;
4. In-door smoking Ban;
5. Demands for resignation of Members of Parliament.

## General conclusions

- During the pre-election campaign in '2013, media did not specifically focus their attention on the pre-selected topics, nor they contributed to the development of informed public opinion among voters;
- With their commentary articles, media rather influenced audience that there was no point to actively participate in the political process. Predominant attitudes in commentary materials were of total distrust to political parties and their promises. The suggestion that most of the parties did empty political promises, and that the aim in the forthcoming elections was only to gain votes, could not motivate the audience to participate in elections;
- Commentary texts, which were also personal opinions of their authors, showed a tendency for tabloidization of Bulgarian media, which tend to use the language on the edge of vulgarity;
- The content analysis clearly confirmed that the main conflict during the pre-election campaign '2013 was between GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP);
- Most of the commentary articles only compared pre-election platforms of the political parties;
- Economic situation in the country provoked media to invite economists to comment economical chapters of the pre-election platforms of the political parties. This was confirmed as from the background of the invited experts,

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as well as of the confrontation between the economic teams of the main two political parties - GERB and BSP. This allowed to compare the pre-election platforms of both political parties mainly in the economic area and to show that some of the promises were the same.

## The study

In the pre-election period (12 April - 12 May 2013), the surveyed topics were found in 553 texts in different types of media - print, electronic and Internet-based, as well as in media with different coverage - national and local. These 553 texts were published in 93 media. Materials about Income taxation were the most frequently published, followed by those about Belene Nuclear Power Plant.

Unfortunately most of the publications were about a particular event from the pre-election campaign and one or another of the surveyed topics was mentioned in the article by coincidence. Only 37 texts were directly related to any of the surveyed topics, which was less than 7 % of the total amount of all texts. The number of anonymous texts was almost the same as the articles with authors. The ratio between materials in print and electronic media was similar.

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As a conclusion, we could say that the pre-election campaign in media, even though surveyed through only five pre-selected topics, showed a lack of serious discussion about the real problems of the Bulgarian society and policy, and was rather a row of promises did by the leaders of the main political parties, accompanied by commentaries of journalists who advised the audience not to play an active role in the political life.

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