



## **POLICY PAPER ON SOME ASPECTS OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS '2013**

### **SUMMARY**

The goals of the present policy paper are to analyse the experience from the application of the online tools Glasovoditel and Glasosleditel for the parliamentary elections 2013 and to outline to what extent and how media created opportunities for informed debate and informed decision-making, and to propose measures for improving its role for promoting active citizenship and informed voting. 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”, supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy and implemented in partnership with the Centre for Liberal Strategies. It was prepared by Georgi Ganev, PhD, Program Director at the Centre for Liberal Strategies.

The present summary contains only the main conclusions from the policy paper. The full paper is available in Bulgarian.

### **OVERVIEW**

The election campaign in Bulgaria in 2013, confirmed the tendency that the Bulgarian political process and the manner of accomplishing political choice and formation of political power rely less and less on reality and more on emotions and dramatic opposition.

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Main characteristics of this tendency are the domination in the strategy of the political actors in their actions towards blackening of the opponent and emotional manipulation of the potential voters and abandoning the rational analysis and argumentative persuasion of citizens in favour of different policies. Concerning the media, its main strategy is to present events, not contents and to look for sensations, not analyses. At the same time the audience clearly realizes that this is manipulation, therefore alienates itself from the political process and still cannot find a mechanism through which the higher information flow that is present through the internet to be turned into political reality.

This tendency points that it is entirely possible for the Bulgarian political reality to gradually move towards a balanced condition, characterized by a relatively small number of competing elites composed of political, media and economic interests, which main battle is for the emotional loyalty of voter groups who find themselves personally and economically dependable on the former. At the same time, bigger and economic-wise more independent voters are consciously alienated from the political process and in reality do not participate in the formation of power and government.

The fact itself that big groups of eligible voters are being alienated opens a niche for political entrepreneurship directed towards their affiliation, towards the winning of their votes and this is a tendency towards a different, more rational and informed equilibrium. The movement towards this equilibrium can be facilitated by the taking of a few measures in the existing legislation that vary from the precision of the state financing for parties and election campaigns, through the demand for clarification of media property and gets as far as restructuring of the legislative process itself in the direction of its rationalization.

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

- Political parties in Bulgaria compete more through blackening the opponent and attempts to manipulate the feelings of potential voters and almost abandon any strategy to rationally convince citizens in the benefits of proposed policies.

- Media focuses mainly on presenting events and looking for sensations and almost abandons its role of transmitting profound information to the audience and analyzing the content of the proposed policies and measures.
- Citizens have their reasons to feel manipulated and neither to trust the campaign itself, nor the established power. Despite the intensified civic energy, citizens are more often alienated from politics and are unable to find alternative not only to when it comes to being informed (despite the Internet) but also regarding the political actors.
- Thus described characteristics point, that probably in the Bulgarian political life there are two possible equilibriums. First - an irrational one which relies on the emotional loyalty of certain electorates and deliberately alienates the rest of the citizens from the political process; second - the rational one, which is looking for an informed persuasion. Bulgaria is probably heading towards the first one, but as long as the second one is the socially most favourable one, there are always going to be attempts to go towards it and those attempts are to cause conflicts.
- Heading towards the rational equilibrium can be facilitated by the taking of a few measures in the existing legislation that vary from the precision of the state financing for parties and election campaigns, through the demand for clarification of media property and gets as far as restructuring of the legislative process itself in the direction of its rationalisation.