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Wednesday, May 30, 2018, 16:07 by Claire Caruana

Malta's political media houses 'skew playing field', OSCE laments

OSCE says broadcasting regulator and national broadcaster must be revamped



The OSCE lamented that the fact that the two larger political parties both ran their own media houses meant "genuine debate" was being restricted.

The government should review the way it chooses people running the Broadcasting Authority and Public Broadcasting Services to "enhance independence", the world's largest security-oriented inter-governmental organisation has urged.

In a report on 2017's general election, presented to the government last week, representatives from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) recommended that the rules for selecting individuals that run the regulator as well as the national broadcaster should be revisited.

"To increase public trust and foster representation of wider political positions and societal interests, consideration could be given to revising the rules for the appointment of members of the broadcasting regulator and PBS management in a manner which enhances independence," a team of six experts concluded in their report after following the election held in June.

The report's findings and recommendations were presented to representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion, the Electoral Commission, Parliament's Standing Committee on the Consideration of Bills, the Broadcasting Authority and other stakeholders.

[READ: Malta warned about risks of politically-owned media](#)

The experts also lamented that the fact that the two larger political parties both ran their own media houses meant "genuine debate" was being restricted.

These factors skewed the level playing field for contestants

"It distorted editorial independence and contributed to partisan and recriminatory campaign coverage. These factors skewed the level playing field for contestants, which was neither rebalanced by the public broadcaster nor enforced by the media regulator," the experts concluded.

The OSCE experts also noted that recommendations from the previous election assessment had not yet been fully addressed, including those related to the promotion of women's participation in politics and "fostering greater transparency in campaign finance".

"To enhance transparency and facilitate oversight, consideration could be given to a requirement that donations above a certain amount only be made through a designated bank account. Moreover, authorities could consider requiring parties to record all donations and lowering the disclosure threshold," the experts said.

The OSCE also suggested that to enhance transparency, parties' elections-related income and expenditure should be made public shortly after the elections.

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Consideration could also be given to introducing a disclosure requirement on income and expenditure before election day, the experts went on, adding that authorities could also consider reviewing the legislation to allow anyone to initiate campaign finance violation proceedings without the necessary recourse to the Attorney General or the Electoral Commission.

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