

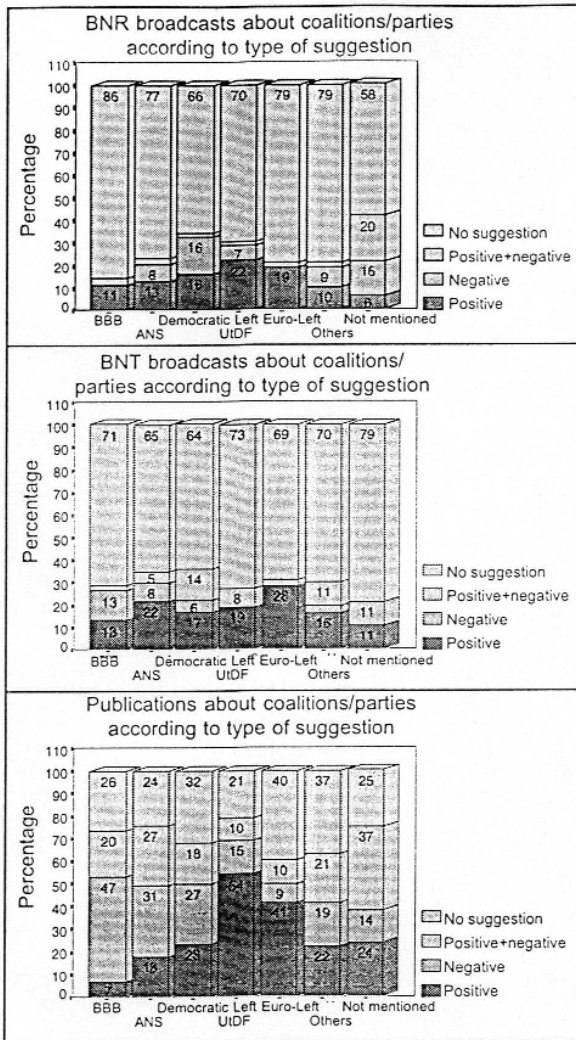
THE ATTITUDE TO COALITIONS AND PARTIES

Regardless of public opinion polls, which during the course of the election campaign invariably confirmed the priority of one political coalition, the national electronic media maintained a balance in the average duration of broadcast materials about the separate parties and coalitions in Block A.

Compared to the presidential elections, the national electronic media now show a stronger trend towards refraining from direct suggestion in the presentation of the separate parties and coalitions (charts 5 and 6).

The share of unbiased broadcasts on BNT and BNR exceeded 70% (with the exception of the Hristo Botev Program - 53.5%). The unbiased press stories were significantly fewer - 26.8% (chart 7).

The UtDF was presented most positively in the press, followed by the Euro-Left. Positive suggestions about the UtDF, the Euro-Left and the Democratic Left dominated on BNR. The largest share of biased material on BNT were about the Euro-Left, followed by the ANS and the UtDF.



The negative presentation of the parties and coalitions in the national electronic media was insignificant. In the press, however, every fifth publication carried a negative suggestion. Most unfavourably represented was the BBB, followed by the ANS and the Democratic Left.

THE THEMATIC DIRECTIONS OF THE CAMPAIGN

This election campaign continued the trend of widely commenting and thoroughly discussing the contenders, rather than the content of their election campaign. Concerning the subject-matter of the election campaign broadcasts, the focus on television was placed on national consent for the future of the country, political responsibility

and guilt, and the restructuring of the economy. BNR also added the discussion of Bulgaria's *foreign policy orientation*. Depending on the main theme, the monitored **dailies** showed the following preferences: 24 Chassa and Novinar to the theme of national consent, Douma, Zemya and Troud to political responsibility, crime and the currency board, Pari, Demokratiya, Standart News and Continent to social assistance and foreign political orientation.

With regard to lay-out, Douma and Zemya front-paged nearly half of the publications relevant to the study. The other papers carried the materials linked with the election campaign mostly on the inside pages: in 24 Chassa - 93% of the materials, Pari - 93%, Demokratiya - 89 %, Troud - 88%, Standart News - 85% and Novinar - 78%.

Both the national as well as private media continued the trend of not showing whether a given material was paid for. The media continued to foster an image of independence and non-commerciality, advertising the claim of serving the public interest. In practice, however, they conceal facts of financial relations with parties and coalitions from public attention.

BASIC CONCLUSIONS

- *Compared to the 1996 presidential elections, the national electronic media and private printed publications pursued a different strategy in the 1997 parliamentary elections. Compared to 01.10 - 03.11.1996, the broadcasts on BNT for the period between 24.03 - 17.04.1997 decreased nearly four times, and on BNR almost nine times, whereas publications in the press prior to the parliamentary elections almost doubled (24 Chassa - 2.4 times, Troud and Standart News - 1.7 times, Continent - 1.5 times).*
- *The coverage of the parliamentary race is unevenly distributed between the programs on the national air. The broadcasts on Channel 1 occurred three times more than those on Air 2, and more than nine times more on Horizont than on Hristo Botev. In practice, Air 2 and the Hristo Botev Program played a satellite role in the presentation of the parties and coalitions.*
- *In the course of the parliamentary election campaign, the journalists in the national electronic media were once again transmitters rather than mediators, reporters rather than people present with their own opinion. The aim to preserve neutrality in the broadcast materials on the national electronic media harmed journalism. Neutrality remains high, but at the expense of diversity - both with regard to genre, subject-matter and manner of tabling information.*
- *This campaign, too, continues the negative trend, dangerous for civil society, of concealing the fact that a given publication/broadcast has been paid for.*
- *The media contributed to an informed choice mainly regarding the parties and coalitions included in Block A. Those in Block B had but a small presence in private printed publications and were presented mainly during times with a smaller audience in the national electronic media.*