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Newstalk 'one-sided and not fair' on Lisbon Treaty

The People's Movement has welcomed the decision of the complaints committee of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to uphold three complaints in relation to a discussion broadcast on 'The Wide Angle' programme on Newstalk radio in September 2009 in relation to the second Lisbon Treaty referendum.

People's Movement chairperson, Patricia McKenna said: 'although relevant to only one particular radio programme the decision of BAI highlights the biggest problem that "No" campaigners faced in last years Lisbon Treaty referendum, which was the blatant one-sided media coverage. This unprecedented one-sided media coverage, evident throughout the entire campaign, has been ignored by the establishment. Despite the fact that in a referendum every Irish citizens is entitled to fair and objective coverage of the facts they were denied this by both print and broadcast media.'

BAI committee found that Newstalk's programme-makers and the presenter, Karen Coleman, 'did not take sufficient action to mitigate the views and opinions expressed by the panel, which was overwhelmingly for a Yes vote'. The authority said it was incumbent on the broadcaster to ensure that 'in dealing with the Lisbon Treaty, a matter of public debate, that both side of the issue were addressed fairly'. It found the Yes side was given prominence in the discussion: 'The broadcast treatment of the treaty in this broadcast was one-sided and not fair to all interests concerned. The complaint was upheld with regard [to] fairness, objectivity and impartiality.'

McKenna has called on the BAI to establish clear and binding guidelines to ensure that this kind of undemocratic and unbalanced reporting of issues in a referendum can never be repeated. She said: 'The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland must address this issue without delay and must put in place strict guidelines to ensure that broadcasters in future constitutional referenda respect the constitutional rights of the Irish people.'

'The High Court and Supreme Court made it clear in the 1995 McKenna and the 2000 Coughlan cases that every Irish citizen is an "interested party" in a referendum and is therefore entitled to have any referendum issues that entail public controversy and debate covered fairly and objectively by broadcasters. Newstalk's programme makers and the journalist, Karen Coleman, displayed a callous disregard for the rights of Irish people during the Lisbon Treaty referendum campaign. It is vital that they are held to account and that this type of media abuse is never repeated' concluded McKenna.

ENDS

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