

From: The Greens in the European Parliament

Dr Caroline Lucas, MEP,

Jean Lambert, MEP,

Alan Francis, Chair of the Green Party Executive

2, Queen Anne's Gate,

London, SW1H 9AA.

To: Fiona Lennox

Head of Complaints

Broadcasting Standards Commission,

7, The Sanctuary,

London, SW1P 3JS

Dear Fiona Lennox,

This is a signed hard copy of a formal complaint we faxed to you on Thursday, 21st January.

We wish to formally lodge a complaint of unfairness against BBC1, BBC Radio 4, ITN and Channel 4 regarding their coverage of the elections to the European Parliament during the period from Monday May 9th 1999 to Thursday, June 10th 1999.

We represent the 84 members of the Green Party of the UK who stood as candidates in this election. The complaint comes to you within a week of us receiving notice of a decision by the Independent Television Commission responding to a similar complaint made by Global Britain. We understand that Global Britain was given an undertaking by your colleague Catherine Martin that complaints on this matter would be accepted up until today because of earlier consideration by the Independent Television Commission. We are also mindful that a letter from Chris Smith, the Secretary of State, to Global Britain on 14th December 1999 notes that the BSC is the body which considers matters such as this.

Our central allegation is that the Green Party candidates in the European elections suffered unfairness by receiving a disproportionately low amount of coverage by the stations detailed above when compared with coverage given to the election as a whole and other candidates standing. It is our contention that broadcasters failed to exercise due diligence by not taking into account election results achieved by the Green Party during the months preceding the election. Proper analysis of these results would have led them to conclude that the Green candidates should have been reported as a political party

highly likely to win seats and warranting wider ranging analysis of our political platform.

We are asking that the Commission uphold our complaint, order the broadcasters to publish the adjudication, and as part of this adjudication, issues notice to the broadcasting authorities that coverage in future elections should properly reflect the full breadth of views being put by all candidates standing.

The facts of the complaint are attached.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Lambert, MEP

Caroline Lucas, MEP

Alan Francis, Chair of the Green Party Executive.

Green Party/ Broadcasting Complaints Commission

1. In May 1999 the Green Party contested all seats in the 11 European electoral regions of England, Wales and Scotland.
2. In local authority elections for principal authorities in the period leading up to May 1999, Green candidates achieved 7.1% of the vote in May 1998 and 6.2% in May 1999. In London the party achieved 10.1% in 1998 (there was no round of local elections there in 1999). In the South East, Greens achieved 9.9% of the vote in May 1998 and 9.1% in May 1999.
3. In May 1999 the Green Party had one MSP elected.
4. The Green Party in the UK was contesting the elections to the European Parliament on a common manifesto with the Green Parties of the other member states. There were 27 Green MEPs in the parliament of 1994-1999.
5. The operation of the list system in the European election made it possible to predict the percentage required in each region for a party to be guaranteed to have a candidate elected. In London the percentage was 9.1% and in the South East it was 8.3%.
6. In the European Election on June 10 the Green Party gained an average of 6.3% in the regions of England, Wales and Scotland, and 2 MEPs were elected, in London and the South East.
7. Taking into account preceding local and council election results, the election of a member to the Scottish parliament and the operation of the list system in the European elections, it is our contention that the broadcasting authorities were in possession of sufficient information to be aware that the Green Party had sufficient support to have members elected to the European parliament.
8. During the period of May 9 to June 13 the broadcasters allocated the following time to the European elections:

Broadcaster Total time given to European elections

BBC1 1.5 hours

BBC Radio 4 8 hours

Channel 4 40 minutes

ITN 25 minutes

Total 10h 35m

9. During the period May 9th to June 13th coverage of the Green Party by the above broadcasters fell into two types: firstly, news packages typically of 40 seconds with actuality, some mention of policies, with footage of press conferences or activists canvassing or distributing leaflets; and secondly mentions that Greens were also standing as part of a more general reports.
10. The first category of news packages comprised approximately 40 second slots on BBC1 on May 25 on the 1pm, 6pm and 9pm news; one similar on Radio 4 Today programme; one similar on Radio 4's 6 O'Clock news; and 2 ½ minutes on On the Record on June 6th as part of a roundup of "minority parties". The second category of mentions of standing appeared on ITN and Channel 4.
11. The total time given to the Green Party was in the region of 7 minutes, of which the majority was on BBC.
12. The percentage of time allocated to the Green Party by the BBC as a proportion of coverage of the election was in the region of 1%. The percentage by ITN and Channel 4 was less than 0.1%.
13. The broadcasters have obligations under their licenses to operate which broadly requires them to provide news which is "wide ranging, impartial and authoritative".
14. It is our assertion that the broadcasters' decision to allocate these percentages of their election coverage to a political party with a long history of contesting UK elections, a strong political platform, and with a strong likelihood of being elected meant they failed to discharge their duty as described above. This amount of coverage meant that viewers and listeners were inadequately informed about the policies of the Green Party, were not told on ITN and Channel 4 that candidates were likely to be elected, and thus the coverage was manifestly unfair.
15. We would point out that Sir Robin Biggam, chair of the Independent Television Commission in a letter dated January 12 2000 to Global Britain took the view that "What is a matter of more concern to the ITC is the comparatively low level of coverage afforded to a number of small political parties with significant political platforms – for example the UKIP and the Greens. We are making this point – with a view to coverage at future elections – to the broadcasters. It mirrors the stated wishes of viewers according to ITC research after the last general election".
16. This statement is, ipso facto, acknowledgement that our complaint has strong justification.