

The Rt Hon. Chris Smith, MP, 20th January, 2000

Secretary of State,

Department for Culture, Media and Sport,

2-4 Cockspur Street,

London, SW1Y 5DH.

Dear Mr Smith

The Minotaur Report on BBC TV, Radio 4 and ITV national news coverage of the European elections (9th May – 12th June 1999)

We write to thank you for your letter of 14th December 1999, for which we were most grateful.

We had shared your hope that the Minotaur Report, which we commissioned, would indeed have served as a useful reminder to broadcasters of the need to ensure impartiality and balance, and of their important role in informing the public and stimulating debate.

Alas, it appears to have had no such effect. We have now received Sir Robin Biggam of the ITC's long-awaited reply to our letter of 16th July 1999. Although he grudgingly admits that the ITC licensees' coverage of the elections was perhaps a trifle inadequate, and that their coverage afforded to small parties was also "comparatively low", he generally challenges Minotaur's findings and attempts to discredit their methodology. He also refuses to meet us to discuss the report, (as does Sir Christopher Bland).

In these circumstances, we are grateful for your confirmation that the Broadcasting Standards Commission's remit includes issues of fairness in programming. We have been in touch with the Commission, who have agreed to accept complaints on this matter outside their normal time frame, because we have been trying to reach agreement with the BBC and ITC since last July, and because all the programmes are recorded, transcribed and analysed.

We will keep you informed of any progress.

With good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Stoddart of Swindon (Labour)

Harris of High Cross (Independent)

Pearson of Rannoch (Conservative)

for Global Britain

Copy to: The Broadcasting Standards Commission