

SBS apologises for 'anti-Israel' comments on Greek program

PETER KOHN

SBS Radio has apologised for comments made by an economics professor on a Greek-language radio program on August 29, in which he expressed views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the pretext of an economic discussion.

The written apology was made to Ronit Fraid, an executive member of community media watchdog Issues of Concern for Justice and Society (ICJS), who had lodged a complaint about the program.

SBS audience affairs manager Sally Begbie stated that the commentary by Dr Yannis Varoufakis of the University of Athens was not "balanced by an alternative point of view within a reasonable time period

"Therefore the particular anti-Israeli line of his commentary

could be reasonably held to have assisted in the promotion of negative stereotypes about Jews, and more particularly, Israeli Jews."

"The particular anti-Israeli line of [Dr Yannis Varoufakis'] commentary could ... have assisted in the promotion of negative stereotypes about Jews."

SALLY BEGBIE

Audience affairs manager, SBS

In his broadcasting on SBS Radio, Dr Varoufakis has called Gaza a "useless hostile land which Israel ceded "to gain the West Bank" and has referred to the security barrier as a "concrete monster":

Begbie said Dr Varoufakis is an economist but "is not a political scientist or an expert on Middle Eastern politics".

"SBS would like to apologise to you for any distress this broadcast may have caused you and would like to assure you that [SBS] Radio management is reviewing existing arrangements between Dr Varoufakis and the Greek-language program."

Ralph Zwier, also a member of the ICJS executive, told the *AJN* the apology was significant.

"It is the first acknowledgment by SBS that portraying Israel in a bad light is the same as negative stereotyping of blacks or women, that it does harm to people."

He added that SBS' reaction "is an example of a complaints process working at its best" and said the ABC should emulate it.