[FR] CSA Issues Formal Notices to TF1 and France 3 in respect of Failure to Observe the Principle of the Honesty of Information

IRIS 1999-3:1/22

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The principle of the honesty of information referred to in Article 2 of the Freedom of Communication Act of 30 September 1986 requires that television viewers should be given correct information and that procedures likely to mislead them should not be used. This principle is taken up in the terms and conditions of the public-sector channels, which are required to "refrain from using procedures likely to be affect the provision of correct information to the viewer". Under their agreement with the CSA (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuelofficial audiovisual regulatory body), the private-sector channels also make extremely precise undertakings as regards the honesty of information.

However, on 5 December 1998 the private-sector channel TF1 broadcast a report containing a number of "reconstituted" sequences, presented as if they had been filmed on the spot, and on 3 February 1999 the public-sector channel France 3 broadcast a report on mountain rescue which contained a number of sequences showing rescue workers undergoing training presented as if they were real rescue operations. The CSA, finding that broadcasting images filmed under conditions different from those announced on the air directly contravened the channels' undertakings in their agreement or in their terms and conditions, took up the cases. The CSA therefore issued the two channels with formal notice in respect of failure to observe the principle of the honesty of information (a pre-requisite for the possible subsequent implementation of the CSA's sanctioning powers). The CSA was keen to stress that the responsibility of broadcasters cannot be delegated in any way to the producers or makers of falsified reports. Moreover, it invited TF1 and France 3 to supply full explanations in order to inform viewers about these incidents, which they have done. In general terms, the CSA's intervention was all the more necessary in that it is attempting to stem the development of "infotainment" which is the result of the competition being waged by the channels.

Communiqués n° 384 et 385 du CSA, des 27 janvier et 9 février 1999.

Releases nos. 384 and 385 by the CSA, 27 January and 9 February 1999.

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