[FR] CSA Recommendations on Covering the War in Iraq

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On 18 March the CSA (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel - audio-visual regulatory body) adopted a six-point recommendation on audio-visual media coverage of the war in Iraq. Calling on all the television and radio services to be particularly vigilant in exercising their editorial responsibility, the CSA reminded them of the need to check that the information they broadcast was correct and, in the event of uncertainty, to use the conditional tense in its presentation, quoting the source and the date. If they did broadcast information that proved to be incorrect, it was important to broadcast a correction as soon as possible, giving this comparable exposure. Archive material should be clearly marked as such during broadcasting.

The CSA also calls on the audio-visual media to ensure that there is no indulgent exploitation of documents that are particularly traumatising. Thus they are not to broadcast documents that contravene the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war. As a result, the Paris representative of the Qatari channel Al-Jazira was called to the CSA less than a week after the recommendation had been adopted to explain why footage of American soldiers presented as prisoners of war held by the Iraqis had been broadcast on television, showing the soldiers being interrogated, which contravenes the Geneva Convention. Under Article 42 of the Act of 30 September 1986, the sanctions that could be inflicted on the channel, which holds an agreement with the CSA since 1999, renewed in 2001 and valid until 2006, range from a mere warning, through temporary suspension of broadcasting or a reduction in the duration of its agreement, to the obligation to broadcast a correction. Further to this incident, the CSA gave more details on 24 March of the terms of its recommendation, calling on the audio-visual media clearly to ensure firstly that it is not possible to identify the prisoners of war, and secondly that what they say is not broadcast. The CSA also said that it had contacted its counterparts in the European Union so that a joint position could be adopted on the issue.

The CSA also called on television and radio stations to act responsibly and adopt the necessary strictness when dealing with subjects likely to fuel tension and antagonism among the population or cause attitudes of rejection or xenophobia towards certain communities or certain countries. This vigilance should be applied to all programmes and more particularly to discussion or "freedom of speech" broadcasts in which invited guests and viewers or listeners had access to the airwaves.

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Recommandation du CSA n° 2003-2 du 18 mars 2003, complétée par le communiqué n° 526 du 24 mars 2003

http://www.csa.fr/infos/textes/textes_detail.php?id=11876

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