[FR] CSA and Broadcasters Discuss Reporting of Acts of Terrorism

IRIS 1995-10:1/29

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On 7 September 1995, informal talks took place at the Paris office of the CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel), the body responsible for supervision of the media in France, on the reporting of terrorist acts on radio and television. The wave of terrorist attacks, which has held the country in suspense since the first bomb was planted on 25 July 1995, led the President of the CSA to invite the programme directors of the main broadcasting bodies to this meeting. He reminded the participants that the CSA had the task of ensuring that the news was truthfully reported, and urged them to exercise the greatest vigilance. He also called on them, in the public interest, to comply strictly with the following basic rules: 1. News items should be carefully selected and classified. 2. Nothing should be done to prejudice police investigations. 3. Victims and witnesses should be protected. 4. Reporting should be objective, rather than emotional. 5. The time and space devoted to such incidents should be in proper proportion to other news items. 6. Inaccuracies should be reduced by cutting down on live reporting.

The main aim of these rules is to ensure that the public, who have been seriously alarmed by the large number of terrorist attacks, are given an objective picture of these incidents. To ensure that individual broadcasters do not compete in trying to make their presentation as spectacular and dramatic as they can, subjective elements, such as eye-witness accounts and live, on-the-spot reports, will be reduced to a minimum. It is also important to make sure that these incidents do not receive undue time and attention, by comparison with other news items, since this would allow terrorists to reap the benefits of excessive media publicity. Last but not least, the victims or witnesses of terrorist attacks must not be identified on television, since this could endanger them personally and hinder police investigations.

The programme directors' first written reactions to the CSA's initiative are favourable, and reflect their willingness to comply with its directives.

Terrorisme et information: un échange de vues CSA/Diffueurs, La Lettre du CSA, Octobre 1995, n° 73 : 5-6.

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