[FR] Commotion over a Radio Station’s Change of Name

IRIS 2007-8:1/42

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Last March, the Lagardère group, which has owned the Virgin Megastore shops in France since January 2001, asked the audiovisual regulatory authority (*Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel* - CSA) to approve the renaming of its Europe 2 radio station and its TNT channel Europe 2 TV as “Virgin”. The group wanted to use this to rejuvenate and boost its audiences. On 17 July, the CSA gave its approval, but laid down a number of conditions.

Firstly, the regulatory authority prohibits any direct or indirect influence on the editorial line adopted by Virgin Radio and Virgin 17 (the channel’s number on the digital TV grid). For example, the CSA prevents the Lagardère group from giving Virgin artistes preferential treatment.

Secondly, and again in order to avoid any slide in advertising, the CSA asks that the logos of these two services should not be confused with those of products or services that include the brand name Virgin in their title. In other words, the graphic art used in these logos must be different from that of the other versions of the brand name, and will be submitted to the CSA.

Similarly, advertising spots and sponsorship or partnership agreements in favour of the Virgin group will be prohibited, and there must be no reference in programmes to Virgin products. These prescriptions were all the more necessary given that, since the first quarter of 2007, the Lagardère group holds a licence agreement with Virgin. The CSA’s approval has not, however, calmed the vociferous group of parties opposing the name change (the radio stations NRJ, RTL and Skyrock, the FNAC group, and the national syndicate of phonogram editors), who fear that the creation of a global multi-play brand name (music, distribution, telephone services) will destabilise the market and give rise to unfair competition. They fear in particular that the radio stations and television channels will become standard-bearers for the brands with which they have licence agreements, and there is talk of referring the matter to the *Conseil d’Etat* . The NRJ Group, who owns the radio stations NRJ and Chérie FM and the NRJ 12 digital television channel, has for its part asked to meet the French President to denounce the “discriminatory system” that it felt had been created by Europe 2 changing its name to Virgin. The media group said it was “shocked to see the resources devoted in France to a brand name that, in its country of origin [Great Britain], had benefited from protectionism from competitors such as NRJ”.

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