[FR] Audiovisual Handling of War Situations - CSA Adopts New Recommendation

IRIS 2014-1:1/24

Amélie Blocman
Légipresse

On 20 November 2013, the audiovisual regulatory authority (*Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel* - CSA) adopted a recommendation on the handing of war situations by audiovisual communication services. Last February, the CSA launched a consultation on the subject with the main audiovisual groups and journalists, after France Télévisions had broadcast particularly distressing images of the war in Mali. The new recommendation repeals the two previous recommendations, one on the conflict in the Middle East (2003) (see IRIS 2003-4/15), and one directed at all television and radio services on international conflicts and their potential repercussions in France (2004) (see IRIS 2005-2/23). For all broadcasts handling war conflicts, the CSA recommends compliance with three major principles. Firstly, protection of the dignity of the human person, particularly that of hostages, when their image or any other element permitting their identification is used by their kidnappers. Editors must also refrain from presenting violence and human suffering in a manifestly indulgent manner when broadcasting images of people who have been killed or injured and the reactions of their family and friends. The CSA's second principle involves scrupulous observance of the stipulations of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols on the protection of prisoners of war and civilians in times of war, and the CSA also recommends respecting public order and the honesty of information. Thus in the event of uncertainty regarding the information being broadcast, journalists are invited to exercise caution, for example by using the conditional tense, quoting the source and the date, and rectifying the information without delay should this become necessary. They must also treat with "rigour and balance" international conflicts likely to intensify tensions and antagonism among the populace or result in attitudes of rejection or xenophobia. Lastly, the CSA recommends observance of the principles regarding the protection of persons, inviting the audiovisual services to systematically broadcast a specific warning before any particularly harrowing sounds and/or images, in order to protect the most vulnerable members of the populace from their potential impact. More generally, the CSA calls for observance "with constant vigilance" of the rules laid down in its recommendation of 7 June 2005 on indicating programme classifications in respect of young people, and in its deliberation of 20 December 2011 on the protection of young people and the code of ethics for programmes on on-demand audiovisual media services.

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

The National Union of Journalists (*Syndicat National des Journalistes* - SNJ) immediately condemned the CSA's initiative, claiming that it was "trying to interfere in journalists' ethics". "Under cover of respect for human beings and the protection of young people, the text is an attempt to regulate the editorial coverage of the audiovisual channels, both public and private, of wars, conflicts and even acts of terrorism." The SNJ believes that the CSA is exceeding its powers, and has announced that it is "considering an appeal to the Conseil d'État".

Recommandation n° 2013-04 du 20 novembre 2013 relative au traitement des conflits internationaux, des guerres civiles et des actes terroristes par les services de communication audiovisuelle

http://www.csa.fr/Espace-juridique/Deliberations-et-recommandations-du-CSA/Recommandations-et-deliberations-du-CSA-relatives-a-d-autres-sujets/Recommandation-n-2013-04-du-20-novembre-2013-relative-au-traitement-des-conflits-internationaux-des-guerres-civi

Recommendation no. 2013-04 of 20 November 2013 on the treatment of international conflicts, civil wars and acts of terrorism by audiovisual communication services

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026