[FR] Sexist Comments at Olympic Games in Sochi - Warning Issued to France Télévisions

IRIS 2014-4:1/16

Amélie Blocman
Légipresse

On 12 March 2014, the audiovisual regulatory authority (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - CSA) issued a "firm" warning to the France Télévisions group further to comments made by sports commentators during the Olympic Games in Sochi. The group attracted the wrath of viewers because of a number of comments proffered by a former champion and a journalist who were both reporting on the figure skating events. A number of the utterances at issue referred to the physical appearance of the female skaters, such as "The costume's quite an eyeful - and so is she", "Valentina has loads of charm, rather like Monica Bellucci, perhaps with a bit less bust, but even so". According to Article 43-11 of Act No. 86-1067 of 30 September 1986, as amended in 2009, the national programme companies are to "implement action in favour of social cohesion and cultural diversity, countering discrimination of all kinds, sexist prejudice, violence directed at women, violence committed within couples, and promoting equality between men and women". Since its new chairman, Olivier Schrameck, took over in early 2013, the CSA has constantly reiterrated its intention to step up its involvement in combating gender inequalities and defending the image of women. A working party within the CSA is especially dedicated to "Women's Rights", and the CSA recently intervened when sexist comments were made about women's football during an entertainment programme on a public-sector channel. In response to a number of complaints from viewers during the Olympics, the CSA found that "the content and dubious nature of the utterances made during the Olympic Games were totally out of order; some even went so far as to reflect sexist prejudices". It recalled that the public-service channels had an obligation to set an example in promoting the image and place of women. As it has done on previous occasions, the CSA also drew the television group's attention to the contradiction between on the one hand its action on the subject and on the other the content of utterances made on some of its programmes. During the days of programming between 3 and 9 March 2014 entitled En Avant Toutes, for example, France Télévisions proclaimed the need to commit, as both a company and one of the media, to women's struggle to have their rights respected… In the light of this, and of these contradictions, the CSA therefore sent "a firm warning" to the public-sector group - this is the first-level warning, before official notice to comply is sent. In the case of a further occurrence after formal notice has been sent, the CSA may pronounce sanctions, such as the reading out of a communiqué on the air, or a fine of up to 3% of the

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

group's turnover. Draft legislation on gender equality tabled by the Minister Ms Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, and adopted by the National Assembly on its first reading on 28 January 2014, provides for an amendment to Article 3-1 of the Audiovisual Communication Act of 30 September 1986, requiring the CSA to "ensure respect for women's rights in the field of audiovisual communication. To that end, it shall ensure that men and women are represented fairly in programmes of audiovisual communication services, and also look to the image of women portrayed in these programmes, combating stereotypes, sexist prejudices, degrading images, violence against women and violence committed within couples. In doing so it shall pay particular attention to the programmes of audiovisual communication services directed at children and young people." The text of the Act also lays down specific provisions for the national programme companies to be called upon to contribute to "combating sexist prejudices and violence against women, by broadcasting programmes on these subjects". Public-sector television will have to provide the CSA with indicators of quality and quantity regarding the representation of women and men in their programmes, and these will be published annually. The text will return to the Senate in spring for a second reading.

Décision du Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (CSA), 17 Mars 2014

http://www.csa.fr/Espace-juridique/Decisions-du-CSA/Propos-deplaces-lors-des-Jeux-Olympiques-de-Sotchi-France-Televisions-mise-en-garde

Decision of the audiovisual regulatory authority (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - CSA), 17 March 2014

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026