[IE] Recent broadcasting complaints decisions

IRIS 2014-5:1/24

Damien McCallig
School of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway

On 27 March 2014, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) released recent broadcasting complaints decisions. A total of ten complaints were considered in the period. At its meeting held in March 2014, the Compliance Committee considered and rejected nine complaints in respect of three programmes, with a further complaint being resolved by the Executive Complaint Forum at its February 2014 meeting.

Under section 48 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, viewers and listeners can complain about broadcasting content that they believe is not in keeping with broadcasting codes and rules. Seven of the complaints related to a single broadcast and in particular to comments made by the presenter of RTÉ 6.01 News, a daily news programme. The presenter referred to two members of a protest group, who moved about behind an interviewee and held up placards to the camera, as 'idiots', when he cut short a live interview.

The complaint relating to this incident was submitted either in whole, or in part, under section 48 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs (see IRIS 2013-5/32), and the BAI Code of Programme Standards (see IRIS 2008-5/23).

In dealing with these complaints, the Compliance Committee was of the view that the presenter could have handled the situation in a better manner and avoided the use of the term 'idiots' to describe the protestors. However, they noted that the subject matter of the live interview was not the same issue as that the protesters were focused on. The Committee determined that as the actions of the protestors could not be considered a matter of news and current affairs that constituted the subject of the broadcast, the presenter's comments were not subject to the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs.

The Committee accepted that the presenter was dealing with what he perceived to be a technical issue linked to the disruption in the quality of an interview that was being broadcast live. They noted that the protestors had entered the camera shot after the interview commenced, moved about during the interview and could be heard talking. The Committee also noted that the presenter clearly linked the decision to end the interview early with the distraction being caused by the

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protestors. They determined that the use of the term ‘idiots’ to describe the protestors arose out of the presenter’s frustration at the distraction being caused and could not be seen as a comment on the message the protestors sought to communicate.

Having regard to their determinations, in relation to the circumstances of the incident, the Committee did not agree that the presenter’s ‘idiots’ comment infringed the rules of the BAI Code of Programme Standards in respect of commonly held standards, protection of groups and individuals in society or factual programming. Accordingly, all aspects of all the complaints, in respect to this incident, were rejected.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, Broadcasting Complaints Decisions, (March 2014)

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