[FR] Audiovisual media handling of terrorist crimes

IRIS 2015-2:1/18

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The coverage of the tragic events in France on 7, 8 and 9 January 2015 by the audiovisual media have been the subject of debate.

On the day of the massacre at Charlie Hebdo, Olivier Schrameck, Chairman of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (audiovisual regulatory authority - CSA), paid “tribute to all those whose talent and bravery serve to promote the freedom of expression, an essential prerequisite for democracy, even at the cost of their lives, without ever giving in to the contemptible threats they may receive”. Two days later, when the continuous news channels, as well as TF1 and France 2, were covering the news of the events live, in a race for information on the subsequent attacks, the CSA sent a memo to editorial teams reminding them that they should exercise caution and urged the television and radio stations to “act with the greatest possible discernment”, with the “two-fold aim of ensuring the safety of their teams and enabling the law enforcement bodies to carry out their duties with the necessary effectiveness”.

On 12 January, the day after the massive pro-republic rallies held throughout the country, the CSA confirmed that they had introduced new measures to monitor the audiovisual media’s handling of terrorist crimes. It announced that under its supervisory powers it would be examining, in the presence of the parties concerned, breaches of the CSA code by the media in relation to their coverage of such events. The television and radio news stations were also invited to a meeting on 15 January for a joint discussion on the questions and difficulties that arose in carrying out their work. Olivier Schrameck said that he was particularly concerned by the permeability between programmes and messages circulating on the Internet, which placed “pressure” on the traditional audiovisual media. This was the case, for example, with the video of the murder of a member of the police force on the pavement at point blank range posted on Facebook and subsequently broadcast by the continuous news channels even after it had been withdrawn from the social network. The criticism expressed regarding the treatment of the events by the media include the risks taken by certain journalists, in terms of both security and public order, and personal safety. Some journalists had made telephone contact with the hostage-takers, while others had revealed the presence of hostages hidden at the scene of the crime, at the risk of the hostage-takers finding out. Some of the images and indications given by the media could also have disturbed the course of the police investigation or

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intervention. In addition, some television viewers may have been distressed, particularly as a result of the absence of blurring in particularly harrowing scenes (the police attack was shown live, for example).

However, the aim of the CSA's meeting on 15 January was apparently not to immediately impose sanctions on the media. While the CSA specified that it would of course be exercising the supervisory tasks conferred on it by law with regard to any breaches of the CSA standards, it highlighted above all the need for further collaborative discussion and debate on the subject. Its conclusions will be issued in the first half of February.

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