[FR] Audiovisual media handling of terrorist attacks: CSA delivers its decisions

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On 11 February 2015, five weeks after the terrorist attacks in France, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (audiovisual regulatory authority - CSA) delivered its decisions on the way in which television channels and radio stations handled coverage of the attacks (see IRIS 2015-2/18). After analysing approximately five hundred hours of programmes, the CSA has announced that it found 36 breaches of the CSA Code, 15 of which justified the issue of a warning. Orders to comply have been issued in respect of the other 21 more serious breaches. However, none of the sanctions the CSA may impose under Article 42 of the Act of 30 September 1986, such as reading out a communiqué on the air or the imposition of a fine, have been implemented.

Regarding the breaches for which orders to comply were issued, the broadcasting by France 24 of images from the video showing the killing of a police officer in the street by the terrorists on the day of the attack against Charlie Hebdo was the most controversial. The CSA found that the sequence “relayed the sound of gunshots and the victim’s voice; the victim’s face and distressed situation were also displayed”. The broadcast therefore infringed the respect for the dignity of the shooting victim. The channel France 5, which had shown the front page of the British newspaper, Daily News, which portrayed the image of the police officer a few seconds before he died, in a distressed state, also failed to show respect for the dignity of the human person, according to the CSA, who issued the channel with a warning.

The CSA found that the divulging by i-Télé and LCI of elements making it possible to identify the two terrorists who had decimated the editorial team at Charlie Hebdo, before the police authorities had issued a call for witnesses to come forward risked disturbing the action being carried out by the authorities. The channels were therefore ordered to comply with their obligations with regard to public order.

Similarly, since the live revelation that the forces of law and order had engaged with the terrorists in the factory where they had taken refuge could have had dramatic consequences for the other hostages being held at the same time in Paris in the Hyper Cacher supermarket, the CSA ordered the television channels and radio stations concerned to respect the imperative of safeguarding public

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order. The same applied to the broadcasting of information, which revealed the presence of a number of people in hiding at the place where the terrorists had taken up their position. At the time of the broadcast, the forces of law and order had not yet intervened and the lives of the victims were still at risk. The CSA considered that revealing this information could have posed a serious threat to the safety of the people being held.

The CSA has also issued a warning on France 3 and Canal Plus, which showed the attack on the Hyper Cacher supermarket, including the fatal shots fired at the terrorist as he faced the forces of law and order. It found that these persistent images were likely to fuel tension and antagonism and might have contributed to a disturbance of public order. The continuous information channels LCI and BFM TV received the most warnings, followed by TF1 and France 2. M6 was the only channel not to be issued with a warning. Based on these findings, the CSA proposed making three additions to its 2013 Recommendation on the handling of international conflicts, civil wars and terrorist acts by the audiovisual communication services, and on respect for the dignity of the human person, the preservation of public order, and control over the airwaves. These proposed amendments should be the subject of a consultation with the audiovisual media to which the Recommendation is addressed, as soon as possible.

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