[FR] CSA authorises LCI channel to shift to free DTT

IRIS 2016-2:1/12

Amélie Blocman
Légipresse

In a decision made public on 17 December 2015, the audiovisual regulatory authority (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - CSA) has decided to allow the TF1 group's continuous news channel LCI to broadcast on free DTT, overturning its decisions made in 2011 and again in 2014 (see IRIS 2014-8/22). Its most recent refusal had been cancelled by the Conseil d'État on the grounds of formal defect, since the CSA had not published its impact study in good time (see IRIS 2015-7/15). At the end of a further cycle of analysis in accordance with the procedure recalled by the Conseil d'État, the CSA considered that 'the LCI channel had ceased to have an economic future in the pay-TV environment and that access free of charge would contribute to diversity and was in the public interest'.

The CSA began its decision by recalling the applicable legal framework. Article 42-3 of the Act of 30 September 1986 amended in 2013 enabled the CSA to authorise a channel's shift from pay to free DTT (or a shift in the opposite direction). Such a change in a channel's financing required approval from the CSA, which is conditional upon observance of diversity, attention to the equilibria of the advertising market, and promotion of the quality and diversity of the programmes to be broadcast. The CSA had therefore carried out an impact study, particularly on the economic aspects, and held a public hearing of the applicants, hearing all those third parties who so requested. It paid particular attention to analysing the risk of the LCI channel disappearing if it were to stay on pay DTT, and concluded that 'absence of any change in the ways of financing the service is likely to result in the company ceasing its operation', given that distribution contracts were coming to an end, audience levels and income from advertising were down, there were accumulated losses, and there were no prospects on pay DTT. This meant that the channel's ability to return to a virtuous economic model by limiting its distribution - under a pay model - to ADSL, fibre, cable and satellite platforms did not seem likely. Furthermore, the TF1 Group intended to stop supporting a service with an economic model it considered no longer viable. The CSA went on to consider the risks that LCI's shift to free DTT would pose for the existing free continuous news channels, namely iTélé, BFM TV and L'Équipe 21. It concluded that, for each of these channels, 'the arrival of the LCI service was not such as to contest their viability'. Lastly, the CSA analysed the respective contributions the services made to diversity and programme quality. It noted that the plan for LCI, plus the undertakings the TF1 Group proposed to make, made the structure of its programming different from those of the two other continuous news channels BFM

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

TV and iTélé, and would provide viewers with an alternative that complemented the present offer. The offer intended to shift the emphasis away from live coverage for everything, promoting news on specific topics, as well as a differentiated treatment of the news, particularly by using magazine formats. The CSA felt that this could lead to emulation of the continuous news services. In the end, the CSA found that the continuation of LCI's activity on free DTT would strengthen the diversity of socio-cultural currents of expression and would be in the public interest. The NextRadioTV Group, which owns BFM, felt on the contrary that 'this decision thoroughly destabilises the two existing free news channels' and has appealed against the CSA's decision to the Conseil d'État.

In contrast, in two other decisions on the same day the CSA felt that the particular situations of the channels Paris Première and Planète+ did not justify waiving the general requirement of an open call for applications: these two channels will therefore remain in the pay-TV category.

Décision n° 2015-526 du 17 décembre 2015 relative à la demande d'agrément de modification des modalités de financement du service de télévision hertzienne terrestre Le Chaîne info (LCI)

http://www.csa.fr/en/content/download/212142/566977/file/D%C3%A9cision+2015-526+du+17-12-2015+LCI.pdf

Decision no. 2015-526 of 17 December 2015 on the application for approval of a change in the method of financing the terrestrially broadcast television service La Chaîne Info (LCI)

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026