[BE] Self-regulatory bodies for journalism and advertising ethics report on their functioning

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Two self-regulatory bodies, the Raad voor de Journalistiek (Flemish Council for Journalism) and the Jury voor Ethische Praktijken inzake reclame (Belgian Jury for Ethical Practices in Advertising) have reported on their 2015 activities and functioning.

The Flemish Council for Journalism opened 49 new files; 48 based on complaints (a 22% decrese from 2014), and one based on a request for advice. 23 complaints concerned daily newspapers, seven were aimed at weekly papers and magazines, seven involved television, two radio, and 19 complaints also related to websites. The latter is an increase from 22% in 2014 to 40% in 2015. The reasons for the complaints ranged from negligent reporting, invasions of privacy, libel, use of information from social media, to the protection of minors, the lack of a possibility to reply, discrimination, and stereotyping. The Council issued 27 decisions, 10 of which concluded that a violation of journalistic ethics had occurred. More than 30% of complaints were settled by agreement. In 2015, the Council also issued a new guideline on the portrayal of minors in the media (see IRIS 2016-2/4).

The Jury for Ethical Practices in Advertising (JEP) opened 127 files, based on 236 complaints: an increase compared to an exceptional low number, 136, of complaints in 2014. In 68% of the 2015 cases this resulted in a decision that “no comments” could be made about the advertising message in question, as it complied with the legislative and self-regulatory obligations (compared with 60% in 2014). In 35 files, the JEP issued an order to change or suspend the advertising campaign. Only in 3 of those cases did the advertiser not comply and a request to suspend the campaign was addressed to the media.

20.5% of files relate to television, 27% to radio, and 24% to digital marketing communication. 29% of files concern deception, 25% social responsibility, 4% health and safety, 24% decency and good taste, 3% lawfulness, and 15% other criteria. In 2015, the JEP also improved the procedures that allow advertisers to submit a “prior request for advice”. 30 such requests were submitted in 2015. This option will be further promoted in the future. Steps were also taken to raise awareness about appropriate advertising of alcohol, and to investigate the development of practices in the advertising sector, in particular native advertising. Consultations with the Flemish Council for Journalism, the Conseil de Déontologie Journalistique (Council for Journalistic Ethics) of the French

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Community, and other self-regulatory bodies in France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, led to the adoption and publication of a “Recommendation on Native Advertising”. This recommendation confirms essential principles of recognisability and transparency of the commercial character of advertising messages.

Raad voor de Journalistiek, Jaarverslag 2015

http://rvdj.be/sites/default/files/pdf/jaarverslag2015.pdf

Flemish Council for Journalism, Annual Report 2015

Jury voor Ethische Praktijken inzake reclame, Activiteitsverslag 2015

http://www.jep.be/sites/default/files/year_report/jaarverslag_2015_nl.pdf

Belgian Jury for Ethical Practices in Advertising, Activity Report 2015

Raad voor de Reclame, Native advertising: Aanbeveling

http://www.jep.be/sites/default/files/inline-media/native_advertising_aanbevelingen_rvdr_nl_2016.pdf

Council for Advertising, Native Advertising: Recommendation

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