[FR] CSA adopts guidelines on audiovisual coverage of terrorist acts

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Amélie Blocman
Légipresse

On 20 October 2016, following a number of meetings with representatives of audiovisual media, journalists and victims, as well as the Paris public prosecutor, the national audiovisual regulatory authority in France (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - CSA) adopted a set of guidelines on audiovisual coverage of terrorist acts. Under the Act of 21 July 2016 extending the application of the State of Emergency Act of 3 April 1955, the CSA had been asked to draw up a code of conduct for audiovisual coverage of terrorist acts. This request followed complaints about inappropriate coverage of the Paris and Nice terrorist attacks last July, which had resulted in formal demands being issued to some television channels. Complaints had also been lodged against BFM TV by victims' families.

In the new guidelines, which go beyond the legal framework applicable to media coverage of such incidents (Art. 1 of the Act of 30 September 1986 and CSA recommendation 2013-04 of 20 November 2013 on coverage of international conflicts, civil wars and terrorist acts by audiovisual communication services), the CSA assesses current issues linked to the coverage of terrorist acts that cannot be dealt with under mandatory and general rules on account of the diversity of situations met, and suggests how these issues should be approached.

These guidelines should enable the media, in relation to coverage of terrorist acts, to reconcile the need to protect freedom of information with other general interest requirements such as the proper running of judicial investigations, protection of the activities of security forces, protection of victims and their families, and respect for human dignity.

As far as general guidelines are concerned, audiovisual media service providers are urged to adopt a more stringent internal monitoring and validation process that should be followed prior to any broadcast when a terrorist act occurs. They are also asked to consider setting up a procedure through which broadcasts are slightly delayed.

With regard to judicial investigations and the activities of security forces, the CSA reminds service providers that they must not make any contact with terrorists or hostages. They must also be very careful not to endanger the safety of victims or witnesses. Broadcasters are free to decide whether to disclose the identity of

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individuals who carry out terrorist acts. The CSA recommends that everything possible is done to avoid the broadcast of propaganda and that, if it is broadcast, it is accompanied by suitable editorial comment. It suggests that amateur footage of terrorist attacks should only be paid for in exceptional circumstances. Among the precautions that should be taken to increase the reliability of information broadcast, it is suggested that “experts” who are invited to speak on air are introduced in a systematic and regular manner, along with information about their personal background that could influence what they say.

Media service providers are encouraged to continue evaluating their procedures, taking into account any recommendations in the document that they do not already follow.

Précautions relatives à la couverture audiovisuelle d’actes terroristes

http://www.csa.fr/Espace-juridique/Codes-de-bonne-conduite-et-textes-de-precautions-relatives-a-la-couverture-audiovisuelle/Precautions-relatives-a-la-couverture-audiovisuelle-d-actes-terroristes

Guidelines on audiovisual coverage of terrorist acts

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