[FR] CSA defends respect for women

IRIS 2018-2:1/18

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The national audiovisual regulatory authority (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel - CSA) has taken the high moral ground in its supervision of the way women are treated in the audiovisual media. At its latest plenary assembly, on 20 December 2017, it announced a record fine of EUR 1 million against the youth-oriented radio station NRJ, and served formal notice to France Télévisions to comply with its undertakings with regard to combating violence against women. The fine imposed on NRJ follows the broadcasting - during the "C' Cauet" programme on 9 December 2016 - of a hoax telephone call during which the perpetrators made comments deemed "degrading" about the physical appearance of the woman who was being hoaxed, together with insults and derogatory remarks about her private life. During the broadcast, a listener phoned her sister-in-law to announce that she had had sexual relations with the latter's spouse, referring to her as, among other things, a "fat sow". The radio station had already been served formal notice at the end of 2016 for "serious failings" concerning its lack of respect for the image of women and the protection of children in a number of broadcasts of the same programme. The presenter was sacked last summer.

The CSA held firstly that what was said constituted a serious disregard for the provisions of Article 3-1 of the Act of 30 September 1986, under which the CSA is required to ensure respect for women's rights in the field of audiovisual communication. It must pay special attention to the way in which women are portrayed in programmes, with a view in particular to combating stereotypes, sexist prejudice, degrading images, violence against women and violence within couples. The public audiovisual services are also tasked with combating sexist prejudice and violence against women by broadcasting programmes about these subjects. To achieve this, they are to pay particular attention to programmes broadcast by audiovisual communication services that are directed at children and young people. The CSA also considered that, since the victim of the hoax had been publicly humiliated and placed in a manifestly distressing and vulnerable position, the broadcasting of this sequence constituted a failure to comply with the stipulations of Article 2-6 of the licence of the NRJ radio station of 2 October 2012. Moreover, the allegedly humorous nature of the sequence could not exonerate the editor of its responsibility, any more than could consent on the part of the victim to the broadcasting of the sequence. NRJ has announced that it has appealed to the Conseil d'État against the fine, "which it considers to be unfair and totally disproportionate".

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The CSA has also issued a formal notice against France Télévisions, further to the broadcasting on the programme “On n’est pas Couché” broadcast on 30 September 2017 of a sequence showing Sandrine Rousseau, a former EELV party MP, who had come to present her work on the sexual aggression she had suffered. After viewing the sequence, the CSA noted that while the guest had wanted to highlight the shortcomings she had witnessed in the care of victims of sexual assault and to offer solutions to help women victims of sexual assault, the programme’s commentators had virulently, systematically and at length questioned the usefulness of her actions, without taking into account her manifest vulnerability, and without respect either for what she had to say or for her commitment to the issue. More specifically, several remarks by the presenter Laurent Ruquier had manifested an indulgent attitude towards the prejudice displayed by the programme’s commentators in respect to what was a particularly serious and painful subject.

The CSA also found that France Télévisions had deliberately chosen not to broadcast a sequence during which the programme’s female commentator, Christine Angot, had left the set. The company had, however, retained the sequences during which the guest had not managed to control her emotion when faced with Ms Angot’s attitude and what the two commentators were saying. This deceptive mode of editing had been such as to prevent viewers gaining a proper understanding of how the debate had proceeded.

The CSA accordingly served formal notice on the company France Télévisions on the grounds of its failure to comply with the combined provisions of Articles 3-1 and 43-11 of the Act of 30 September 1986 (which give France Télévisions particular responsibility with regard to combating violence against women), together with those of Article 35 of the mission statement of France Télévisions. It also stressed that the national programme company France Télévisions, by virtue of the public-service missions entrusted to it, had a particular duty to abide by its duty to be exemplary in its treatment of matters involving violence against women. In the event, France Télévisions did not wait for the formal notice to be served: it announced last week that the presenter, “Tex”, had been sacked after making jokes about battered wives.

CSA, assemblée plénière, décisions du 20 décembre 2017

http://www.csa.fr/base_JO/resultats/?type=&pleniere_jj=20&pleniere_mm=12&pleniere_aaaa=2017

CSA, plenary assembly, decisions adopted on 20 December 2017

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