[BE] RTBF generally respected its public-service obligations in 2017

IRIS 2019-3:1/6

Olivier Hermanns
Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel Belge

The regulatory body for the audiovisual sector in the French-speaking community in Belgium (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel Belge - CSA) has issued an opinion regarding the extent to which the Belgian French-language public broadcasting body (Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française - RTBF) met its public-service obligations during 2017. The CSA carries out an annual check on the RTBF's actions on the basis of the RTBF's annual report on its activities, and gathers its observations in the form of an opinion. This was published on 18 January 2019.

The obligations incumbent on the RTBF are defined in the Decree of 14 July 1997 on the status of the RTBF (Decree on Audiovisual Media Services, as consolidated on 26 March 2009) and by a "management contract" - a multi-year agreement between the RTBF and the government of the French-speaking community. The Decree firstly lays down in detail the RTBF's objectives in terms of its public-service obligations; secondly, it determines the (mainly financial) resources that it is to be allocated by the Government in order to achieve them. If the CSA notes that the RTBF has failed to meet its obligations, it may impose a sanction.

In its opinion, the CSA describes all the RTBF's television and radio media services, which comprise three television channels, seven radio stations, 19 Internet radio stations, and one audiovisual platform. The CSA then uses 13 "factsheets" to review the various aspects of its offer.

According to the CSA, the RTBF generally met - and indeed often exceeded - its obligations in 2017. This was the case in respect of its "own productions, investments to be made in both independent production and the fund for aiding new radiophonic works, the accessibility of programmes, web creation, broadcasting quotas, and its ongoing mission to provide information and education'.

In other areas, however, the CSA felt that the RTBF could make improvements by exceeding the strict quotas imposed on it. Thus, it noted that the RTBF ought to "broaden the scope of its cultural output in order to expose it to as wide a public as possible" - i.e. the RTBF ought to increase the cultural programming on its most popular channel and in general broadcast cultural programmes more

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frequently in early evening slots. The CSA added that the RTBF should also reflect to a greater extent the dynamism of the dance sector in the French-speaking part of Belgium by increasing the number of choreographic shows that it broadcasts. Lastly, in keeping with a line laid down previously, the CSA felt that the obligation to broadcast "large-scale cultural programming" broadcast "on a regular basis and directed at a broad public" had been met in the case of several short "multidisciplinary" programmes.

Regarding sports broadcasts, the CSA felt that the RTBF should pay "more attention to sports less covered by the media - particularly sports played by women and sports played by handicapped people".

The RTBF also has an obligation to broadcast a mediation programme at a reasonable time on one of its television services. The RTBF does so, thereby complying with its management contract. The CSA therefore concluded that the obligation was formally being met, and also noted "a renewed dynamism in fulfilling this public-service mission".

Lastly, the CSA would like to see the RTBF promote diversity among its staff, and has assessed its plans to promote gender equality. More particularly, it feels "that the initiatives are concentrated more on-screen than among its own human resources". To bring about a change in that situation, the CSA intends to discuss this with the RTBF in 2019; the CSA now aims to decide which data the RTBF would be required to provide and the form its assessments might take.

Collège d'autorisation et de contrôle du Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique, Avis RTBF 2017,

http://www.csa.be/documents/2980

Authorisation and supervision college of the audiovisual regulatory authority for the French-speaking community of Belgium; Opinion on the RTBF in 2017

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