

[FR] Honesty of information: no CSA sanction for RT France

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On 29 and 30 March 2019, the TV channel RT France, the French-language outlet of the Russian international news channel RT, broadcast information suggesting that, according to official Russian sources, France and Belgium were planning to simulate a chemical attack in Syria with the help of 'terrorist leaders'. Three days later, in an item entitled 'Attaque ou intox?' ('Attack or disinformation?'), a studio-based journalist repeated these accusations, giving more detail and criticising the response of the French authorities, before giving the floor to an analyst who alleged, in particular, that the western media were reporting the story in a biased way. After the broadcast was notified to the French national audiovisual regulatory authority (*Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel* – CSA), the latter, under its standard procedure, appointed a rapporteur, who informed the channel last July that he intended to instigate sanction proceedings. Under Article 42 of the 1986 law, RT France was liable to be fined or have its broadcasting licence suspended or even revoked.

The channel had already been officially cautioned by the audiovisual watchdog. In June 2018, following the broadcast of a report during a TV news bulletin devoted to the situation in Syria following chemical attacks against the civilian population, the channel had been warned by the CSA to respect its agreement with the CSA, the terms of which were set out in Article 1 of the CSA's decision No. 2018-11 of 18 April 2018 concerning the honesty and independence of information. The channel had disputed this decision with the *Conseil d'Etat* which, on 22 November 2019, rejected its request for the warning to be annulled and pointed out that the agreement required the channel to distinguish between the presentation of facts and commentary on those facts, and to ensure that different points of view were expressed when dealing with controversial topics.

After questioning the rapporteur and representatives of the channel, the CSA issued its decision on the disputed news item broadcast in spring 2019. It noted that, since the investigation had shown, firstly, that the source of the information broadcast had been mentioned and that the conditional tense had been used, the channel had not infringed the provisions of Article 1 of the decision of 18 April 2018 concerning honesty and rigour in the presentation and processing of information. Secondly, the presentation of different points of view had not been sufficiently imbalanced to constitute a breach of the requirement contained in the

same article for controversial issues to be presented honestly. In these circumstances, the CSA decided that, in this case, no sanction should be imposed against the Russian channel.

Décision n° 2020-227 du 26 février 2020 relative à la procédure de sanction engagée à l'encontre de la société RT FRANCE le 17 juillet 2019

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000041654781&categorieLien=id>

Decision no. 2020-227 of 26 February 2020 on the sanction proceedings opened against RT France on 17 July 2019

