[FR] CSA fines CNews EUR 200,000 for comments inciting hatred and discrimination

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On 17 March 2021, the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel* (French audiovisual regulatory body – CSA) imposed a fine of EUR 200,000 against the CNews television channel following comments made by Eric Zemmour during the programme "Face à l'info" broadcast on 29 September 2020. Talking about the situation of foreign unaccompanied minors in France, the political commentator said several times that “most” or “all” of them were, or at least would become, “thieves”, “rapists” and “murderers”, and that France should put a stop to this “invasion”.

In a decision dated 27 November 2019, the CSA had already issued a formal warning to CNews, requiring it to comply with the provisions of its licence following remarks made by the same commentator during a previous edition of the same programme. According to the audiovisual regulator, these remarks had constituted a “forceful rejection of Muslims in general that was likely to encourage discrimination on religious grounds”. Issued in accordance with Article 15 of the Law of 30 September 1986, the channel’s licence states, in particular, that “the broadcaster shall ensure that its programmes (...) do not encourage discrimination on the grounds of race or origin (...), religion or nationality”, and that “the broadcaster is responsible for the content of the programmes it broadcasts and must in all circumstances retain control over what is being broadcast”.

In its decision of 17 March 2021, the CSA observed that the comments in question, which had been made by someone with a high media profile, had been broadcast during prime-time hours. It considered that the commentator’s repeated use of aggressive words that stigmatised foreign unaccompanied minors by claiming they were likely to commit criminal acts had sent out a strong message of rejection. Although the comments had been made during a legitimate debate on France’s policy to admit foreign unaccompanied minors and its immigration policy in general, they had incited hatred of foreign unaccompanied minors and conveyed numerous defamatory stereotypes likely to encourage discriminatory behaviour. The CSA also stressed that none of the other people in the studio had reacted strongly to the comments. It concluded that the broadcaster had lost control over what was being broadcast, especially since, as the Canal Plus Group’s ethics committee pointed out in its opinion of 22 October

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2020, the programme had not been shown live and had not been edited. The fine of EUR 200,000 was justified, “taking into account the nature and the seriousness of the infringements, especially since they were committed in a programme that had already been the subject of a formal warning on 27 November 2019, which the ethics committee had brought to the channel’s attention.”

Décision du CSA du 17 mars 2021 portant sanction à l'encontre de la Société d'exploitation d'un service d'information (S.E.S.I.)

https://www.csa.fr/Informer/Espace-presse/Communiques-de-presse/Le-Conseil-superieur-de-l-audiovisuel-sanctionne-la-chaine-CNews

CSA decision of 17 March 2021 imposing a sanction against CNews

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