[FR] Editorial reporting and opinion-based journalism: Council for Ethical Journalism issues two opinions on TV news programmes

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On 26 May 2021, the *Conseil de déontologie journalistique et de médiation* (Council for Ethical Journalism and Mediation – CDJM), a self-regulatory body, published four new opinions, two of which concerned well-known television and radio journalists. Since it was created in December 2019, the CDJM has received 407 referrals from members of the public regarding 164 different journalistic activities. It has issued an opinion in 34 of these cases, including the two described below, and dismissed 111, while 19 are still pending.

In the first case, the CDJM received a complaint from a representative of the Sud Éducation trade union concerning a report in the programme "C à vous" broadcast on France 5 in October 2020 following the murder of the teacher Samuel Paty. The journalist was accused of altering the comments of a member of the aforementioned trade union, who had spoken to France Inter the previous day, and claiming that Sud Éducation was an organisation that "forgives torturers". In its opinion, the CDJM wrote that the trade unionist's comment had been based on two ideas: firstly, "grief, contemplation and solidarity" and, secondly, a refusal to exploit Samuel Paty's assassination in order to create an "outpouring of Islamophobia". The CDJM pointed out that, although the reporter had expressed ideas, beliefs or value judgments and was entitled to freedom of expression, his work still had to meet ethical standards. It considered that, in this case, the reporter had flouted certain ethical rules, including the principle that "information essential to an understanding of the facts should not be withheld and documents should not be misrepresented".

In the second case, the CDJM again issued an opinion concerning a report broadcast on the news channel LCI in January. In particular, using two short excerpts, the journalist concerned had criticised "the fascination [of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a radical left-wing figure] with powerful men", especially Donald Trump. He was also accused of reporting inaccurate and false information, and altering documents, since the chosen excerpts had been edited in such a way that "Mr Mélenchon's words were given the exact opposite meaning". In the CDJM's view, this case raised the issue of editorial reporting. It did not think it needed to comment on the opinion put forward by the journalist in his analysis of a politician's views. However, it held that the excerpts used by the journalist to

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support his analysis had been edited in a way that deliberately omitted elements essential to an understanding of the words quoted, and had changed their meaning. Therefore, the ethical obligation not to withhold information essential to an understanding of the facts and not to misrepresent documents had not been met.

Meanwhile, on 3 June 2021, the CDJM published its first recommendation, entitled “Correcting errors: good practices”. This short, practical guide stresses the importance for journalists to correct their errors “systematically, quickly, explicitly, fully and visibly”. It distinguishes between different types of error (minor, significant or serious) and forms of publication (published content or content that can be edited online). It also lists good habits to adopt on digital media such as websites or social media accounts.

Avis du CDJM sur les saisines no 20-120 et no 21-005 publiés le 26 mai 2021

https://cdjm.org/2021/05/26/le-cdjm-publie-quatre-nouveaux-avis-2/

CDJM opinion on referrals 20-120 and 21-005 published on 26 May 2021

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