

The debate on film classification in France during the recent months

The French film industry is attached to the French system of classification as it is. It is not in favour of a system of self-regulation. I told you several times that contrary to what one can observe in other European countries that are reviewing their system of classification or that have a political debate on this topic (Netherlands, United Kingdom, Austria, Germany), the topic seemed to be of little interest to the French public and to the politicians.

But something happened in 2002. The vicious murder of a youngster by another youngster who confessed he was influenced by the movie "Scream" was a starting point. A study according to which a substantial proportion of 12 years old children had been exposed at least once to pornography through television or video fuelled the debate that concentrated first on television. In France there is pornography on pay television; it is shown after midnight at a time where children are supposed to be in bed. But some parents may not be very cautious and kids seem to operate video recorders better than adults... The French institution regulating television, the CSA, made known that it was considering forbidding pornography on French television as it is in several European countries; it also said that there was too much violence on television. Many broadcasters as well as the film industry were not pleased.

The French minister of culture then decided to ask a commission chaired by a well-known French philosopher, Blandine Kriegel, to prepare a report on violence on television. The report was made public in November 2002. While focused on television it also contained some recommendations regarding film classification. It suggested that the French Commission classify not only films for theatrical as it does at the moment but also videos, DVDs, video games and possibly Internet. It also proposed to amend the composition of the Commission in favour of more experts on child psychology and of television broadcasters and that proposals for "minus 18" could be made at a simple majority. Another report made, a few weeks later, at the request of French minister of Justice by the "défenseur des enfants", an independent institution in charge of children rights, made similar proposals. It recommended further that an independent institution make classification of all audiovisual media.

These proposals were welcomed by some NGOs representing families but the film industry and several media rejected them. The opponents pictured the proposals as regressive and censorial. For weeks, there were heated debates on the matter on television and through the press. Some members of the French Parliament made an attempt to legislate in order to put the Commission under the authority of both the minister of Culture and the minister of family

matters. That attempt failed as it was successfully countered by criticism of censorship and bigotry. Finally the French Government cautiously decided to distance itself with the reports. A limited amendment of legislation regarding film classification was finally decided: the two third majority requirement for the “minus 18” would be eliminated, the composition of the Commission would be slightly amended in order to add an extra expert and extra representative of the film industry. This new legislation is being prepared; it will probably be enacted on 1st January 2003.

Francis Delon, chairman of the French commission of film classification

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