[DE] Discussions on the Future Structure and Financing of ARD's Public Broadcasters

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With an eye to the expiry of the system of balancing of financial needs in the year 2000, the discussions on the financing system for ARD which have been going on for years have entered into a new decisive phase.

Under the present regulations, in accordance with the Financial Agreement between the Länder on Broadcasting (Rundfunkfinanzierungsstaatsvertrag), the big broadcasters within the broadcasters' group support the small ones which are not able to completely cover their needs as determined by the Commission for Notification of Financial Requirements (Kommission zur Ermittlung des Finanzbedarfs - KEF) out of nationwide or regional licence fees. The idea of dropping this form of financial balancing has been received variously as regards constitutionality in a number of recent legal reports. An important point here is the significance of the judgment of the Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) on financing public-sector broadcasting out of licence fees; another is whether the size of a regional broadcaster could be an argument for the representation of the federal structure in the field of public-sector media. Legal discussion has centred on whether different levels of broadcasting licence fee may be charged in the separate Länder.

The Minister Presidents of the Länder had called on ARD to present suggestions by July this year for the future structure and financing of its public broadcasters. The Directors of the eleven broadcasters have since unanimously decided in a basic schedule that the balancing of financial needs in its present form should be changed with a view to the largely independent financing of each of the broadcaster.

Basically, after a phase of transitional financing, the broadcasters should finance themselves out of the broadcasting licence fees raised in their broadcasting area. For reasons of economy, every possible form of institutional cooperation, including mergers, should be investigated. The small broadcasters should basically be retained, and a single licence fee throughout the Federal Republic should be maintained.

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