[DE] Agreement Between Public Service Broadcasters and Germany's Largest Cable Provider

IRIS 2004-5:1/11

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At the beginning of April, public service TV broadcasters ARD and ZDF reached an agreement with Kabel Deutschland concerning a series of conditions for the digital transmission of their programmes. Kabel Deutschland acquired most of the broadband cable networks previously owned by Deutsche Telekom and is currently preparing to take over additional networks.

There had been a dispute over the technical parameters for the cable transmission of the respective programme bundles, ARD Digital and ZDF Vision, which largely cover the whole range of digital public service TV channels. As well as the ARD channel itself, these include all regional and digital ARD channels, as well as ZDF's main channel and special interest digital channels. One important question was whether these channels should be broadcast totally unencrypted. It seemed that ARD and ZDF could insist this was the case in spite of opposition from the cable network operator. With the introduction of new business models, particularly in view of the conditions for the cable transmission of private free-to-air channels, it will therefore be difficult to stick to a system where all digital cable channels are encrypted. In any case, Kabel Deutschland has also agreed to support the MHP standard insofar as the public service channels can be received using any MHP-compatible cable decoder. This makes it possible to access the additional interactive services designed for this application standard. The agreement also states that the public service channels should be treated equally and without discrimination in the presentation of channels available.

The public service broadcasters also reached an agreement with the Verband Privater Kabelnetzbetreiber e.V. (Association of private network operators - ANGA) concerning technical conditions for the digital distribution of their programme bundles. The parties are in favour of a free market for terminal equipment, based on open, standardised technologies. This agreement forms part of an overall contract to be signed by the end of April 2004.

ARD press release, 2 April 2004

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