

[DE] A Study Paper on the Reform of Public Service Broadcasting

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A study paper has just been published by the states of Bavaria and Saxony which reflects on structural reform in public service broadcasting.

The paper's main demand is the strengthening of the special interest programmes of the regional broadcasters to the detriment of the national ARD-programme for the general public. According to the paper a reform of this type is needed for two reasons: Firstly, the very necessary wide range of programs and interests, seen as an integral part of the ARD, has to be re-established and, secondly, costs must be reduced and yet be able to cover the needs of a basic service.

Over the last 30 years, the paper claims, the ARD has developed a structure similar to that of a large group in which the majority of the regional broadcasters function automatically as subsidiaries of the ARD. The WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) has taken on the role at the head of this group which is nonetheless either controlled centrally by the ARD or at least under its direction. The federal state principle of multiplicity, supposedly represented by the merger of regional broadcasters, is said to have been undermined. In recent years, stations providing better services have been anxious to counter this development by strengthening the position of their regional programmes. Consequently, a number of regional broadcasters is now offering general programmes of which an increasing number can be picked up throughout the whole of Germany. This development has led, it is claimed, to increased costs and also to a widening in the range of programs on offer going over and beyond a basic service. According to the paper, a reform of the ARD would call for the important role of the regional broadcasters to be reinforced and for preference to be given to the variety of programmes on regional stations rather than to the ARD's general national programme simply because variety must be maintained. Along with this, individual regional stations will have to merge to form stations with a well-balanced company structure which necessitate no financial adjustments. Such a reform of the ARD must also attempt to restore directors' responsibility and control through company channels. These, it is claimed, are currently being undermined by "company dependence on programme planning".

