

Reporters Without Borders

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Asia - China

Controversial co-operation

Reporters without Borders Germany calls on Deutsche Welle Director General to change strategy on China

30 September 2014

25.09.2014 – Reporters without Borders Germany (ROG) calls on the director general of Deutsche Welle (DW), Peter Limbourg, to change Deutsche Welle`s strategy on China. During the last few weeks, the tax-financed German broadcaster Deutsche Welle has taken some alarming decisions related to its Chinese programme. Furthermore, Peter Limbourg has decided to agree on a highly controversial co-operation with CCTV – the Chinese state broadcaster.

The executive director of Reporters without Borders Germany, Christian Mihr, states: “We highly condemn the co-operation agreement between Deutsche Welle and the Chinese State broadcaster CCTV.” He continues: “This co-operation is incompatible with Deutsche Welle`s statutory mission as CCTV is part of the repressive apparatus directed against Chinese journalists. Deutsche Welle should not try to increase its reach in China at the expense of freedom of the press. As a member of the Reporters without Borders Germany board of trustees, we urgently call on Peter Limbourg to reconsider his decision.”

In a press release dated September 4, Deutsche Welle announced its intention to work with CCTV in the future. According to the statement, Deutsche Welle will produce music and business-related content together with CCTV. In addition, CCTV will broadcast an adaptation of Deutsche Welle`s lifestyle magazine Euromaxx (see: <http://bit.ly/1sXLxjk>).

CCTV IS A FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR OF CHINESE STATE PROPAGANDA

CCTV is China`s largest television broadcaster. At the organisational level, CCTV forms part of China`s State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. Consequently, CCTV is directly connected to the government and plays a fundamental role in Chinese state propaganda. In fact, regulations force all other Chinese TV stations to broadcast CCTV`s 7pm main evening news.

During the last few months, CCTV has repeatedly broadcast “forced confessions” (see: <http://bit.ly/1j3J0EI>). During these broadcasts, critical journalists and bloggers were made to publicly criticise their own behaviour. On May 8, this was even done to a Chinese freelancer working for Deutsche Welle - to Gao Yu. The 70-year-old journalist has been held in criminal detention in China since she was arrested at the end of April (see: <http://bit.ly/1yqVPB7>).

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS GERMANY`S LETTER TO PETER LIMBOURG

On September 16, Reporters without Borders Germany wrote to Peter Limbourg, the general director of Deutsche Welle, calling on him to answer a number of questions concerning Deutsche Welle`s cooperation with CCTV. This letter, available in German, can be accessed under: <http://bit.ly/1ptN1jp>. His answer is available in German under <http://bit.ly/1vkzYFO>.

Deutsche Welle describes the co-operation agreement with CCTV as a dialogue. However, numerous previous cases experienced by Reporters without Borders demonstrate that similar forms of communication and co-operation have usually been skilfully put to work for state propaganda. Reporters without Borders Germany doubts, that Deutsche Welle will be able to avoid such instrumentalisation.

Despite Peter Limbourg`s answer, certain questions remain unanswered:

How have the agreements between Deutsche Welle and CCTV been formulated? What exactly has been agreed to? Will Deutsche Welle supply content for CCTV and enable its Chinese partner to select what it wishes to broadcast? Or will CCTV have to broadcast all of Deutsche Welle`s contributions? How would this affect, for example, a China-critical programme on the artist Ai Weiwei? Could CCTV decide to reject such a programme?

Furthermore, it is still unclear why Su Yutong, who was working on Deutsche Welles` s China programme, was dismissed. Officially, she is said to have publicised internal matters. However, Reporters without Borders Germany is extremely worried that Su Yutong`s dismissal is related to Deutsche Welles`s new approach in its China-programme.

Our letter to Peter Limbourg included an invitation to participate in a panel discussion organised by Reporters without Borders Germany on "The Chinese media" aimed at clarifying these questions. Peter Limbourg made no mention of our invitation in his letter of response.
