



Brussels, 22 September 2020

Press Release

## Stabilisation of a Free Media System – From Thinking to Acting

### ***ERGA's Focus Session within the digital conference series in the course of Germany's EU Council Presidency***

This Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) was given the chance to invite to one of five focus sessions held in the course of the digital conference series “Pluralism and Responsibility. Media in the Digital Society”. In the context of this series, the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media took the opportunity offered by Germany's EU Council Presidency to bring together high-class speakers and discuss relevant issues linked to media pluralism in Europe.

**The goal of ERGA's session was to find effective solutions for a sustainable balance between the protection of fundamental European values like the protection of minors in the media and the freedom of speech on the one hand and the requirements of content providers on the other. This is mandatory to stabilise freedom within our media system, for both citizens and all media players.**

**Tobias Schmid**, Chair of ERGA and Commissioner for European Affairs of the Directors' Conference of the German Media Authorities, was host of the focus session. He emphasised right at the beginning of the event that “Finally, Europe takes responsibility for the defence of our constitutional freedom in the online environment. And that means setting rules to protect freedom – because many things might have changed through digitisation but this mechanism has not. So, it is our common duty to find solutions to the new threats to our democracy now.”

After a keynote speech by **Roberto Viola**, Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, Tobias Schmid interviewed **Bernd Reichart**, CEO of Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland, on the effects of the Covid19-pandemic on their businesses and RTL's approach to tackle disinformation. To Bernd Reichart, “credible, professional journalism is the best weapon against disinformation. Platforms have left their passive role by ranking, curating and spreading content and there has to be a responsibility alongside that. Of course, regulation in that field has to be compatible with the freedom of speech.”

During the course of the session, **Sabine Verheyen**, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Committee for Culture and Education, **Roch-Olivier Maistre**, President of the French National Audiovisual Regulatory Authority (CSA), **Alexandra Laffitte**, Vice Chair of EuroISPA, and **Laura Blaževičiūtė**, Director General of All Media Lithuania discussed positions and initial considerations as well as possible European solutions to stabilising a free media system. Particularly the continued relevance of the country of origin principle as the cornerstone of EU online content regulation, the questions of a future proof liability system and the parallel demand to improve end-to-end cooperation between regulators on cross-border issues was at the heart of the discussion.

Sabine Verheyen, Chair of the CULT Committee in the European Parliament, stated that she is looking forward to the forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding that ERGA is currently working on. “The fact that most of major players have their headquarters in Ireland cannot be overlooked. Hence, networks of national regulatory bodies

coordinated at Union level are vital to support enforcement, considering the key importance of the country of origin principle in that regard. In order to enhance its effectiveness, strengthening end-to-end cooperation between regulators on cross-border issues is crucial.”

The ongoing debate about the Digital Services Act und European Democracy Action Plan makes the members of ERGA feel confident towards the next steps and they look forward to seeing their thinking put into action. European media regulators are prepared – now, it is up to the legislator to take care of the realisation.

A video of the Focus Session “Stabilisation of a Free Media System – From Thinking to Acting” will shortly be available under this link: <http://eu2020-medienkonferenz.de/en/session-3-stabilisation-of-a-free-media-system/>

#### *About ERGA:*

*The European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) brings together heads or high-level representatives of national independent regulatory bodies in the field of audiovisual services. Thereby, ERGA advises and assists the European Commission in its work, to ensure a consistent implementation of the AVMSD as well as in any other matters related to audiovisual media services within the Commission’s competence. In addition, ERGA aims to facilitate cooperation between the regulatory bodies in the EU by fostering the exchange of information, experience and good practices.*

*Dr Tobias Schmid, Commissioner for European Affairs of the German Media Authorities, is the Chairman of ERGA in 2020.*