

- Check against delivery! -

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,

I was invited to talk about the “value of television.” An unusual topic, you might think, for a manager of an international media company whose primary concern - it would seem - is numbers and returns. And yet: I was delighted to accept the invitation, as I would like to make a stand on precisely this topic - not least because of the discussion over recent months.

I'd like to start with some quotes:

- “Television makes people fat, dull, unhappy and violent.”
Federal Minister of Family Affairs Ursula von der Leyen said this word for word not too long ago - on a TV show, incidentally.

Next quote:

- “Regulation of the commercial broadcasters continues to be necessary; otherwise only rubbish would end up being produced.” - Manfred Helmes, Director of the State Media Office of Rhineland-Palatinate.
- And finally, possibly the most famous recent contribution by a politician to the media policy debate, by Minister President Günther Oettinger: “Channels like SuperRTL and such similar shit...”

These are just some of numerous, to put it gently, “tough remarks” made by politicians and media watchdogs about our industry.

Now as you know, ladies and gentlemen, the debate itself isn't exactly a recent phenomenon. Quite the opposite. Even before there was a single commercial broadcaster in Germany, we were treated to the insight that we are “more dangerous than nuclear power.” And Helmut Schmidt wasn't the only one who felt commercial broadcasting was a threat to society. Although the critics' choice of words has changed - more Dieter Bohlen,

less Günther Jauch, the youth protectionists would say - the facts haven't.

One thing is clear: it's so easy to badmouth television because everyone, really everyone, knows what you're talking about. Television is the mass medium of our time. If politicians were to criticise scenes of nudity in the latest Czechov production on a Berlin stage, few would even know what they're talking about. So why bother getting upset at all. Lambasting popular TV programmes, on the other hand, is sure to get you into the headlines - if for no other reason than that everyone knows what you're referring to.

To put it bluntly: politicians love to verbally beat up television because it is so popular - a phenomenon that FC Bayern Munich is all too familiar with.

But how to respond to this? Get upset - or just shrug it off? - Or try to put emotion aside and counter the criticism rationally? I will attempt exactly that in the next 30 minutes, because I feel it is important to recall every now and then the contribution that television, all criticism aside, makes to our society and within our society.

And it is about these contributions, about the social value of television, that I would like to speak.

I don't want to talk about the commercial or economic value of our industry - although there is quite a lot to be said about that as well.

For instance,

- ... that in Germany, commercial broadcasters alone employ nearly 17,000 people - not counting adjacent industries.
- ... that each year, the two major commercial groups of channels alone invest over 2 billion euros into their programming - much of it in Germany.
- ... that more than 350 commercial channels exist and invest in Germany.
- ...and that without television, there could be no successful product launch in Germany.

In a word: the TV industry in general and commercial television in particular, is a branch of industry whose importance to the economy cannot be overstated. Cities like Cologne, Munich and Berlin are all too aware of this.

But as I said, that isn't our main topic here today.

The focus will be on the social value of television.

For many of our critics, ladies and gentlemen, social value is synonymous with "educational" or "the state's responsibility for providing education" - as if television were somehow responsible for ironing out the failings of parents and teachers. Let me make it clear right from the start, ladies and gentlemen, that this is not our role - it simply cannot be.

Television is a function of society - not vice versa. Society is not a function of television. Of course there are interactions and interrelationships, but in the end the state of society determines television - and not the other way round. And yet: of course we have social mandates - many, in fact. We build awareness, we tell the background story, and we tackle questions no one else wants to deal with. Let me cite some examples.

First, our role in communicating political content. Public broadcasters complain that their news programmes are losing more and more young viewers. Just this morning, an ARD programme claimed that "young people don't watch the news any more."

That is true - for public broadcasters, but not for us. Our news programmes are more popular than ever, especially among younger audiences.

And that has to do with how political topics are presented, how political communication is "translated".

Young viewers appreciate the fact that we deliver political contexts and political explanations in the kind of language they understand. And that, with all due respect, is more than necessary.

TV news programmes, especially those on commercial channels, attempt to clarify complex contexts, mainly by visual means, and to make abstract political contexts more understandable by illustrating them with human-interest stories.

That doesn't qualify as tabloidisation and it certainly isn't infotainment.

As I see it, it is a contribution to political education and one of the key reasons that the overwhelming majority of younger viewers tune in to the news programmes of commercial broadcasters, and especially of RTL Television.

Yes, I can state quite confidently that commercial broadcasters make an essential contribution to political education - in their news programmes and other parts of their programming.

One example is the series *Gute Zeiten – Schlechte Zeiten* which has taken on an exemplary role both in the battle against smoking and in the battle against drug abuse. In fact, it has been recognised for doing so. German chancellor Angela Merkel recently held a reception for the series' actors and producers at the chancellery, and commended them for their efforts against drug use among young people.

Nor was this the first time. The series had been honoured in the past for its contribution against smoking.

And this is just one of television's social contributions. Another is that we concern ourselves - though seen as an entertainment medium - with the real problems of people in Germany.

You don't believe me? You don't believe that television deals with topics like career training, upbringing, tolerance and integration, the gap between economic upswing and increasing poverty, growing debt and the decline of the welfare state?

But that is exactly what we do - more than ever before - and especially on commercial TV.

While many local authorities are axing social workers to cut costs, often turning state aid into a luxury, here in our TV programming social workers become protagonists. The idea is to “help people to help themselves.”

There are a large number of such Help-TV formats, which provide hands-on advice for life, where help is provided to those who really urgently need it.

- For instance, the former government employee Peter Zwegat helps families in debt to gain control over their finances again.
- Street-worker Thomas Sonnenburg tries to get teenage runaways off the streets and back into a normal life.
- Educator Katharina Saalfrank aka “Super Nanny” helps overwhelmed parents with raising their children,
- and youth therapist Annegret Fischer Noble deals with “teenagers out of control” and communicates to them the purpose and necessity of proper social conduct.

By running such formats we not only tackle topics that are relevant - we make them accessible to a wide public and point out solutions, giving people the hope of escaping an apparently hopeless vicious cycle.

Spiegel magazine - not exactly known for its love of commercial television - recently commended these programmes in glowing terms, actually writing of “welfare state TV.” The helpers mentioned were praised as - and I quote - “heroes of social work.” And Spiegel quotes a social worker in one of the local administrations as saying: “These programmes enhance the value of our work.”

As a result, there has been a growing run on the social services offices because the Help-TV formats give many people the necessary impetus to take charge of their situation. This and the fantastic viewer ratings show that we have struck a social nerve here.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from translating political contexts and homing in on social questions, commercial broadcasters make one other social contribution - and this one is undoubtedly a controversial matter for many. I’m referring to

the afternoon programming on commercial channels. Cultural pessimists and cynics like Harald Schmidt refer to it as “underclass television” - I say that’s taking a short-sighted view.

I admit, what happens in some afternoon talk or courtroom shows isn’t always nice - in fact it can be downright repulsive. And I don’t expect anyone here in this room to be a fan of such shows. I am not one either. But, ladies and gentlemen, and I say this with all due force: this is also part of Germany! These people live in our society too, and are part of our society.

Sure, here we are in beautiful Cologne, sipping cappuccino and nibbling croissants, and it’s easy to slip into condescension.

But I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, which one of us actually leaves our comfortable couch? Who regularly spends time with the people of Mühlheim, Neukölln or Hasenberg!

Commercial television shows these people:

- People who live on welfare and have been unemployed for ages.
- People from “immigrant backgrounds”, who live by different sets of values.
- People who live on the fringes of society.

And we don’t do so through consternation-tinted glasses, but present it unvarnished, just the way it is. - Who does this except us?

Still, some might ask “Is it really necessary?” But if I may be provocative for a moment: what would be the alternative? More television that pretends everything is just hunky-dory? If this 5 percent of society were never even perceived, if they were to be completely marginalised - would that be public service?

I don’t have a way to solve the basic problem behind this situation either. But I do believe that showing the facts is the first step to even recognising that there is a problem here -

otherwise, these people would continue to be what they have been to date: marginalised and forgotten by the mainstream. In this sense, I see what many feel to be pure provocation as a kind of public service, too.

Ladies and gentlemen, whatever your views on the last issue, the social contribution that commercial television makes to public life is beyond dispute.

What I would like to see from all participants in the public debate - and this includes us media - is a little more grey and a little less black-and-white. Perhaps we should all, before tearing down a programme yet again - whether on public or private TV - actually watch the programme. I daresay that this alone would already add a whole new dimension of objectivity to the discussion.

This brings me to my last aspect of “value” - a definition that is only very rarely appreciated in our culture. It was proposed by a professor at INSEAD, the prestigious business school near Paris. He lectures on topics such as mergers & acquisitions and business appraisals - so at first glance doesn't have anything to do with the idea of social values.

Still, this professor came up with what for me is the simplest and most surprising definition of value, of social value.

His approach says that the most important measure of the value of an offering or product is the extent to which it makes people happy. The more people and the bigger the “happiness,” the greater the value. Or, in a nutshell, “Value is Happiness.” Offers that make people happy are valuable - an interesting definition, especially when you consider that it comes from an economist!

Making people happy is something television can most certainly do.

At RTL, we recently made someone very happy: Thomas Godoj - winner of the most recent season of *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*. For him, a dream has come true!

And we didn't just make Thomas happy, but in the process also brought happiness to over 5 million people each week, who tuned in every Saturday evening to cheer for their candidates, tremble in anticipation with them, rejoice with them. And that has a value all its own.

Yes, we entertain people - even if entertainment is still somewhat disreputable in the German-speaking countries. You don't think so? Then just take this simple test at a dinner with friends, acquaintances or business partners.

Imagine the following situation: the person next to you has just finished proudly airing his views on a recent book, the person opposite reported on the Long Night Of Museums.

Then it's your turn and you cheerfully say: I just wanted to relax so I watched *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*. It was a fun evening - How do you think the party would react? I can tell you from personal experience: usually by quickly changing the subject. For some, the fact that you just hung out and relaxed, that you simply wanted to be entertained, makes you a bit of dubious character. Much as if you were a regular in the adults-only section of the video rental store.

Now let me turn the situation around. Just as the value of all televised entertainment is called into question, people assume that every book in and of itself represents a gain for society.

Why?

No one can seriously believe that every single one of the 400,000 new books presented at last year's Frankfurt Book Fair was good, that all of them were a valuable contribution to society.

In fact, it is much more likely that a large share of the books - I would go as far as to say the absolute majority - are read purely for entertainment.

Television is no different. And yet, entertainment obtained by reading is culture - while entertainment obtained by watching television is "mere" entertainment!

Please don't misunderstand me, I absolutely don't begrudge the book industry its unilaterally positive image. But why are two different yardsticks used here?

And while we're on the topic:

- What's so objectionable about entertainment?
- What's so reprehensible about having a good time?
- And what speaks against relaxing and emotional well-being? - After all, that is what good entertainment triggers.

A socially valuable media offering has the mandate to provide information - no doubt. But surely the social mandate cannot be limited to this function alone.

Ensuring fun and enjoyment is also part of our mandate. Even if we for a variety of reasons aren't as relaxed in our dealings with entertainment as our European neighbours - one thing holds true for us as well: entertainment is just as much part of a functioning media society as information and education.

In a nutshell: I am not an advocate of a hedonistic society focused solely on fun and games. But nor am I the opposite, I am no advocate of a no-fun society.

Yes, we too are far from infallible. Yes, we too have had undesirable developments. But all in all, I believe that we, and here I really mean everyone who works in television, can be happy with the social contribution we make.

But in order to continue doing so, we need to have conditions in place that allow it. So please allow me at this point to direct a few words at the legislators, here in Germany and in Brussels.

On many fronts, the present discussion about the development of the media society in general and television in particular is shaped by attitudes and pieces of information that do not correspond to the present and factual situation.

Let me merely mention the catchphrases 'Interstate Treaty on Broadcasting', 'advertising bans' and 'protection of minors' here.

The new Interstate Treaty on Broadcasting, which has been as good as adopted by the Minister Presidents, includes many details that I feel are clearly a step in the wrong direction. It shifts the balance between public and commercial broadcasters - already off-kilter - even more in favour of state-owned television.

I won't go into detail. Only this much: The public broadcasters' near-unrestricted expansion on the Internet at the expense of fee-payers will not only lead to a weakening of the print media and commercial broadcasters, but also result in the demise of many a small Internet company.

Arguments used in this context include the claim that only public broadcasters can guarantee "islands of quality" on the Internet.

A logic that has led one critic to state: "When politicians issue a command for 'quality', it is usually time to be seriously concerned about freedom of press and speech!"

Who made this comment?

Not a representative of the VPRT or the magazine lobby, but Viviane Reding, one of the two EU Commissioners in charge of this topic.

Second catchphrase: 'advertising bans'.

- Regardless of the fact that we, despite improvements to the new European 'TV without Frontiers' directive, still have excessive regulation on TV advertising, unlike our main competitor in the cultural industry, the US
- Regulation that tells us - unlike the printed media - how much and when and at what intervals advertising may be shown, as if responsible, mature citizens only existed among newspaper readers but not among TV watchers.
- Regardless of this, the legislators in Brussels are increasingly considering advertising bans and restrictions on entire groups of products.

For the sake of fairness I must make explicit mention here of the fact that German politicians are going to great lengths to represent our interests in this.

But nonetheless, we, the advertising-financed media, are tilting at windmills. Whether we are dealing with politicians' - undoubtedly justified - battle against smoking, against driving fast and the causes of climate change and most recently the battle against obesity - Brussels apparently believes that it can cure all ills with advertising bans.

This can lead to an all-but-absurd double standard, as when you consider the fact that one authority in Brussels has just placed a blanket ban on tobacco advertising while the Commission resolves billions of euros in subsidies for tobacco farmers!

Ladies and gentlemen, with all due understanding for the above-mentioned problems: advertising bans alone won't solve a thing.

I daresay the fact that today, as opposed to just 10 or 20 years ago, smoking no longer takes place on television - not during discussions, in no studio on earth, and in no series and movies - that this trailblazing role of television has done more to reduce smoking than the advertising ban.

Let's please not forget that advertising adds colour to life. Advertising stands for imagination, for freedom. If you don't believe me, just think of former East Germany, where there was hardly any advertising.

Third catchphrase - 'Protection of minors'
One thing right up front: Yes - it is necessary to protect minors. And yes, we as broadcasters have a responsibility here, which we are aware of and which we take on.

At the same time, I would like to issue a clear no to censorship based on taste - something that is on the increase. A recent example? The youth protectionists have currently set their sights on *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*.

And do you know what's supposed to be so harmful to minors about it? When people laugh! It is unacceptable, the powers that be say, when candidates perform on "Superstar" who cannot sing. They are, the accusation runs, being put on

display - or made a laughingstock of. So in future, no one should be allowed to audition for *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* unless they have proven that they can sing. If someone sings off-key and people grin about it, or even laugh, minors are at risk. That's official, and it comes with a considerable fine. So the rule of thumb is: the more people laugh, the more harmful the show is to minors. I ask you, ladies and gentlemen - are they serious about this?

And if so: what's next? Will miserably failed penalty kicks no longer be replayed - let alone in slow-motion? What about the popular program 'Pleiten, Pech und Pannen', about glitches and bloopers in public life? When will it be banned?

Ladies and gentlemen, with all due respect for the work done by the Committee for the Protection of Minors in Media - this lawsuit against *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* is questionable at the very least.

Five seasons later, every candidate knows exactly what they're getting into. A guy named Menderes is perhaps the least successful *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* candidate of all time.

Dieter Bohlen and Co. have sent him home five times already - and they didn't mince their words.

But is he embarrassed about his lack of success? Does he need to be protected from himself? - In fact, the opposite is the case. Menderes has countless videos of himself on Youtube, does the rounds on the German club circuit and earns part of his living in this way. Not exactly what you'd call a broken man.

And still the Committee for the Protection of Minors in Media felt it was necessary to serve notice based on Dieter Bohlen's comments. The things that are classed as "harmful to minors" at times border on the grotesque: Dieter Bohlen said to 29-year-old Thomas: "Well, you hardly look like you're from the sunny side of town, more like someone whose already bumped his head on the lid of his coffin." It was an exaggeration of course. According to the powers that be, this remark is harmful to minors!

Incidentally: the Thomas in question was Thomas Godoj, who ended up winning season five.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are determined to defend ourselves against this sort of censorship of taste - and we will do so in court.

By the way, on ARD, the porn-rapper Lady Bitch Ray recently uttered obscenities on the Harald Schmidt and Oliver Pocher show that Dieter Bohlen wouldn't even mutter to himself in a closet. And although the show was recorded in advance, the episode was aired entirely without a bleep to obscure her language. On ARD, that would be interfering with the freedom of opinion, says ARD. - Some of ARD's channels actually reran the programme days later, still without changes!

If a commercial broadcaster had done this, it would have been sentenced to a 100,000-euro fine at the very least, there would have been an outcry from youth protectionists, and ARD or ZDF would have run a programme about the destructive influence of commercial TV on our youth, in which the usual suspects would have lamented the disintegration of values.

In the case of ARD there was just one thing: silence!

Granted, that isn't the fault of the broadcasting authorities, which are not charged with monitoring the public broadcasters, but nonetheless it represents unfair treatment that is simply not okay.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, back to the topic at hand: What is the value of television?

If you ask me, that is something that each one of us ultimately has to decide for ourselves. And I really mean each and every person - not a select few on behalf of all others.

Whether you'd like to be entertained or are seeking information, whether you prefer *Dr. House* or a *Tatort* whodunit, whether you want culture on Arte or RTL Television's big *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* show. Television has something for everyone.

The remote control allows every single person to make their individual decision: whether to watch, when to watch, what to

watch, when to change the channel, and finally, when to turn off the TV!

All necessary discussion about content and direction aside: commercial broadcasters fulfil an important social task in our country.

We communicate political information, we show social realities - and we entertain people.

We can't solve all of society's problems - but we're not responsible for all of them either. And we believe that pointing them out is a good first step toward solving them.

We don't succeed at everything, some things go wrong - but we do get some things right as well.

And in the heat and magnitude of the discussion, let's always remember one thing:

In the end, it's only TV - one of the nicer, minor matters of life!