

## Guest contribution

### The future of broadcasting and cultural frequencies must be negotiated in parliament

The cultural and creative industries and radio broadcasting are particularly affected by the pandemic. Many artists are unable to perform, venues have closed their doors to the public, and the livelihoods of small businesses and self-employed people are at risk. The industry has declared a state of emergency and is taking to the streets in protest in many quarters – always in compliance with appropriate hygiene rules. At the same time, radio is being used more than ever before as a source of information, broadcasting cultural events that previously took place on location.

Culture and radio broadcasting have another thing in common, namely they use the same frequency spectrum in peaceful coexistence when events are broadcast. To be heard, actors, musicians and singers need – in the truest sense of the word – sound amplifiers. Each and every day, they work with radio microphones and other such systems that require frequencies. The same goes for journalists, professors, members of the clergy and many others, such as the event industry and the (live) production of radio broadcasts.

However, frequencies are a hotly contested commodity for economic reasons, and their usage rights are constantly being redefined. Not all uses of frequencies can be adequately assessed according to purely economic criteria. After all, the cultural industries and radio broadcasting in particular assume indispensable social tasks. Both use the frequency spectrum in the range from 470 to 694 MHz (known as the UHF band). This range is commonly referred to as “cultural frequencies”.

The future of this band is set to be negotiated during the next World Radiocommunication Conference in 2023. In Germany, as in all other countries, preparations are under way at the national level. The Federal Network Agency for Electricity, Gas, Telecommunications, Post and Railway has commissioned a study on the use of the UHF band. Some lobbyists are calling for culture and radio broadcasting to give up frequencies and hand them over to mobile telephony. This demand is baseless and we reject it. After all, there are good reasons for preserving these cultural frequencies.

These frequencies have been curtailed twice since 2010 and are now only a shadow of what they once were. By contrast, mobile telephony has been able to secure broad frequency ranges that the sector does not fully exploit. The increased use of mobile telephony during the pandemic has not revealed any lack of resources. A further imbalance between culture and mobile telephony must be avoided. As far as mobile telephony is concerned, the UHF band would also only represent a negligible addition to transmission capacity. Culture and terrestrial broadcasting, on the other hand, urgently need this spectrum, which has technical characteristics that other frequency ranges cannot offer.

To date, the UHF band has been guaranteed for culture and broadcasting until December 2030. A great many investment decisions have been made against this backdrop. We want this guarantee commitment to be upheld. However, even after 2030, interference-free frequencies for culture and media must remain available in the UHF band. This also applies to other independent users such as free-radio initiatives. Mobile telephony, on the other hand, should continue its efforts to develop new transmitter sites and make transmission capacities available via a sufficiently large infrastructure even post-2030. The fibre optic network must be further expanded to this end.

No further frequencies from the UHF range are required either now or in the future to achieve the Federal Government’s broadband targets. However, these frequencies are extremely important and are vital for the broadcasting and cultural industries. Despite all the technological progress made, it is still not clear whether further digitalisation and the use of 5G will be available to radio broadcasting, the cultural industry and the events industry as an efficient alternative. The German Bundestag should

therefore reaffirm its commitment to supporting culture and broadcasting before the end of this electoral term and renew its pledge to safeguard frequencies until December 2030. At the same time, radio broadcasting and the cultural and creative industries deserve a roadmap for the decade to come.

With such a roadmap, we will protect small and medium-sized radio enterprises and also broadcasters in Germany. At the end of the day, we want to preserve terrestrial broadcasting in the long term. As it can be used anonymously and is independent from mobile telephony systems, it can always be counted upon in the event of crises or disasters. For security reasons, Germany needs a transmission channel (DVB-T2, 5G broadcast technology) that is available autonomously, without any third-party influence. We must take steps to avoid becoming totally dependent on mobile phone companies and social networks in the interests of diversity of opinion and a functioning democracy. Multiple independent systems are therefore better than a mobile phone monoculture – for the sake of culture and broadcasting, as well as for the benefit of citizens and the state.

We are therefore responding to an appeal made by the Bundesrat (67-19 (B)): “Long-term coordinated frequency planning at the national and European level with a sufficient and interference-free frequency spectrum for users of wireless means of production in culture, education, research, science, sports and churches must be guaranteed.”

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