

Workshop on the independence of national regulatory authorities in the media sector in Brussels

The Institute for Information, Telecommunication and Media Law, Münster (ITM) held a workshop on the independence of national media regulators with contributions from both academia and practitioners, hosted by the Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in Brussels. The main focus of the conference was the present status of regulatory authorities in Central Europe, with special regard to Hungary and Poland, implemented into a wider context regarding independence as a European core value.

In his welcome address, Dr Marc Jan Eumann (State Chancellery of Northrhine-Westphalia) stressed the importance of the independence of media regulators as an important challenge for both Western- and Eastern-European governments. After a brief welcome and introduction speech by Professor Dr Bernd Holznagel, Dr Gábor Polyák (University of Münster) gave a short presentation about the clever ways of eliminating media freedom in Hungary, pointing out how the independence of the regulatory authority in Hungary has been seriously compromised by political influence lately. Afterwards, Dorota Głowacka (Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland) summarised the recent Polish public media reform, emphasizing her doubts about its foreseeable negative impact on institutional independence.

During the second part, Sarah Hartmann (ITM Münster) gave a detailed overview of the importance of independence as a European value and highlighted the standards of the Council of Europe in connection with the topic through case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. Professor Dr Bernd Holznagel (ITM Münster) then continued by presenting a thorough insight into the present guarantees of independence for telecommunications regulatory authorities, with special regard to the role of the Body of European Regulators of Electric Communications (Berec). Professor Holznagel especially pointed out the parallels and differences between the European competences regarding the safeguard of independence in both sectors.

Lastly in the final section, following a comprehensive introduction into reform proposal for the AVMS Directive regarding the independence of audiovisual regulatory authorities by Dr Krisztina Stump (European Commission), a round table discussion took place with the participation of Professor Dr Bernd Holznagel, Thomas Langheinrich (President of the Landesanstalt für Kommunikation Baden-Württemberg), Dr Krisztina Rozgonyi (University of Vienna), Dorota Głowacka (Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland) and moderator Peter Riesbeck (Berliner Zeitung) about independence as a challenge for Europe and the interpretation and effects of the new AVMS Directive, where the participants came to different conclusions on the competences and the liabilities of the European Union.