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Intercultural dialogue: ZDF to set up Friday Forum as an online dialogue platform

Director-General Schächter presents social integration project to Television Council

Addressing ZDF's governing body, the Television Council in Mainz, Director-General Markus Schächter presented plans for a new online service called "Forum zum Freitag" (Friday Forum). The idea of this forum has been developed in the wake of recent public debates in Germany on ways of promoting social integration. The head of ZDF mentioned, in particular, the suggestions and recommendations that emerged from the "integration summit" held at the German Chancellery in Berlin as well as the deliberations of the leaders of Germany's Protestant Church (EKD) and of the Conference on Islam, which had been organised by Federal Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Markus Schächter said he expected to see the concept being implemented this year during the summer. He reaffirmed to the ZDF Television Council the importance that ZDF attaches in its programming to dialogue with Moslems living in Germany, who now number around three-and-a-half million. The overall concept pursued by the broadcaster included, he said, initiatives like the planned "focus week" on the theme of migration and integration, which would involve ZDF's main channel together with its digital channels and take place next autumn.

With its new online service ZDF would, said Schächter, be offering on the internet viewpoints, commentaries and discussions as "thoughts of the day" from a Moslem perspective. Editorial responsibility for the Friday Forum, conceived as a journalistic format, would lie with ZDF. It might take the form of commentaries, discussions or interviews from a Moslem standpoint. Schächter added that he envisaged the use of interviews with prominent figures proposed by Moslem associations and then chosen by ZDF. As for content, the spectrum would range from ethical topics and spirituality through existential questions to current affairs from a Moslem point of view.

On the issue of a "third-party broadcasting right", which, under German law, means the main churches are granted broadcasting autonomy for certain slots, ZDF's Director-General noted that only religious communities organised nation-wide as public-law bodies had this entitlement. In any case, it was a right that referred only to television programmes and not to online offerings.





On the basis of this concept ZDF's Director of Programming, Dr. Thomas Bellut, and Editor-in-Chief Nikolaus Brender will discuss the development of the forum with representatives of the Moslem community. The solutions they arrive at will then be trialled for a period of one year.

ZDF Television Council member Salomon Korn, who represents the Central Council of Jews in Germany, had expressly welcomed the new concept and judged the establishment of a "Forums zum Freitag" to be the right move, reported Director-General Schächter, adding that, "We have also arranged a top-level meeting with representatives of the Central Council of Jews in Germany in order to consider options and prospects for the Jewish community having its own ZDF forum in the online sphere in particular."

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