

German committee criticises television news coverage of Ukraine

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26 September 2014

The supervisory committee of Germany's ARD public television station has criticised the station's coverage of developments in Ukraine. The station's coverage had "given the impression of bias" and appeared to be directed against "Russia and Russian standpoints", the committee declares in the minutes of its meeting of June 24, which has been published in the online magazine *Telepolis*.

The purpose of the nine-member committee is to represent the interests of viewers, and it has an advisory function. It is elected by the broadcasting councils of German states and consists of representatives from various associations, political parties, churches and other groups. Its current chairman is the lawyer and banker Dr. Paul Siebertz from Bavarian Radio. Also on the committee are the Catholic priest and journalist Stefan Wahl, a teacher, a natural health practitioner, a pastoral consultant and a representative of the federation of public officials.

Prior to meeting, the committee had analyzed several ARD reports on the crisis in Ukraine—a step that is regarded as unusual. The measure was taken following complaints from viewers about biased reporting. The members of the panel unanimously agreed that such criticisms were entirely justified.

The Advisory Council lists 10 points in which the reporting of the ARD was inadequate.

It criticises the absence of any fundamental analysis of the negotiations between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine on the Association Agreement. It criticises the fact that "NATO's political and strategic intentions" with regard to its policy of eastern enlargement were not raised. Nor was any critical analysis made of the legitimacy of the "so-called Maidan council". The same applies to the "role of the radical nationalist forces, particularly Svoboda" and

their activities during the failure "of the agreement to resolve the crisis in Ukraine of 21 February".

The "constitutional and democratic issues" involved in the removal of President Yanukovich and the role of right-wing forces in his overthrow were also not adequately investigated by the ARD. In addition, there was no critical analysis of the role of politicians such as Julia Tymoshenko and Vitali Klitschko.

The council also challenged the station's coverage of the secession of Crimea from Ukraine. There was no proper investigation made of the procedure and legality of the Crimean referendum, its international legal status, the significance of popular participation in the vote, and the role of historical issues and the ethnic groups in Crimea in the secession process.

The criticisms raised by the committee are devastating, and confirm the assessment of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which wrote that news reportage on German public television had "degenerated into nightly propaganda spots". Rather than informing the public, the reports promoted the policy of the government, which has played a leading role in the conflict in Ukraine.

Whatever does not fit into the framework of official propaganda is eliminated: the content of the Association Agreement; the subordination of Ukraine to the dictates of the EU and the International Monetary Fund; the role of fascists in the Maidan protests; the toppling of Yanukovich in a right-wing coup; and the massive rejection of the new rulers in Kiev by the Russian-speaking population in the east of the country.

The council cautiously refers to a "more or less subliminal transfer of opinion by moderators and reporters" and the selective choice of reports, "which even in the synopsis of all ten Ukraine hotspots fail to give a fairly comprehensive picture of the crisis itself."

In plain English, this means manipulation and censorship.

Television director Tom Buhrow is reported to have reacted in an “extremely agitated and in part irreverent” manner to the criticism raised by the Advisory Board. From ARD sources *Telepolis* learned that both Buhrow and television director Jörg Schönborn aggressively insisted on an editorial line to “defend Western standpoints”. In other words, the one-sided reporting was ordered from the highest levels. From 2002 to 2006, Buhrow was head of the ARD studios in Washington.

Nothing is likely to change after the report. The station’s deputy programme director, Thomas Baumann, vigourously rejected the council’s charge of biased reporting and praised the work of the station’s “local correspondents”.

The reporting of the country’s second main public station, the ZDF, is no better than that of the ARD. Web sites have compiled the numerous complaints from viewers detailing inaccurate and false reporting, including deliberate omissions of important information, selective cuts to interviews and conflicting standpoints in the same programme. Viewers have also criticised the lack of any comment on pictures of pro-Ukrainian forces sporting Nazi symbols such as swastikas, as well as and the trivialisation of the fascist Azov battalion, which is fighting on behalf of the Kiev government.

These reports make clear Germany’s public broadcasters are being deliberately used to bombard the population with misinformation and deception about a war it overwhelmingly rejects.



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