

## P R E S S R E L E A S E

Berlin, 25. September 2018

### “Journalists must be able to work safely”

BDZV President Mathias Döpfner opens Newspaper Congress in Berlin

“I expect from the police, from special forces, from groups of hundreds of officers, from individual officers even under the greatest stress and pressure in the field, as well as from their superiors and authorities, even from the secret services – and especially from politicians, who establish the rules of the game here – that reporters and journalists are not obstructed in their research. Are not obstructed at work. On the contrary: I expect them to be helped. I expect them to be protected.” This is a very specific demand, said the President of the Federal Association of German Newspaper Publishers (BDZV), Dr. Mathias Döpfner, today in his opening speech to more than 400 participants at the Newspaper Congress in Berlin's ewerk. “Journalists must be able to work safely”

He also mentioned the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, which has reported 22 cases of assault with a total of 28 journalists and media workers attacked in the first eight and a half months of this year alone. All but two of the offenses were committed in the setting of right-wing populist or right-wing extremist gatherings.

In his speech, the Chief Executive Officer of Axel Springer SE formulated the “Newspaper Principle”, which originated from the printed medium, but which has long since gone beyond it. One of the most important features of the Newspaper Principle is “first and foremost the search for truth”.

In this context, Döpfner called for lessons to be learned from recent political events such as those in Chemnitz or Köthen. He himself did not always feel well informed in these cases. The press in Germany should therefore become more courageous, critical and unpredictable: “Any journalist who

does not question, attack or criticize the government plays along with those who want to abolish the government system. Those who entrench themselves behind formal criteria in order to circumvent reporting on murderers and terrorists among the refugees play into the hands of all those who spread the fairy tale of the 'Lying Press'." It is up to the publishers to create framework conditions that enable journalists to work in this way.

In contrast to the relevant networks and platforms on the Internet, the Newspaper Principle, continued the BDZV President, is neither arbitrary nor anonymous. It is "inconceivable without the responsibility which a clearly recognizable originator assumes", Döpfner emphasized, and expressed his concern about the fact that controversial editors are being increasingly criticized by their own superiors under pressure from the readers: "Without strong internal pluralism we are at risk of becoming a bubble ourselves instead of bursting those on Facebook, Twitter and perhaps also in the Berlin government district", the BDZV president warned.

### **Competition between systems with China threatens freedom of information**

At the same time, Döpfner made it clear that newspaper journalism was essential for democracy itself – and firmly linked to the achievements of free speech and freedom of information. These two achievements do not exist everywhere however: "Some of the largest markets in the world believe neither in freedom of information nor in free speech. Their success makes them attractive to the West and their money makes them powerful. This is why freedom of information and expression have become measures of ethical responsibility, the crucial question of media capitalism: Who's fighting for them? And who doesn't give a damn about them - and is cashing in as a reward?".

According to Döpfner, China is a world leader in many future technologies. We find ourselves in a competition between different systems: "The Western market economy, liberal democracy and the strong rule of law have so far been more successful in this combination than any other social order", the Springer CEO noted and posed the question: "Can it also prevail against Chinese state capitalism and its surveillance economy? Is it not rather the case that we are slowly getting used to China instead of the long-cherished hope that China would slowly adapt to our standards of human rights and the freedom of the press?"

## **“The best times are yet to come”**

This makes it all the more important to further strengthen the Newspaper Principle, Döpfner urged. Through the consistent, independent, never biased and ever courageous search for the truth. The BDZV president expressed his conviction: “The best times are yet to come. Never before has journalism been as diverse, as fast, as precise as it is today. And it is a long time since it has been so important for the continued existence of our open society”.

Contact: BDZV, Alexander von Schmettow, Head of Communications,  
email [schmettow@bdzv.de](mailto:schmettow@bdzv.de)