ZDF, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. For five decades, the German public broadcaster has built its reputation and viewership on quality news and current affairs, including the newscast of record, heute; popular entertainment shows, such as the long-running Wetten, dass...?; and a long list of hit drama series, from the legendary Derrick to Der Bergdoktor to the crime series Heldt. At ZDF's helm is Thomas Bellut, a journalist by trade who joined ZDF in 1984 shortly after graduating from university and working at a newspaper. Bellut learned the business and responsibilities of public-service broadcasting from the bottom up: first in the domestic current-affairs division, where he was often on the air presenting election and breaking-news specials, conducting interviews and providing in-depth reports, and then as director of programming, a position he stepped into in 2002 and remained in for ten years.

Today, as director-general, Bellut is responsible not only for the main network, ZDF, but also for four joint-venture channels: the children's channel KiKA; the cultural and information channel 3sat; the arts channel Arte; and the documentary channel Phoenix. ZDF also operates the digital channels ZDFinfo, ZDFneo and ZDFkultur.

Since being appointed director-general in March of 2012, Bellut has focused on making ZDF more efficient, more appealing to young viewers and more relevant in today's digital world. The programming strategies implemented by Bellut and by the current programming director, Norbert Himmler, are working. In fact, in recent months, ZDF's audience share has exceeded the other public broadcaster, ARD, and more important, German television's usual market leader, the commercial network RTL Television.

Bellut shares with TV Europe his views on what it means to be a public broadcaster in today's multichannel and digital world.

TV EUROPE: ZDF celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Over the years, in what unique ways has ZDF contributed to the German television landscape?

BELLUT: We are Germany's national public-service broadcaster. Our counterpart is the ARD, which has one main network and nine regional state broadcasters. Our name stands above all for good fiction, entertainment and information. This is why we started attending the international markets very early on. In the 1970s and '80s, ZDF aired many American television series for the first time in Germany. Today, news and information programs play a very important role. With nearly 50 percent of our programming devoted to information—we have the highest proportion of all TV broadcasters in Germany—we are still market leaders. But we also have a soft spot for laughter: we air the funniest political comedy, for instance.
TV EUROPE: Congratulations on ZDF’s market-leading 12.6 percent audience share! That is more than ARD and RTL. What factors have contributed to that success?

BELLUT: We’ve been working hard on our programming. We’ve improved the quality, modernized broadcasts, experimented a great deal and developed new formats. Call it trial and error, but it works! We have more viewers again, especially younger ones. Our portfolio—the main network, digital channels and online—is again as successful as it last was in the early 1990s, even though we’re now competing with more than 150 national TV broadcasters.

TV EUROPE: What is your vision for public-service broadcasting? What role must ZDF play in today’s digital age?

BELLUT: Public-service media are very important for the public debate on politics, economy and social topics in Germany. You can completely forget commercial TV here. Apart from the top-of-the-line newspapers, we provide the arena for the major and minor debates of our society in our independent political and economic magazine shows, documentaries, talk shows and the comprehensive coverage of elections. We offer all of this in the digital world as well. Next to online portals, our ZDFMediathek is our most important platform, which, by the way, leads the on-demand offerings in Germany.

TV EUROPE: Having been the director of programming for many years, what did you learn about balancing public-service obligations and scheduling shows that get high audience shares? What types of shows can do both?

BELLUT: I have learned to listen not only to the experts, but also to my gut feeling. You have to love television and like the public, and a few years of experience do a world of good. Programming is decisive, having the right mix of programs. If I air a great documentary after a strong feature film or sports event, I get an audience that would otherwise not tune in to it. But if you happen to like it, you might watch such a show more often in the future. A strong public broadcaster needs strong entertainment formats, otherwise it becomes a niche broadcaster. And incidentally, news and current affairs can also be exciting. Many of our high-gloss documentaries such as Terra X combine pure entertainment and valuable knowledge.

TV EUROPE: A few years ago, ZDF set a goal of reaching more young viewers. How has the channel succeeded in that goal?

BELLUT: Step by step. The digital channels reach younger viewers differently than the main network. To my great satisfaction, this even happens with our news channel ZDFinfo. With high-caliber entertainment such as international series and documentaries, ZDFinfo is targeted specifically to younger audiences. We can finally anchor our brand environment to younger demographics once again. Our little broadcasting family reached 10 percent of the under-50-year-olds in January—a great result.

TV EUROPE: The license fee structure in Germany has changed and this has sparked quite a bit of debate. Why was it changed and what is the value of this new reform?

BELLUT: The old model didn’t work anymore. Before, whoever had a TV or a radio had to pay a license fee. This has become pointless now since everyone can view our content with a cell phone. Now it’s one residence, one fee. It’s that easy.
The debate doesn’t have all that much to do with the change of structure. Nothing changes for over 90 percent of the people here in Germany. For many, it will even be less expensive. Yet we have a growing criticism of public-service radio in Germany on the whole. This doesn’t come from the viewers, but from competitors such as the newspapers. They have big problems of their own finding new business models, and suddenly see the electronic media as rivals.

**TV EUROPE**: Regarding ZDF’s advertising revenue, will ZDF be allowed more than 20 minutes of advertising per day before 8 p.m., or advertising after 8 p.m.?

**BELLUT**: We’re taking a different direction here. Sponsorship after 8 p.m. has been prohibited since the beginning of 2013. Additional sources of revenue are being reduced rather than expanded.

**TV EUROPE**: What has been the strategy behind ZDF’s bouquet of digital channels? How have they helped bring in a more diverse audience for ZDF programming?

**BELLUT**: Here we’re in a competition the likes of which you won’t find anywhere else in the world. It’s impossible to reach the entire society with one single channel. It’s easier with the additional digital channels. ZDFneo, for example, targets the 30- to 50-year-olds. And it works! We schedule popular younger formats. We test new formats, and [conduct] experiments that would be impossible on the main network. We produce and pur-
chase more economically. And it’s paying off: in the digital market, our three digital channels have already garnered a market share of more than 2 percent.

**TV EUROPE:** Are there plans for launching more digital channels? I have read reports of plans for a youth channel with ARD.

**BELLUT:** There will be no additional channels. The idea of starting a joint ARD/ZDF youth channel has been floating around. But this would require eliminating other digital channels. And don’t forget, you also can’t leave German media politics out of the equation.

**TV EUROPE:** You started your career as a journalist. Looking at how the Internet is changing the way viewers receive their news throughout the day, what are the main priorities for ZDF’s news division?

**BELLUT:** News is no longer an exclusive offering. More and more people inform themselves via other sources, at any time, any place, and generally free of charge. This is why TV news has to offer more. We have highly experienced editors and a worldwide network of correspondents. Our strength is that we can competently assess national and international events and developments, and shed light into their backgrounds. People trust us here. We’re also increasingly using new graphic techniques to explain complex processes in a simple and easily understandable way. There is a great need for this as well [among our viewers].

**TV EUROPE:** How does ZDF.de fit into ZDF’s overall digital strategy?

**BELLUT:** ZDF.de is no longer an add-on. It is an essential component of our content offering. We long ago stopped being a TV broadcaster to become a multimedia content provider. We offer our content on all the platforms used by our audience. The journalistic work for ZDF.de is thus brought back into the classic editorial department. The staff is no longer responsible only for individual time slots on the TV channel, but for all platforms.

**TV EUROPE:** How does ZDF.de rank among other websites in Germany? What is it offering viewers and how is it supplementing the ZDF linear channel?

**BELLUT:** We have a good online presence, but it isn’t our core business. Compared with the websites of the major newspapers, we’re rather in the middle. We concentrate primarily on video content. This is our core competence. What’s important to us are the social media platforms. There we exchange views with the fans of our shows and obtain [input and new ideas] for our work.

**TV EUROPE:** What challenges and opportunities do you see for ZDF in the next 12 to 24 months?

**BELLUT:** We want to maintain a strong position among the competition, but we don’t have to remain the market leader. Much more important is the quality of our programs. We will have elections this year in Germany. Political and economic themes will thus play an important role. In view of the discussions about the public-service system in Germany—which we are ready and willing to contribute to—we want to satisfy our viewers above all through the quality and relevance of our programs.
ZDF Enterprises at 20
Alexander Coridass

While ZDF celebrates 50 years, there is another birthday this year in the German public broadcaster’s family: its commercial arm, ZDF Enterprises, marks its 20th year in the international distribution and co-production business. President and CEO Alexander Coridass talks about the company’s many accomplishments, which are all focused on one objective: quality programming.

**TV EUROPE**: How has ZDF Enterprises contributed to ZDF?

**CORIDASS**: Our main job is to generate additional income for ZDF. We deliver all our annual profit to ZDF every year. Last year this amounted to roughly €10 million, which, for a mid-sized company like ours, is a result we can be proud of. There are two other financial streams that flow from our firm to ZDF. There is our direct investment in ZDF programs, which ranges from €5 million to €10 million. And as far as we sell ZDF programs without prior direct investment, we pay a certain percentage of our sales volume to ZDF as a compensation for the rights. So we provide three financial streams to our shareholder. Over the years, this has amounted to several hundred million euros that have gone to ZDF.

The value of ZDF Enterprises is also much higher today than it was 20 years ago. Plus, we have formed a small portfolio of subsidiaries, mainly production companies, which all amounts to a considerable corporate value for the ZDF Enterprises group.

Last but not least, through our co-productions and international partnerships, we have been able to provide ZDF with excellent programming in all genres, from Scandinavian drama to U.S. documentaries to Australian live-action teen series. All these programs have been successful on ZDF, and ZDF acquired them for a favorable price-to-quality ratio. So besides the direct financial contributions that I mentioned above, we are very proud to have provided ZDF with excellent programs and international content.

**TV EUROPE**: What reputation does ZDF Enterprises have among international co-production partners?

**CORIDASS**: Each year we invest between €30 million to €50 million in new programs with money generated from our own cash flow—not from license fees collected from German TV spectators. These are either projects originating from third parties or from ZDF; but I would say that in general, the major part goes into programs and third-party projects and a minor part into ZDF programs.

What co-production partners can expect is a co-producer who is willing and able to provide input into the editorial development. We want to be involved in the production process and, in return for our investment, we need to obtain the rights. There is no general pattern for co-productions; they vary from case to case. Sometimes we are just a co-financer: we let our partners do most of the job and we just [provide] some additional financing. In other cases, we are in the driver’s seat, so to speak, and are the ones who are really developing a production. One example is Alexander the Great, which is a project [written by Michael Hirst] that we are carrying out with one of our subsidiaries [Gruppe 5 Filmproduktion] and with Beta Film.

There is a broad range of arrangements as far as our involvement in co-productions is concerned, but our partners can always count on us to be very dedicated and fair.

**TV EUROPE**: Over the years, what has been the strategy to broaden the ZDF Enterprises catalogue?

**CORIDASS**: We are extremely proud of the programming we obtain from ZDF, but it goes without saying that it is limited, as ZDF’s output is aimed primarily at the German market and is not necessarily suited for international distribution. Thus, some 10 to 15 years ago, we reached the decision that if we wanted to grow, to have a broader catalogue and to enter new markets, we would need additional programming. We strive to obtain this through co-productions or distribution mandates from German or international producers. We even buy finished product. Two-thirds of our catalogue has nothing to do with ZDF; it is programming we have acquired from third parties or co-produced. This is something that became necessary—it wouldn’t have been enough just to be the sales arm of ZDF.

**TV EUROPE**: ZDF Enterprises has done a number of deals with digital platforms.

**CORIDASS**: I wouldn’t have thought that we would have such great deals with partners like Netflix and Hulu, not only for our Scandinavian crime series but also for other German programs. We talk so often about how complicated it is to sell non-American product to the U.S., but this has changed. Outlets like DIRECTV, along with Netflix and Hulu, are really very open and we’ve made very satisfying deals with them. In Germany and the rest of Europe, digital and VOD platforms are becoming more and more important. Since we have a huge catalogue, the digital world is really a great opportunity for us.
Herzlichen Glückwünsche, ZDF!

Congratulations to our friends at ZDF on 50 years of creating outstanding nonfiction programming.

SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL searches the world for the best storytellers, most compelling original series and documentary specials. We find them at ZDF.
The Power of Three

Congratulations ZDF Enterprises on their 20th Anniversary & to ZDF on their 50th Anniversary

SLR Productions CONGRATULATES ZDF on 50 Years of Television Broadcasting and ZDF.enterprises on 20 Years of Programming and Distribution.

We are proud to be working with you on Sam Fox: Extreme Adventures and The Skinner Boys.
50 YEARS
BROADCASTING
HIGH QUALITY,
TRANSMITTING
HIGH PASSION.

WIR GRATULIEREN,
ZDF.

THIS IS WHO WE ARE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
CHANNEL
FROM SEEWOLF TO SKYFALL
43 YEARS TOGETHER

50 YEARS

CONGRATULATIONS!

YOUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS FROM

TMG
TELE MÜNCHEN GRUPPE
The media landscape has changed over the past 50 years but what remains constant is your vision and dedication to delivering brilliant entertainment.

Congratulations ZDF on your very special anniversary

From your friends at Content Television
Congratulations
to our loyal partners
and friends at

2DF

and

2DF.enterprises

We are looking forward
to another

50

years

of trustful cooperation.