

LCQ6: Free cross-boundary broadcast of Mainland and Hong Kong television programmes

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kwok-fun and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (May 12):

Question:

Quite a number of members of the public have relayed that as Mainland television (TV) programmes are rich and diversified in content, opening up more local spectrums for free broadcast of more programmes of Mainland TV channels can provide members of the public with more choices of programmes, and is also conducive to their understanding of the Mainland's latest development and culture, their grasp of the national developments, and strengthening their sense of national identity. Regarding free cross-boundary broadcast of Mainland and Hong Kong TV programmes, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has plans at present to open up more local spectrums for free broadcast of more programmes of Mainland TV channels; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if the programmes of the Comprehensive Channel of the China Central Television currently broadcast in Hong Kong and on the Mainland are of the same version; if they are not, of the reasons for that, and whether it has assessed if such an arrangement will reduce the benefit of programme broadcasting; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether it will discuss with the Mainland authorities the improvement measures; and

(3) whether it has plans to assist the operators of Hong Kong TV stations in developing the markets in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and other Mainland cities, so as to broadcast more Hong Kong TV programmes on Mainland TV channels?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong has a vibrant broadcasting sector despite keen competition. Members of the public have access to 12 free television (TV) channels and over 800 satellite and pay TV channels for watching various TV programmes. They may also watch TV programmes from around the world through different platforms, including the Internet.

Hong Kong's broadcasting policy objectives are to promote competition, encourage the broadcasting sector to widen programme choice and diversity, facilitate the sector to introduce innovative broadcasting services and encourage investment in infrastructure and enrichments in content.

Our reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) At present, Hong Kong viewers can watch various TV channels and programmes of China Central Television (CCTV) and other Mainland TV stations through different means. On free TV services, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) provides 24-hour relay of China Central Television Channel 1 (CCTV-1) to Hong Kong through RTHK TV 33. Three commercial domestic free TV broadcasters; namely Fantastic Television Limited, HK Television Entertainment Company Limited and Television Broadcasts Limited; have been providing Mainland-produced TV programmes in different time slots every week according to market needs. In addition, two domestic pay TV broadcasters, namely Hong Kong Cable Television Limited and PCCW Media Limited, also relay 15 channels (Note) from CCTV and other Mainland TV channels.

In addition to those mentioned above, the public may receive over 80 Mainland TV channels free of charge through the satellite TV systems, and watch Mainland TV channels and programmes through other over-the-top TV or Internet platforms. For example, the official website of CCTV also provides real-time live streaming and programme re-runs of multiple channels.

As regards spectrum, the 500 MHz band is used for the provision of local digital TV broadcasting services in Hong Kong. The existing plan provides sufficient spectrum to support local digital TV services and development needs.

(2) Since May 2017, RTHK has relayed CCTV-1 on the digital channel RTHK TV 33 on a 24-hour basis. The contents relayed on this channel are different from the Mainland version as CCTV has arranged for a version suitable for broadcast in Hong Kong having regard to local regulation of TV programmes, such as removing commercial advertisements and contents involving commercial sponsorships.

(3) The Government has been striving to develop the Mainland market, particularly that of the Guangdong Province, for the broadcasting sector. At present, a Hong Kong free TV broadcaster has obtained the landing right in the Guangdong Province to broadcast relevant channels through cable TV networks on the Mainland. Under the Agreement on Trade in Services of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), various liberalisation measures are available to facilitate the Hong Kong broadcasting sector in gaining access to the Mainland market. For example, the Mainland has since June 2020 further relaxed the restrictions on TV programmes jointly produced by Hong Kong and the Mainland, with a view to promoting the exchanges and development in cultural industries of both places. The HKSAR Government will continue its efforts to enable the Hong Kong broadcasting sector to gain access to the Mainland market under more

favourable conditions through CEPA.

Note: The 15 Mainland TV channels are CCTV-News, CCTV-4, CCTV-1, CCTV-11-Opera, CGTN, Pearl River Channel, Dragon TV, Hunan TV International, Hubei TV, CGTN-Documentary, Yicai TV, Shenzhen TV, Southern Television, Sansha TV, and Zhejiang Satellite TV.