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The *Autorité de la concurrence* clears, subject to conditions, the proposed acquisition of sole control of the Est Républicain Group by the Crédit Mutuel

> French version



The *Autorité de la concurrence* has examined the acquisition of the Est Républicain group² by the Banque Fédérative du Crédit Mutuel (BFCM)¹.

Although the BFCM has focused its activities on the banking and insurance markets, the federalist bank is also active in the media sector where it, notably, owns the following regional daily newspapers: L'Alsace-Le Pays, Le Républicain Lorrain, Le Progrès, Le Dauphiné Libéré, Le Journal de la Saône-et-Loire and Le Bien Public.

The Est Républicain group is a player in the press and television sectors. It publishes four regional daily newspapers in the North-East of France: L'Est Républicain, Vosges Matin, Le Journal de la Haute Marne and Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace.

However, the distribution area of these newspapers intersects only in a few limited areas. Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace and L'Alsace-Le Pays are distributed concomitantly in the Haut-Rhin department and in the Sélestat district of the Bas-Rhin department. L'Est Républicain and L'Alsace-Le Pays are distributed concomitantly in the Territory of Belfort.

The *Autorité de la concurrence* notes that the purchaser will hold all the daily regional newspapers in these areas, whereas competition has existed

between these newspapers up to now.

Although the *Autorité de la concurrence* has set aside any risk of a price increase in the areas in question, it considers that **there is a risk that the operation could lead to a homogenization of the content of the newspapers, with a lowering in the quality and diversity of the regional daily newspapers for the consumer/reader as a result.**

Therefore, the *Autorité de la concurrence* has authorized the operation subject to certain commitments enabling the competition problems identified to be remedied.

The commitments: diversity of content, keeping the dedicated chief-editors and guaranteeing the distribution of the acquired daily regional press in the areas concerned.

To ensure that the quality of the newspapers is maintained, the BFCM agrees not to harmonize the content of L'Est Républicain and Le Pays on one hand, and Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace and L'Alsace on the other hand. Only general content (the weather, horse-racing information, television programmes, etc.), i.e. factual information without personal input from the editorial office, which is conveyed to the reader 'as is', can be harmonized. These newspapers will continue to have their own dedicated chief-editors.

Similarly, the BFCM has agreed to continue to distribute Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace and L'Alsace in the Haut-Rhin department and the Sélestat district (Bas-Rhin department) and L'Est Républicain and Le Pays in the Territory of Belfort³, in order to ensure the current diversity of the existing newspapers in the areas in question.

An independent trustee, approved by the *Autorité de la concurrence*, will monitor that the agreements are respected.

(1) Holding Company of the Crédit Mutuel Centre Est Europe group.

(2) After takeover, the BFCM will hold 91.36% of the share capital of the Est Républicain group.

(3) On the condition that distribution of L'Est Républicain in the Territory of Belfort stays at over 10,000 copies per day.

> To consult the complete text of decision 11-DCC-114 of 12 July 2011.

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