

Procedure Number:
CAEU-IW/2026-049

Terms and Conditions and Information
about the Competition (Document 01)
MARLIN Challenge

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Terms and Conditions and Information about the Competition (Document 01)

For the procedure: MARLIN - Maritime Advanced Resilient Link Integration Network
"MARLIN Challenge"

Procedure number: CAEU-IW/2026-049

Organizer of the Competition

Agentur für Innovation in der Cybersicherheit GmbH
Große Steinstraße 19
06108 Halle

Email: MARLIN@cyberagentur.de

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1. Introduction

The Agentur für Innovation in der Cybersicherheit GmbH – „Innovation for Cybersecurity“ (hereinafter: Cyberagentur) is the organizer of the “MARLIN Challenge” competition.

These “**Terms and Conditions and Information about the Competition (Document 01)**” govern the legal framework for the conduct of the competition.

2. Organization of the Competition

This competition is an ideas competition, which can be used not only for design competitions but also in the context of research contracts. Under Section 103 (6) of the Act Against Restraints of Competition (GWB), competitions are procedures designed to assist the client in arriving at a concept or conceptual solution, based on a comparative assessment by a jury, with or without the awarding of prizes. According to EU Directive 2014/24/EU, “competitions ... have traditionally been conducted primarily in the fields of urban and spatial planning, architecture and construction, or data processing. *It should be noted, however, that these flexible instruments could also be used for other purposes.*”

The competition does not, in principle, lead to the award of a public contract, *but merely prepares the ground for a possible subsequent contract award.*

This competition is governed exclusively by the principles of German public procurement law (competition, transparency, and equal treatment). In this respect, all references to German statutory regulations (VgV/VSVgV and UVgO) are not directly applicable.

3. Brief description of the competition task

The fundamental concept of the “MARLIN Challenge” competition is to identify and reward ideas with high innovative or disruptive potential in the field of maritime communication, and to use them as a basis for initiating potential research projects through the Cyberagentur or for direct implementation by the German Navy. The competition is open to individuals as well as research institutions, startups, and companies.

The focus of this competition is the research and development area “Resilient and high-performance Beyond-Line-of-Sight (BLOS) communication for the hybrid fleet.”

Possible areas of focus include novel physical transmission media (e.g. optical communication/lasers), innovative modulation techniques for interference suppression, AI-based signal processing in the electromagnetic spectrum, and technological support such as autonomous relay stations or mobile network nodes. These are merely examples. It is expected that each submitted idea addresses technological sovereignty in the maritime

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domain and ensures a stable, high-speed data connection over a distance of at least 30 NM. In particular, the Concepts must demonstrate resilience against electronic warfare (EW) as well as reliability under challenging maritime environmental conditions (sea state, weather).

We are not seeking ideas for incremental improvements to existing standard radio technologies or conventional satellite communication solutions. The competition is based on a scenario in which traditional communication channels and navigation systems (such as SATCOM or GPS) are completely disrupted, compromised, or unavailable due to hostile action or atmospheric interference.

4. Competition Guidelines

4.1 Prize

The prize in this competition is the conclusion of a contract to develop the idea into a prototype with technical documentation in exchange for a predetermined Remuneration, as well as the opportunity to win additional prize money (see **Section 7** for details). The legal framework will be governed by a contract to be concluded with the finalists (see **Sample of Agreement (Document 03)**).

4.2 Questions regarding the procedure and documents

Questions regarding the procedure and the documents may be submitted via angebote@cyberagentur.de until **June 25, 2026**. The answers will be published on challenge.cyberagentur.de from **June 29, 2026**. If deemed necessary for the competition, questions may also be answered earlier+.

4.3 Eligibility

Eligible to participate in the competition are:

- Natural persons of legal age, as well as
- Legal entities (e.g. universities, research institutions, companies, public bodies, associations, and other types of organizations).

The following are not eligible to participate:

Natural and legal persons from countries on the [list of states maintained by the Federal Ministry of the Interior within the meaning of Section 13\(1\)\(17\) of the Security Clearance Act](#) are not eligible to participate in the competition.

Furthermore, no persons or entities listed in the sanctions list under Council Regulation (EU) No. 269/2014 of March 17, 2014, concerning restrictive measures in view of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine (as amended) may participate.

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Excluded from participating in the competition are employees of the Cyberagentur, members of the Jurys, military personnel involved in the conduct of the competition, and employees of service providers involved in the conduct of the competition.

Competitors against whom an application for the opening of insolvency proceedings has been filed or against whom insolvency proceedings have been opened are also excluded from participating in the competition.

Furthermore, the Cyberagentur reserves the right to exclude participants who violate the terms and conditions of the competition, attempt to disrupt or manipulate the course of the competition, or gain an advantage through the use of unauthorized aids.

4.4 Proof of Participation

Finalists must submit the following current proof of eligibility prior to signing the contract:

- For **natural persons**: Proof of identity
- For **legal entities**: Extract from the relevant register or a comparable register in accordance with the legal provisions of the respective country in which the legal entity is domiciled
- For **universities**: The university's constitution or a comparable document in accordance with the laws of the respective country in which the university is located

The documents must be submitted in German or accompanied by a German translation.

4.5 How can I participate?

The idea descriptions in the form of a Brief Concept must be submitted exclusively electronically and in German or English to angebote@cyberagentur.de by no later than **July 2, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.** Brief Concepts submitted late will be excluded from this competition and cannot be considered in the selection of finalists.

Submissions by mail (letter post) are not accepted.

4.6 Number of entries

Competitors may submit multiple Brief Concepts with different ideas via angebote@cyberagentur.de.

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5. Competition Dates and Schedule

5.1 Dates

By July 2, 2026, 2:00 p.m. (CEST)	Submission of ideas in the form of a Brief Concept
July 6, 2026 – July 17, 2026	Evaluation of the Brief Concepts by the Jury and selection of the six best ideas / finalists
July 20, 2026 – July 24, 2026	Discussions with finalists and planning
July 27, 2026 – August 3, 2026	Signing of contracts
August 3, 2026 – December 7, 2026	Work Phase I – Development of solutions
December 7, 2026 – December 11, 2026	Interim experiments/tests as part of OPEX FCSS 2026 – Disruption and Detection Scenario in Eckernförde
December 11, 2026 – February 1, 2027	Work Phase II – Incorporation of the results from OPEX FCSS 2026 – Jamming and Detection Scenario and finalization of the solutions
February 1, 2027 – February 12, 2027	Review of the final prototypes and technical documentation by the Grand-Jury
February 15, 2027 – February 19, 2027	Technical review and Pre-Tests
February 22, 2027 – February 26, 2027	Final demonstration of the prototypes and award ceremony by the Grand-Jury

The Cyberagentur reserves the right to change dates for organizational or technical reasons. Competitors will be informed of any changes immediately.

5.2 Competition Schedule

The announcement will be made on **May 11, 2026**. Ideas may be submitted until **July 2, 2026**. The competition is divided into six project stages.

Stage 1 Submission of Brief Concepts (until July 2, 2026)

In Stage 1 of the competition, participants have time to develop a written Brief Concept for their idea and submit it via angebote@cyberagentur.de. Stage 1 of the competition involves the preparation of a Brief Concept in the form of a coherent, comprehensible, and scientifically convincing brief presentation of the idea with reference to the key content areas outlined in the **Tender Specification (Document 02)**. The Brief Concept should outline the technological approach and its innovative content.

Stage 2: Evaluation and Selection (July 6 – July 17, 2026)

In the subsequent Stage 2 of the competition, all submitted Brief Concept will be formally reviewed to ensure they meet the minimum legal and content requirements. All Brief Concepts

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that pass this review will be evaluated by a Jury comprising representatives from the Cyberagentur, the German Armed Forces (German Navy), and BWI GmbH, who will award points based on criteria specified and disclosed in **Section 6.2**.

The Brief Concepts with the highest scores will be subject to a redundancy check regarding projects already funded by the Federal Republic of Germany. Brief Concepts that do not pass this redundancy check will be eliminated from the competition.

By **August 3, 2026**, three to six competitors with the highest scores who have passed the redundancy check will receive an offer to enter into a contract for the implementation phase. If a competitor does not wish to participate in the final round, the Cyberagentur reserves the right to have the competitor with the next highest score take their place. At the end of Phase 2, the competitors (finalists) will be determined who will have the opportunity to develop their solution approach, as outlined in the Brief Concept, into a functional demonstrator (Target Maturity Level TRL 6).

Stage 3: Work Phase (August 3, 2026 – February 1, 2027)

In this phase, the finalists will further develop their ideas from the Brief Concepts into **Solution Concepts** in the form of a functional prototype (demonstrator) as well as accompanying documentation. The requirements for the prototype and accompanying documentation are set out in detail in the **Tender Specification (Document 02), Section 5.2, Table 2 (Stage 3)**. During this period, the finalists will be supported by the Cyberagentur's competition team as well as by mentors from the German Navy. During the Work Phase, the finalists will test their solutions as part of OPEX FCSS 2026 from December 7–12, 2026, in Eckernförde. Subsequently, there will be an opportunity to incorporate the insights gained into the final prototypes by **February 1, 2027**. The Solution Concepts must be submitted by **February 1, 2027**.

Stage 4: Pre-Test Days (February 15–19, 2027)

Technical Pre-Tests will take place in Eckernförde prior to the final demonstration of the prototypes. During Stage 4, measurement data will be collected and the basic functionality of the prototypes will be tested to ensure smooth integration and testing in the German Navy's test environment. The Pre-Tests serve as quality assurance for the subsequent validation under real-world conditions.

Stage 5: Demonstration – Demo Days (tentatively February 22–26, 2027)

The competition will conclude with the **"Demo Days"** in Eckernförde. During this event, the prototypes will be validated under operational conditions in a realistic maritime test environment ("sandbox") provided by the German Navy.

During the Demo Days, a realistic operational scenario will be set up that reflects the core of the challenge: establishing stable and interference-free BLOS communication between two German Navy units. A German Navy command unit in an operations centre on land (on the coast) must transmit an operational order to a manned unit at sea (such as an FCSS (Future

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Combat Surface System)). Due to the crisis scenario at hand, no satellite-based communication channels are available. Likewise, radio communications are jammed by enemy electronic warfare (EW) assets. The scenario is intended to reflect a realistic communication challenge in a crisis situation. During the demo days, the teams will have time to technically test, adapt, and further develop their systems or Solution Concepts under the given situational and interference conditions.

Stage 6: Grand-Jury Decision (expected February 24, 2027)

On the final day of the Demo Days, a structured exercise sequence will take place in which the developed prototypes are tested under live conditions. Based on the results of this live testing, the submitted accompanying documentation, and the final presentation, the Grand-Jury will evaluate the finalists' **Solution Concepts** according to criteria specified and disclosed in **Section 6.2**. The **Solution Concept** with the highest score wins the competition.

The Cyberagentur and the Federal Republic of Germany shall be granted exclusive, worldwide, and unlimited rights of use to the Concepts of the finalists. The Cyberagentur and the Federal Republic of Germany may exploit the Solution Concepts in any manner whatsoever, including all known and unknown forms of use.

Competitors will be informed of their ranking on the day of the award ceremony. The award ceremony is tentatively scheduled for **February 24, 2027**, in Eckernförde.

6. Examination and Grading – Brief Concepts and Solution Concepts

The examination and evaluation of both Brief Concept and Solution Concept takes place in a two-step process:

In the first step, each Concept is **checked** for compliance with **the minimum formal and content requirements** (see **Section 6.1**). Concepts that do not meet the minimum formal and content requirements are eliminated from the competition.

Concepts that meet the minimum formal and content requirements are **evaluated qualitatively** in a second step (see **Sections 6.2 and 6.3**).

- The qualitative evaluation of **the Brief Concepts** submitted in Stage 1 is conducted in Stage 2 by a Jury of experts comprising representatives from the Cyberagentur, the German Armed Forces (German Navy) and BWI GmbH.
- From the **Solution Concepts** developed in Stage 3 and demonstrated in Stage 5 by the finalists, the Grand-Jury will select the Winning Concept.

Jury members and judges of the Grand-Jury are independent.

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6.1 Review of minimum formal and content requirements

6.1.1 Formal Requirements

The formal review of the Brief Concepts and Solution Concepts will be conducted in accordance with the requirements outlined below and their fulfilment, taking into account the guidelines set forth in the **Tender Specification (Document 02), Section 5, Table 1 (Stage 1) and Table 2 (Stage 3)**. Brief Concepts or Solution Concepts written and submitted in any other format will not be considered.

6.1.2 Content Requirements

The **Brief Concept** must address at least the following aspects:

- Technical Solution Approach
- Innovative content and disruptive potential
- Operational relevance
- Feasibility
- Presentation of the project team

For details, please refer to **Section 5, Table 1, No. 6 of the Tender Specification (Document 02)**.

The **Solution Concept** must include at least the following components:

- Prototype (hardware/software)
- Accompanying documentation and materials:
 - Technical documentation
 - Presentation materials

Additional materials that illustrate how the prototype works are optional.

6.1.2.1 Own Work and Use of AI

The Brief Concepts must represent the Competitors' own personal intellectual contributions or, in the case of legal entities, those of their governing bodies or employees. The use of subcontractors is not permitted. The use of tools such as ChatGPT or other AI-based applications for writing texts is permitted only for linguistic correction.

If AI is used not merely as a tool, for example, for purely linguistic correction, but instead takes over significant parts of the work itself, this constitutes a breach of the minimum requirements. The Brief Concepts are a key criterion for the course of the competition. The rigorous selection process is designed to identify the best Brief Concepts from among the Brief Concepts submitted by Competitors with the relevant skills.

For this reason, there is a duty of transparency. This means that it must be clearly stated exactly where and how specific AI systems (e.g. LLMs) have been used. The exact scope and the affected parts must be apparent to the Cyberagentur.

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6.1.2.2 Prohibition on Publication and Disclosure

Competitors may not publish or disclose the submitted ideas to third parties until they have been eliminated from the competition, even if such ideas are not eligible for protection under intellectual property rights (such as patent rights or copyright). The terms of the agreement apply to the finalists.

6.1.2.3 Non-compliance with requirements

Should the Cyberagentur subsequently become aware that one of the Brief Concepts does not meet the requirements set forth in **Sections 6.1.2.1 – 6.1.2.3**, it reserves the right to retroactively revoke the award and reclaim any remuneration and prize money. Further claims by the Cyberagentur remain unaffected.

6.2 Qualitative Evaluation Criteria

The following qualitative evaluation criteria will be used to evaluate the **Brief Concepts** and **Solution Concepts**:

- Degree of Innovation & Disruptiveness
- Operational Benefits
- Technical Concept & Feasibility
- Team expertise & resources

1. Degree of innovation & disruptiveness (weighting: 40%)

The innovativeness of an idea is characterized by the expected research progress as well as a significant methodological innovation compared to current BLOS communication methods. In particular, the future viability of the technology over a 10- to 15-year time horizon is evaluated, with a focus on adaptability to future geopolitical threat scenarios and the ability to counter enemy electronic warfare capabilities. A key element here is the disruptive potential, defined by the transformative potential relative to established technologies, to fundamentally revolutionize existing maritime operational patterns and the command and control of hybrid fleets.

2. Operational Benefits (Weighting: 30%)

The benefit to Germany's External Security is defined by the advantage it provides for maintaining national resilience and sovereignty in contested maritime areas such as the Baltic Sea or the North Atlantic. The submitted idea must describe a capability that contributes to international stability and threat mitigation within the framework of German security interests, with a focus on the requirements of the German Naval Command (MarKdo), the Cyber and Information Space Command (KdoCIR), and BWI GmbH as the primary stakeholders. In particular, the evaluation will assess the extent to which the research results can be translated into concrete applications for the end-users and integrated into the existing maritime IT architecture.

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3. Technical Concept & Feasibility (Weighting: 20%)

The feasibility of the idea is assessed based on a scientifically and technically sound and plausible presentation of the chosen approach. In this context, the submitted time and resource plan is reviewed for the establishment of meaningful milestones to evaluate the likelihood of success in creating a functional demonstrator with a maturity level of TRL 4–6 within the planned work phase.

4. Team Expertise & Resources (Weighting: 10%)

This criterion evaluates the Competitors demonstrated technical qualifications in relevant disciplines such as communications engineering, photonics, or maritime systems, as well as the availability of the necessary human and material resources to successfully complete the project within the specified framework.

6.3 Evaluation and Selection Process

6.3.1 Evaluation of Jury of Brief Concepts (Stage 2)

In Stage 2, the Brief Concepts submitted in Stage 1 of the competition are first reviewed to ensure they meet the minimum formal and content requirements.

All submitted Brief Concepts that have met the minimum formal and content requirements (see **Section 6.1**) will be evaluated by a Jury of experts. The Jury consists of representatives from the Cyberagentur, the German Armed Forces (German Navy), and BWI GmbH.

The Jury will award points for each of the qualitative evaluation criteria listed in **Section 6.2**. These points will be added together to form a total score.

If a third or more of the Jury members award 0 points for at least one criterion, that Brief Concept is eliminated from the competition. If different competitors submit identical or very similar ideas, only the Brief Concept with the highest score advances. In the event of a tie, a Jury meeting will determine which Brief Concept will proceed where the ideas are the same or very similar. If the Jury cannot reach a decision, the matter will be decided by lot.

The proposed solutions presented in the Brief Concepts with the highest total score will be checked for redundancy (see **Section 5.2**). After passing the redundancy check, the three to six Competitors with the highest total score will receive one of a maximum of six contracts and the opportunity to develop the submitted Brief Concept into a detailed Solution Concept within **25 weeks**. In the event of a tie, the three to six best Brief Concepts will be determined during a Jury meeting. If the Jury cannot agree on the best three to six Brief Concepts, lots will be drawn to decide which Brief Concepts go through to the final round.

If any of the selected contestants does not wish to participate in the final round, the Cyberagentur reserves the right to have the contestant with the next highest score take their place.

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6.3.2 Grand-Jury Assessment (Stage 6)

The submitted Solution Concepts that meet the minimum formal and content requirements (see **Section 6.1**) will be evaluated by the Grand-Jury. The Grand-Jury will determine the Winning Concept of the “MARLIN Challenge” competition.

The final assessment by the Grand-Jury at the end of the Demo Days is based, amongst other things, on practical validation in the sandbox. This involves testing the functionality under real-world conditions (range ≥ 30 NM, data rate) as well as the system’s robustness in the face of active hostile jamming and challenging environmental conditions. The ability to integrate into future IT architectures is also taken into account in the decision.

The members of the Grand-Jury are:

- Prof. Dr. Christian Hummert
- Oberst i. G. Sönke Marahrens
- Flottillenadmiral David Helmbold

Evaluation by each member of the Grand-Jury

The evaluation and assessment of the Solution Concepts is conducted via a weighted ranking analysis based on the four specific criteria: “Degree of Innovation & Disruptiveness,” “Operational Benefit,” “Technical Concept & Feasibility,” and “Team Expertise & Resources.” Each of the four criteria is assigned an individual weighting.

The assessment of the Solution Concepts is recorded in a ranking list. The structure of the ranking list is shown in **Table 2**.

The members of the Grand-Jury assign rankings from 1 to 6 to the Solution Concepts for each criterion. This **ranking** is multiplied by the respective weighting (0.4, 0.3, 0.2, or 0.1) to obtain a **Weighted Individual Rank (WIR)** for each criterion. The Weighted Individual Ranks of the four criteria are added together for each Solution Concept to form a **Weighted Total Rank**.

Overall Standings

The overall result of the Solution Concepts (rank 1 to 6) is calculated as the average of the Weighted Total Ranks of all members of the Grand-Jury.

The Solution Concept with the lowest average rank wins the “MARLIN Challenge” competition, provided that the margin over the next-ranked Solution Concepts is at least 0.3.

If the minimum margin of 0.3 is not met, and a ranking cannot therefore be clearly determined, the ranking will be decided during a meeting of the Grand-Jury. If the Grand-Jury cannot agree on a ranking of the Solution Concepts, the Cyberagentur reserves the right to determine the ranking.

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EVALUATION CRITERIA	Weighting		SOLUTION CONCEPT 1	SOLUTION CONCEPT 2	...	SOLUTION CONCEPT 6
DEGREE OF INNOVATION & DISRUPTIVENESS	0.4	Rank				
		WIR				
OPERATIONAL BENEFIT	0.3	Rank				
		WIR				
TECHNICAL CONCEPT & FEASIBILITY	0.2	Ranking				
		WIR				
TEAM EXPERTISE & RESOURCES	0.1	Ranking				
		WIR				
TOTAL RANK						

Table 2 Sample Ranking (Evaluation by each Member of Grand-Jury)

7. Compensation for expenses, prizes and award ceremony

The finalists will receive a compensation for expenses of 40,000 EUR (net) for their submitted Solution Concept, which meets the formal and content requirements. In addition, the top three finalists will receive a prize money.

The Winning Concept will receive 100,000 EUR (net) in prize money. Second and third place will be determined based on the second- and third-lowest average rank and will receive prize money of 50,000 EUR (net) for second place and 30,000 EUR (net) for third place.

The finalists will not learn their rankings until the day of the awards ceremony. The awards ceremony is scheduled for February 2027 in Eckernförde.

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8. Rights of Use

8.1 Rights to Brief Concepts

The rights to the Brief Concepts that are not selected for development into a Solution Concept remain with the competitors. The Brief Concepts will not be published by the Cyberagentur and will only be used to the extent necessary for the conduct of the competition.

The Cyberagentur will delete the submitted Brief Concepts as well as any copies made for the purpose of conducting the competition after the competition has ended.

8.2 Rights to Solution Concepts

The finalists will further develop their Brief Concepts into Solution Concepts on the basis of a contract in exchange for remuneration. Under the terms of the contract, they grant the Cyberagentur and the Federal Republic of Germany an exclusive, worldwide right of use the solutions (prototypes, technical documentation, and technological basis) with no restrictions as duration and content. The Cyberagentur and the Federal Republic of Germany may exploit the solutions in any known or unknown manner (see **Sample of Agreement (Document 03)**).

8.3 Freedom from third-party intellectual property rights

By submitting their Brief Concept and/or Solution Concept, the Competitors affirm that they hold all necessary rights to the submitted Concepts and all rights to the submitted texts and graphics, and that no third-party rights exist. Third-party content must be clearly identified.

9. Cancellation of the Competition

As the organizer, the Cyberagentur reserves the right to cancel the competition at any time for good cause and to suspend or terminate it at any time. This applies in particular in cases of force majeure or if the competition cannot be held or continued for other organizational, technical, or legal reasons. The Cyberagentur will make use of this option in particular if, for technical reasons (e.g. viruses, manipulation) or legal reasons, the proper conduct of the competition cannot be guaranteed. In such a case, the competitors shall have no claims against the Cyberagentur.

If the Cyberagentur terminates the competition after the contract has been signed, the finalists may be reimbursed for costs that can no longer be avoided. At the Cyberagentur's request, all rights under **Section 8.2** to the Brief Concept and the Solution Concept, in the version existing at the time of cancellation, shall remain with the Cyberagentur and the Federal Republic of Germany in exchange for appropriate compensation. The detailed provisions can be found in **Sample of Agreement (Document 03)**.

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10. Data Protection

Personal data will be handled in accordance with the **Privacy Policy for Competitions (Document 04)**.

11. Liability

As the organizer, the Cyberagentur is liable for any resulting damages only to the extent that such damages are attributable to intentional or grossly negligent conduct on the part of the Cyberagentur, a legal representative, or a vicarious agent.

In addition, the Cyberagentur is also liable for breaches of cardinal obligations resulting from simple negligence. Cardinal obligations are those whose fulfilment is essential for the proper conduct of the competition and the achievement of the contractual and competitive purpose, and on whose compliance the competitors may reasonably rely. This limitation of liability applies in particular to damages arising from errors, delays, or interruptions in the transmission of data; malfunctions of technical equipment or the service; incorrect content; loss or deletion of data; viruses; or any other issues arising from the use of the application.

Any further liability for damages is excluded.

Liability for culpable injury to life, limb, or health in accordance with statutory provisions remains unaffected.

12. Miscellaneous

The terms and conditions of participation are governed by the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany, excluding the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods. Legal recourse is excluded. Where English texts are also provided, these are for information purposes only. They have no legal force. Only the German version is legally binding.

There is no legal entitlement to the prize of this competition or to the specific implementation of the submitted ideas.

If any of these provisions are or become invalid or unenforceable, the validity of the remaining terms and conditions shall remain unaffected.