



Sir David Tweedie
International Accounting Standards Board
30 Cannon Street
UK – London EC4M 6XH

Luxembourg, February 22nd, 2011

Re.: Comment letter in response to IASB ED/2010/13: Hedge Accounting

RTL Group

RTL Group – the leading European entertainment network

With 40 television channels and 33 radio stations in ten countries, RTL Group is the leading European entertainment network. The Luxembourg-based company operates TV channels and radio stations in Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Spain, Greece, Russia, Hungary and Croatia. It is one of the world's leading producers of television content such as talent and game shows, drama, daily soaps and telenovelas, including *Idols*, *Got Talent*, *The X Factor*, *Good Times - Bad Times* and *Family Feud*.

RTL Group's response

1. General comment

We welcome the IASB's project to improve and simplify IAS 39 and undertake a fundamental review of the standard. RTL GROUP agrees with the overall objectives of the exposure draft, being to align hedge accounting more closely with the risk management activities, establish a more objective based approach of hedge accounting and address inconsistencies and weaknesses in the current hedge accounting standard. IAS 39 has widely been regarded as unduly complex and often leading to unrepresentative accounting outcomes. We believe that hedging is an economic activity and that hedge accounting should be designed to reflect the economic reality of risk management

Many of the rules related to hedge accounting were drafted to prevent abuse. We believe that these strict anti-abuse provisions encourage constituents to structure transactions to avoid running afoul of these rules. As a result, the treasury community has experienced a worrying trend in recent years, of risk management activities often being structured sub-optimally to fit within the strict guidelines of IAS 39. In addition, compliance requires significant time and effort which is disproportional to the benefit obtained. Although we recognize that there have to be controls over the application of hedge accounting, we believe that this control would best be accomplished through use of professional judgment rather than rules based standards.

Notwithstanding the comments above RTL GROUP agrees with the objectives of the Board. It is felt that IASB had taken the right approach in not starting 'with a blank page' but focusing on patching up the current framework. In general the changes proposed by the Board are welcomed, as they bring accounting closer to the risk management strategy of non-financial companies and simplify hedge accounting rules..

RTL GROUP hopes that the IASB will consider that the concerns expressed in this comment letter are essential, to allow the hedge accounting part of the new IFRS 9 standard to be better tailored to meet the requirements of practical financial risk management approaches and strategies of non-financial companies.

RTL GROUP wanted to make comments on what should be changed in the interest of reducing complexity.

2. Qualifying for hedge accounting

a. *Voluntary de-designation prohibited*

RTL GROUP does not agree with the proposed prohibition on de-designation, for the following reasons:

- This is not in line with current risk management market practice for example when a company enters into a cash flow hedge for forecasted sales in foreign currency. As the aim of risk management strategy is to protect its cash flows, the hedging horizon would be until settlement of the invoice. However, hedge accounting would only be applied until the moment the sales invoice becomes an on-balance sheet item, after which the company obtains a natural offset in the income statement through the revaluation of both hedged item and hedging instrument.
- RTL GROUP feels that this rule could be circumvented by applying the strategy of taking an opposite derivative position, and applying hedge accounting on the whole structure. Hence we do not see the benefit of this prohibition.
- RTL GROUP has difficulty in applying this concept to situations of net investment hedges. Voluntary de-designation should be permissible for net investment hedges if a partial/total reduction of hedge occurs. If a corporate has an investment in a company and, for whatever reason, the amount of the investment is partially or totally reduced, then the hedge should be de-designated and unwound in order to avoid profit and loss effects. Furthermore, if the risk

management objectives change and the company decides to reduce the amount of net investment hedges in place, these hedges should be de-designated and then unwound.

- There is a general consensus among our members that de-designation flexibility is needed and required to more closely align hedge accounting to the risk management strategy. It is also important to state that de-designation is allowed when changes in the risk management policies take place, therefore reinforcing the idea that voluntary de-designation is closely tied to risk management, which is dynamic and therefore should be permitted.

b. Mandatory rebalancing

RTL GROUP is pleased that the arbitrary 80-125% rule is to be removed; however it is felt that it is unnecessary to introduce mandatory rebalancing, for the following reasons:

- This represents a lack of confidence in risk management, whereas the risk management strategy and results need to be disclosed in the financial statements and defended towards auditors and investors
- Rebalancing is the core responsibility of risk management, which is a serious profession with applicable standards and controls in place
- This will not be equal for every company, as each of them has to deal with different circumstances
- If a company were to rebalance, this would mean in practice a need to recognize ineffectiveness into profit and loss, which would yield the same result
- If a company were to set the optimal ratio incorrectly, the resulting ineffectiveness would need to be recorded in the income statement anyway

RTL GROUP believes that this would not reduce complexity but would instead increase it. For example, how to define the optimal ratio? Different risk managers will reach different conclusions, as this is not a matter of fact but rather based on interpretation and differing models or views of the market. Another example would be how to deal with a gradual change in hedging ratio. Gradual changes in the hedging ratio can imply de-designation when the hedge has to be adjusted to a lower ratio, whereas when the hedge has to be increased this can be done entering into a new hedge.

c. Calculation of ineffectiveness using discounted spot

In general RTL GROUP agrees with the need to include time value in the ineffectiveness calculation; however this should not be made mandatory. We consider that this would give rise to unnecessary ineffectiveness in some circumstances e.g. when using short term rolling forward contracts, whereby the intent is to hedge the undiscounted spot component but not the interest component. In currencies with very high interest rates (for example emerging markets currencies), the ineffectiveness amount tends to be larger. Therefore, we would rather propose to allow the use of undiscounted spot in some circumstances.

3. Hedge items – components of non-financial items

a. Separately identifiable and reliably measurable

RTL GROUP supports the proposed changes, but at the same time believes that the Board should elaborate further the concept of separately identifiable and reliably measurable, setting a range of examples in order to avoid arbitrariness. In terms of the eligibility of the implicit risk, it is proposed that each company should be able to decide whether an implicit risk is an eligible hedge item, based on the correlation and overall risk management strategy; however it should also be required to provide sufficient disclosures on this in the notes to the financial statements, and therefore enable users to understand the nature of the strategy. Hence in cases where it is difficult to measure the implicit

component, we would make the assumption that the hedge relationship would be 100% effective, and that to be consistent with the risk management strategy, the hedging result should be taken when the hedged item affects the income statement. This simple and pragmatic approach is proposed because it is difficult to imagine a way to determine any ineffectiveness on the hedged implicit risk.

b. Designation of a layer component of the nominal amount

RTL Group supports the IABS's proposed changes.

c. Designated component must be less than or equal to the total cash flows

RTL GROUP disagrees with this restriction. We believe that if the components are present, they should be entitled to the same hedging possibilities. In instances where a commodity is quoted or priced at a discount to the futures price, the exchange-traded amount should still qualify as a component that can be hedged.

4. Hedge items – groups and net positions

a. Income statement presentation

RTL GROUP does not agree with the proposed changes, as it believes this leads to misleading/meaningless numbers in the income statement as it represents only part of the profit and loss impact of those items being hedge accounted. We would propose to gross up the net resultant profit and loss impact in a manner similar to creating synthetic derivatives. This would be the only way to truly reflect the risk management rationale behind hedging sales and purchases on a net basis.

This approach furthermore ensures conceptual alignment with the hedging of a gross group of dissimilar items (which also includes opposite movements), where here it would be acceptable to gross up the result. For example, if we use a FTSE100 index option to hedge a portfolio of FTSE100 shares, which perfectly replicate the index, the portfolio shares will offset the option perfectly, although the individual shares in this portfolio might move in different directions. What should be recycled when one of the shares is sold? In our opinion, if you do not gross up the net result on the index option (i.e. allocation of hedging gains and losses to individual share according to how much they moved by) then you do not know how much to release when a single share is sold.

b. Same period

We disagree with the proposed changes, as from a risk management perspective treasurers generally hedge the cash flow in a defined period and not the profit and loss. Given the overall objective to align hedge accounting with the risk management strategy the ability to net hedge account even where items impact the profit and loss in different reporting periods should not be prohibited. Any restriction in periods would create a restriction on hedge accounting that in no way reflects the risk management strategy.

To conclude, RTL GROUP welcomes the proposed changes, however it believes they do not go far enough as most cases of net position hedging are related to the hedging of sales and purchases in foreign currency, which typically does not occur in the same month.

5. Hedging with options

It is agreed that these are positive changes, as they bring IFRS closer to US GAAP. RTL GROUP agrees with the fact that the premium has to be reflected in the underlying whether it is sales, purchases or interest. For period-related hedges, it was felt that the correct period for amortization should be the entire life of the underlying taking into account amortizing schedules. In terms of transition period, RTL GROUP would encourage more clarity.

6. Presentation and disclosures

a. *Fair value hedge model*

We do not see the benefits of grossing up OCI, for the following reasons:

- In spite of helpfulness of more comprehensive disclosures, it is not useful for investors to have this information on the face of the balance sheet
- This approach adds unnecessary complexity

b. *Cash flow hedge model – mandatory basis adjustment*

RTL GROUP does not agree that this should be made mandatory. Mainly for operational reasons it would be preferable to allow the current flexibility of choosing whether to make the basis adjustment or not (e.g. inventory systems are not designed to deal with this adjustment).

c. *Cash flow hedge model – recycling out of equity*

This is not considered a useful change, as it adds unnecessary complexity. Also, cash flow results should be considered as a higher or lower cost of the hedged item.

d. *Disclosures*

There is a general concern regarding the disclosure of commercially sensitive information. This issue is particularly prevalent in corporations reporting under IFRS and where key competitors are private companies and hence not required to provide detailed numerical of hedges in place impacting future periods and average hedged rates. Disclosing quantitative hedged amounts and rates is an area of commercial sensibility. Furthermore, we do not think such disclosures are compatible with the fiduciary duty of Directors to protect shareholder's interests.

Eventually, RTL GROUP would like to re-emphasize the need for convergence between US GAAP and IFRS rules on financial instruments accounting. We keep thinking that they remain significant divergences with FASB proposed hedge accounting rules. It should be a priority of both Boards to converge as far as possible their rules.

We thank you for considering these comments before finalizing IFRS 9 – Hedge Accounting part.

Sincerely yours,



F. Masquelier
SVP Treasury, Corporate Finance & ERM