

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad

Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

Band: 20 (1993)

Heft: 2

Artikel: Journalists at the service of the Fifth Switzerland

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907410>

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Journalists at the service of the Fifth Switzerland

Since last year, it's been possible for Swiss Abroad to voice their opinions through postal votes. This of course demands that they be informed about Swiss affairs regularly and fully and no one can do it better than Swiss Radio International (SRI) which broadcasts daily around the world.

A large part of our audience tunes in to us once a day at a particular time. In a way, it's the listener's date with Switzerland and this approach explains our information policy: our programmes are conceived in such a way that they reflect events of the previous 24 hours in Switzerland and the world. In our European programme on shortwave and satellite we offer not only our own broadcasts but also relays of regional programmes (French, Italian and German language Swiss radio).

Informing the Swiss Abroad

The means at our disposal in the SRI French, German and Italian services are relatively modest in terms of personnel and budget. We produce a daily news magazine five days a week, sometimes more in exceptional cases, with national and international coverage. Normally, weekends are devoted to feature programmes. In Europe, the French programme also offers a one-hour live broadcast called Azimuts. This magazine provides a portrait of Switzerland and its cultures based on reports and talks with studio guests.

One of the SRI mandates is the regular supply of information to Swiss either travelling or living abroad and to cement their links with their native country. This task has taken on particular importance since July 1, 1992, the date that Swiss Abroad could begin to vote by postal ballot.

National events at a glance

To ensure that we fulfil this mission, SRI broadcasts daily programmes of national news particularly for Swiss wherever they may be in the world. The idea is to provide as wide a scope of information and opinion as possible, in a way that lets our compatriots abroad understand clearly developments in the

country and exercise their civic duty intelligently when the occasion arises. But life in Switzerland is more than politics and that's why we also broadcast items with specific themes or magazines covering a wide range of subjects: economics, science, culture, health, tourism, sport and contact programmes.

A disparate public

One of our difficulties lies in the fact that our public is far from homogenous. It's made up of Swiss who travel abroad regularly and who make a habit of

Dieter Schmid, SRI reporter, interviewing André Daguet, General Secretary of the Swiss Social Democratic Party, about the election of a new member of the federal government on March 3, 1993.
(Photo: SRI)

keeping in touch with events back home. There are the Swiss of dual nationality and there are second or third generation Swiss Abroad. And then you can add to this mix the non-Swiss who listen to our "national" broadcasts because they're interested in what's happening in this country. SRI keeps you up-to-date with a 24-hour news service which produces bulletins in English and which are adapted by the individual language services.

Commentaries, analyses or interviews which follow the news must, however, take a certain distance from minute-by-minute developments. We want to provide a well-chosen review of current affairs, national, international, political, economic, and whatever else reflects society.

International events and how to treat them are the subject of a daily editorial meeting between representatives of the various language services and our editor in chief. We try to treat major topics or problems in as universal a way as possible whether they are Swiss or common to other countries.

In many spheres, we feel that Switzerland has something particular to offer listeners. Not having a colonial past nor a vital interest in most of the conflicts which are raging, Switzerland is freer to express its opinion.

In brief this is a challenge we have to meet each day!

*Dominique Boillat (French Progr.)
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