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Autor: Plomb, Georges
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The Swiss press

Newspapers decimated

In the last few years the Swiss press landscape has drastically changed. Newspapers disappear, mergers are in and it leaves the politicians cold.

Amazing the movement of concentration in the Swiss press since the beginning of the 1990s! Mergers, creation of joint routes, launchings of publicity or editorial pools have succeeded each other at an unequalled

*Georges Plomb **

speed. Press groups and alliances of a size without precedent have been extending their empires. Titles sometimes more than one century-old have become weak or have disappeared. The three main linguistic regions have been struck by the same whip.

A third of titles disappear

Lets look at French-speaking Switzerland. In less than ten years it has lost one third of its independent titles. The big spectacle merger of the "Journal de Genève" (born in 1826) and of the "Nouveau Quotidien" (born in 1991) crowns – if we may use the expression – an uninterrupted session of coups de théâtre:

- 1991. The "Journal de Genève" swallows the "Gazette de Lausanne".
- 1991 also. "The Nouvelle Revue de Lausanne" abandons its daily publication.
- 1992. "L'Est Vaudois" de Montreux swallows up "Vevey Riviera" and becomes "La Presse Riviera Chablais".
- 1993. "Le Démocrate" of Delémont and "Le Pays" of Porrentruy form "Le Quotidien Jurassien".
- 1994. "La Suisse" of Geneva disappears body and soul.
- 1996. "L'Express" of Neuchâtel and "L'Impartial" of La Chaux-de-Fonds are only two regional editions of a single newspaper.
- 1998. "Journal de Genève" and "Nouveau Quotidien" unite their forces to become "Le Temps".

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Edipresse takes a half

Worse! One press group – Edipresse, owned by the Lamunière family – controls a good half of what remains. It dominates "24 Heures" and "Le Matin" (both of Lausanne), as well as, since 1991, the "Tribune de Genève". It also possesses important holdings in the "Nouvelliste" (of Sion), "Le Quotidien Jurassien" and "Le Temps". It also publishes various periodicals and is pursuing its expansion abroad. As a counter-weight, six regional dailies – "La Liberté" (of Fribourg), the "Journal du Jura" (of Biel), as well as the "Nouvelliste", "Le Quotidien Jurassien", "L'Impartial" and "L'Express" – form the publicity and editorial pool Romandie Combi. That has never been seen before.

The crisis and its competitors

The economic crisis of the 1990s – which led to a drop in advertising income – is largely to blame for this acceleration. We can add the merciless competition of radio and television channels, the arrival of new media such as Teletext, Videotext and even more so Internet. It is a long time since the written press held the ground alone.

German-speaking Switzerland: a newspaper per region

German-speaking Switzerland was not less affected. Entire regions no longer have more than one single daily newspaper – sometimes surrounded by satellite editions. Examples: the "Neue Luzerner Zeitung" (Luzern and Central Switzerland), the "Aargauer Zeitung" (Aargau), the "Neue Mittellandzeitung" (Solothurn and surroundings), the "Südostschweiz" (Grisons and surroundings), the "St. Galler Tagblatt" (St. Gall and surroundings). It was the big Basle merger of 1977, that which produced the "Basler Zeitung", which was the starting pistol twenty years earlier. In parallel, 4 giant press groups increased and embellished themselves – from which Ringier (with "Blick" and numerous periodicals, in-

cluding "L'Hebdo" and "L'Illustré" in French, the "Tages Anzeiger" (with "Facts", the "SonntagsZeitung" and others), the "Basler Zeitung" (with the "Weltwoche", "Bilanz", ...), the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (with "Bund", the "St. Galler Tagblatt", ...)

Ticino: from 7 to 3

Italian-speaking Switzerland: It too falls on its head. In 1990, it had seven dailies, today there are only three left:



Eric Hoesli, Editor in Chief of "Le Temps", the product of a merger. (Photo: Keystone)

the "Corriere del Ticino" of the Soldati family (which calls itself independent of parties and of the Church), "La Regione" of the Salvioni family (fairly near to the radicals) and the "Giornale del Popolo" (the paper of the bishopric of Lugano). The others have been transformed into periodicals or have disappeared. As to the thundering "Mattino della Domenica", it has become a free Sunday newspaper launched by the populist Ligue des Tessinois. Amongst the rare pieces of good news, we may greet the launching of the first daily in the Romansh language in history, "La Quotidiana". And this is not nothing.

The politicians don't care

In brief the daily written press in Switzerland – much more than the periodical written press – has its back to the wall. The political world so far has shown itself strangely indifferent. A law on cartels has been passed which considers itself very vigilant about mergers. But it has not put the brakes. How long must we wait? ■

*Georges Plomb is an editor at the Fribourg daily "La Liberté".