

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 30 (2003)
Heft: 4

Artikel: The "Voice of Switzerland" must not be silenced
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907391>

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The "Voice of Switzerland" must not be silenced

The Federal Council intends to gradually cut subsidies for swissinfo/Schweizer Radio International and replace them by higher fees. Director Nicolas Lombard is shocked.

SWISS REVIEW: Were you prepared for the bad news from the Federal Council?

NICOLAS LOMBARD: No, we were devastated. We knew from the Federal Office for Communications that the government was aiming to gradually cut its subsidies from CHF 15 million to 10 million by 2006. But now it plans to turn off the tap completely by 2006. So all we will have left is the CHF 18 million from the SRG (Swiss Broadcasting Corporation).

But SRG SSR idée suisse is to offset the loss of subsidies for its swissinfo international service by increasing fees.

Then we would finally have a secure basis for planning; that would be something!

So wouldn't it make sense to fund the state mandate which swissinfo performs as an SRG enterprise via customer fees?

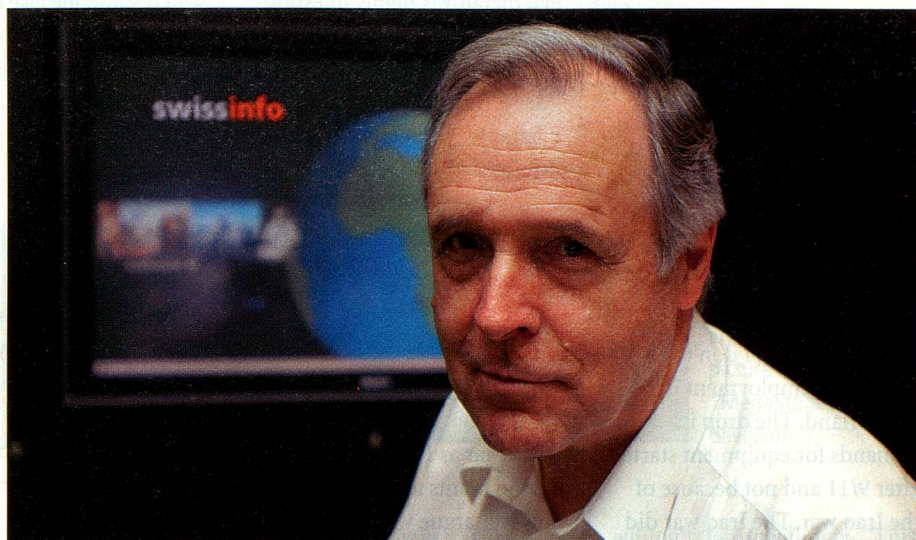
Absolutely not. Such an approach would not be opportune and we are opposed to it. Our licence requires us to disseminate information on Switzerland abroad. If our business is geared to people abroad, and most importantly to Swiss nationals abroad, the Swiss-based consumer should not have to pay.

What does the law have to say?

According to the law, the government must

How to help

With over 5 million hits a month from 130 countries, www.swissinfo.ch is Switzerland's most popular multilingual Internet information platform. If you are opposed to the threat to the existence of the "Voice of Switzerland", send a brief letter to: "Swiss Review", Aktion swissinfo, Alpenstr. 26, 3000 Berne 16 or e-mail swissinfo@aso.ch
Please do not call!



Nicolas Lombard, 63, Director of swissinfo/Swiss Radio International since 1999.

bear at least half the costs and the remainder must be borne by SRG. That's why subsidy cuts would necessitate a change in the law.

Whatever the case, the cuts will be severe. Will swissinfo still be able to perform its task?

We will make every effort to continue offering an excellent service. We owe it in particular to our compatriots abroad to provide first-rate information on their home country, and they will continue to receive it.

Will this lead to job cuts?

As things stand at present, we will need to shed 40 jobs. Fortunately we still have time and can leverage the opportunity to downsize through natural fluctuations.

Where else will the hammer fall? Will the cuts affect line staff or language departments?

Our multilingual service distinguishes us from other products. So we intend to keep all nine languages but downsize the teams. First and foremost, however, we plan to discontinue radio broadcasting altogether, even in English.

What can Swiss Abroad do to help secure your service and apply political pressure?

The umbrella organisation of Swiss clubs in Germany has already assured us of their support. It would be good if individuals or Swiss associations could publicise their interest in our service.

INTERNET

www.swissinfo.ch
www.swisspolitics.ch
www.swissmusic.ch
www.swissgeo.ch

False economies!

Bernese SP National Councillor Peter Vollmer, formerly a member of the Board of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA), is vehemently opposed to the proposed cuts in federal subsidies for swissinfo/SRI: "This important source of information, and not just for Swiss Abroad, cannot be allowed to fall victim to cost cuts," he says. Information posted on the Internet is accorded major importance and regarded as an independent, high-quality public service.

As President of the Committee for Transport and Telecommunications Issues he is convinced that "We must now see to it that the new radio and television law creates a reliable basis for maintaining this important service."

www.vollmer.ch

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