

The 2019 Program Performance of the Radio Programs of SRG SSR: Italian-Speaking and Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland

Summary

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Initial situation and objectives

High expectations in terms of standards are placed on radio and television in Switzerland: The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation¹ stipulates, among other things, that radio and television shall contribute to education and cultural development, to the free shaping of opinion and to entertainment (Art. 93(2)). The Swiss Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA)² stipulates in Art. 3 that any person wishing to broadcast a Swiss program service must notify this in advance to the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) or hold a license in accordance with this Act. These **broadcasting licenses**, which are issued in Switzerland by the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC), or, in the case of SRG SSR, by the Federal Council, are linked to specific **performance mandates**. Performance mandates are of particular importance if the programs concerned use frequencies that are in short supply (radio) and/or are financed with public funds (radio and television). This is the basis for the duty of the legislator or the regulatory authorities to periodically review the way in which the performance mandates are implemented.

The present study focuses on the Rhaeto-Romanic and Italian-language radio programs of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft, hereinafter referred to as: SRG SSR). The business units of SRG SSR that are examined are therefore RSI (Radiotelevisione svizzera) with the radio stations Rete Uno, Rete Due and Rete Tre, and RTR (Radio-television Svizra Rumantscha) with the station Radio Rumantsch³. The program mandate of SRG SSR and its implementation by the radio programs mentioned above are the main focus of this study. The aim is to help answer the following question: **How does SRG SSR implement the program mandate** from the RTVA and the license with its radio programs?

¹ Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999 of the Swiss Confederation (Status as of 1 January 2020)

² Swiss Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) of 24 March 2006 (Status as of 1 January 2017)

³ RTR is in the process of adapting the name of its radio station at the time that this report is compiled (May 2020): Radio Rumantsch will be changed to Radio RTR. According to the broadcaster, the name will be brought into line with the umbrella brand in the interests of standardization and simplification for listeners. The change of name will be implemented step by step; for example, from June 2, 2020 the new name should also appear on the radio screens. Since this study refers to the survey year of 2019, in which the station was still called Radio Rumantsch, consequently the "historical" name of the station at that time is used.

Methodical approach

For the survey necessary to answer this question, a **random sample** of an artificial week was drawn. This included all weekdays from Monday to Sunday. The reference days drawn were evenly distributed across the entire year of **2019**. Methodologically, this study is based on a **quantitative content analysis**. The above-mentioned research question regarding the implementation of the program mandate by the four radio stations was first translated into suitable indicators and then into measurable variables. The key performance indicators derived from the legal provisions are **diversity of topics, diversity of opinion, diversity of contributors, diversity of format, language, regional focus and relevance**.

Methodical profile

Method	Quantitative content analysis
Examined programs	
Italian-speaking Switzerland	> Rete Uno > Rete Due > Rete Tre
Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland	> Radio Rumantsch
Sample	
Language	One artificial week, Monday to Sunday (7 days) Recording time: 19 hours per day Per radio station: 133 hours of program Total: 532 hours of program
Music	1 reference day of 15 hours 7 evening programs of 4 hours Per radio station: 43 hours of music Total: 172 hours of music
Reference days	
Language	7 reference days > Monday, July 29, 2019 > Tuesday, April 23, 2019 > Wednesday, March 6, 2019 > Thursday, November 7, 2019 > Friday, January 18, 2019 > Saturday, June 15, 2019 > Sunday, September 22, 2019
Music	1 reference day > Wednesday, March 6, 2019

Time frame of the study

Language	5:00 am. to 12:00 midnight
Music	5:00 am. to 8:00 pm. (reference day) 8:00 pm. to 12:00 midnight (evening program)

Program recording Eurospider Information Technology AG, Zurich (CH)

2019 Results

In 2019, the program performance of the radio stations surveyed was inconsistent. No clear trend is evident in the development over time. For each of the RSI radio stations and the RTR station, there are performance indicators that show a positive development compared to 2016 and others that indicate a significant decline in the program performance delivered.

The percentage of the two most frequently occurring topics (Table 1) on the RSI radio stations increased slightly between 2016 and 2019, while the amount of coverage of the remaining topics – and thus the **diversity of topics** – decreased. A similar development can be observed among the contributors to informative contents of the RSI radio stations. It is plausible that these two aspects developed hand in hand and that the topical focusing was accompanied by a smaller number of contributors. However, this focusing did not correspond to a decline in the **diversity of opinion**. This aspect shows a significant increase for the RSI radio stations. For Radio Rumantsch, on the other hand, the **diversity of topics** has not **changed**, while the **diversity of opinion** and **contributors** has **increased significantly** or **slightly**.

Table 1: Performance indicators of diversity of topics, opinion, contributors and format (incl. development since 2016)

Aspects	Rete Uno	Rete Due	Rete Tre	avg. RSI	Δ vs. 2016	Rumantsch	Δ vs. 2016
Diversity of topics	49%	25%	39%	37%	-5%	44%	±0%
Diversity of opinion	68%	57%	89%	71%	+35%	91%	+37%
Diversity of contributors	35%	31%	40%	35%	-11%	40%	+2%
Diversity of format	29%	39%	30%	33%	-	28%	-

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The percentage of the dominant language – Italian – is high for all three RSI radio stations (Table 2) and has remained unchanged over time. A language other than Italian can seldom be found in the verbal contributions.

Table 2: Performance indicator of language (incl. development since 2016)

Aspects	Rete Uno	Rete Due	Rete Tre	avg. RSI	Δ vs. 2016	Rumantsch	Δ vs. 2016
Percentage of the dominant language	98%	100%	100%	99%	±0%	79%	-2%

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Due to the high percentage of Italian-language verbal contributions, it can be assumed that the three RSI radio stations will be able to have a significant impact on creating an identity for Italian-speaking Switzerland. On the other hand, such a high percentage of one dominant language also means that there is little room for the other national languages and that there is hardly any exchange across language borders.

For Radio Rumantsch, a slight decline in the dominant Romansh language can be observed. The lower percentage of the dominant language compared to the RSI programs can be explained by the integral acquisition of certain programs from Radio SRF 1 (“Rendez-vous”, “Echo der Zeit”). Compared to 2016, the percentage of standard German and Swiss German verbal contributions has increased slightly, making the program more accessible to people who do not speak Romansh. However, it cannot be determined whether the acquisition of the above-mentioned broadcasts is intended as an integration measure or simply represents a way of recycling them.

The performance indicator of regional focus (Table 3) shows another rather **inconsistent picture**.

Table 3: Performance indicator of regional focus (incl. development since 2016)

Aspects	Rete Uno	Rete Due	Rete Tre	avg. RSI	Δ vs. 2016	Rumantsch	Δ vs. 2016
Events in Italian-speaking CH	34%	21%	27%	28%	-1%	1%	-1%
Events in German-speaking CH	9%	9%	6%	8%	-1%	12%	+3%
Events in French-speaking CH	4%	4%	2%	4%	±0%	2%	+1%
Events in Rhaeto-Romanic CH	2%	1%	1%	1%	-	38%	+8%
Events abroad	37%	55%	53%	48%	+2%	31%	-3%
Regional focus Italian-speaking CH	72%	52%	73%	65%	-	3%	-4%
Regional focus German-speaking CH	28%	48%	27%	34%	+2%	33%	-
Regional focus French-speaking CH	18%	26%	9%	18%	+7%	8%	±0%
Regional focus Rhaeto-Romanic CH	7%	5%	5%	6%	-	69%	-
Range of topics: ≤ according to language region	13%	10%	11%	11%	-9%	35%	+5%

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It can be noted that the reporting of the RSI radio stations has less of a regional focus compared to 2016. The same is also evident in the focus on the other parts of the country, which has remained unchanged at a low level since 2016. Here, too, more information from the other regions could provide an opportunity for cohesion and exchange between the language regions. The percentage of events from Italian-speaking Switzerland has decreased, while more coverage has been given to events abroad. Consistent with this, the percentage of events that can be accredited with a maximum coverage of language region-specific topics has also declined.

A more detailed analysis of the development over time shows that these shifts are due to an increase in the number of events with an international reach. Consequently, there is a trend towards **internationalization** of reporting at the RSI radio stations.

At Radio Rumantsch, on the other hand, the reverse development – i. e. **regionalization** – can be observed. On the one hand, the percentage of events from Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland has increased, while on the other hand, a larger percentage of events with a maximum coverage of language region-specific topics can be identified.

When evaluating the relevance of informative contents (Table 4), it is almost inevitable to consider the question of perspective: For **whom** are or should **which contents** be relevant? Relevance can therefore not be evaluated objectively, but is subject to a **standardized value system**. The explanatory report on the SRG SSR license outlines certain guidelines that allow a statement to be made about the varying relevance of different informative contents. The main criteria for evaluating relevance are a focus on the common good, well-informed participation in life within state institutions and ensuring that there is a range of dialog available throughout society as a whole.

Table 4: Performance indicator of relevance (incl. development since 2016)

Aspects	Rete Uno	Rete Due	Rete Tre	avg. RSI	Δ vs. 2016	Rumantsch	Δ vs. 2016
Information percentage	36%	38%	12%	29%	+1%	18%	-1%
Topics: Relevance (+)	88%	95%	89%	91%	-1%	88%	-6%
Topics: Relevance (-)	12%	5%	11%	11%	+1%	12%	+6%
License-related topics (min.)	599	463	174	412	+227	299	+168

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While a **slight increase** in information can be observed for the three RSI radio stations, an equally **slight decrease** can be observed for Radio Rumantsch. However, the extent of the change is small. Changes of a similar scale can be seen when comparing the topics according to their assumed relevance: As a general tendency, “hard” – more relevant – topics (politics, economy, society, culture and sports) have decreased at the RSI radio stations, while the “soft” – less relevant – topics (human interest and bad news) have increased. For the three RSI stations, it can therefore be concluded that the selection routines and focus of information processing have remained largely unchanged. However, as in 2016, the comparatively minor importance of economic topics at the RSI radio stations is striking. In view of the actual social importance of the economy and the diverse economic ties of Ticino, this finding is surprising.

At Radio Rumantsch the **shift** between these two categories of topics is **more severe** and the **increase in soft news** compared to 2016 is evident. All four radio stations examined showed an increase in the number of topics addressing aspects relevant to licensing law.

The fundamental differences already noted in 2016 between the radio programs of German-speaking and Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland on the one hand, and French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland on the other, in terms of the **music** they play (Table 5), still exist.

Table 5: Performance indicator of music (incl. development since 2016)

Aspects	Rete Uno	Rete Due	Rete Tre	avg. RSI	Δ vs. 2016	Rumantsch	Δ vs. 2016
Diversity of music	74%	100%	65%	80%	±0%	72%	-11%
Contemporary nature of the music	31%	43%	62%	45%	-4%	53%	+10%
Percentage of Swiss music	7%	10%	7%	8%	±0%	40%	-7%
Comparison with music from private radio stations ⁴	-6%	5%	2%	0%	-	2%	-

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The percentage of Swiss music on RSI radio stations is and remains low, while Radio Rumantsch has a much higher percentage of Swiss music. The music format of Radio Rumantsch reflects Switzerland's multilingualism well, whereas the same cannot be said for the RSI programs. There are virtually no national languages other than Italian. This means that the opportunity to make a contribution to the exchange between the different regions or to promote cultural identity is largely being missed. At the same time, however, the percentage of **music** from **Switzerland** played on **Radio Rumantsch** has **decreased**, while the music has become more contemporary. Since there has been a significant increase in music from the last decade, it can be assumed that the music program is trending toward a rejuvenation – and this is not just a reflection of the period and point of the study. The future development of both indicators remains to be observed with interest.

⁴ In addition to Rete Uno, Rete Due, Rete Tre and Radio Rumantsch, the music program of the two private Ticino radio stations – Radio Ticino RFT and Radio3i – was also recorded, encoded and evaluated on the music reference day (03/06/2019) for comparison purposes.