

The radio channels of SRG SSR 2017 (German-speaking Switzerland)

Summary

The channel analysis of SRG SSR radios in 2017 included the six general-interest channels in German-speaking Switzerland.

Overall, the SRF channel family provides a service that is thematically broad, highly diverse in terms of form and music, and to some extent complementary. More than half of the information is broadcast multiple times or on multiple channels. The six channels fulfil the channel mandate to different degrees. Services to promote cultural identity have increased since 2014 and are to be rated far more highly than their contribution to integration.

Methodological key data

The following channels in German-speaking Switzerland were examined in 2017:

SRF 1, SRF 2 Kultur, SRF 3, SRF 4 News, SRF Musikwelle, SRF Virus

Sample: artificial week (Mon - Sun) in the period from 9 January 2017 to 3 December 2017

Sample days: Mon 19 June; Tues 21 November; Wed 4 October; Thurs 4 May; Fri 17 March; Sat 12 August; Sun 15 January

Analysed airtime: 05.00 - 24.00 each day

Music analysis of daytime programme: Wed 4 October, 05.00 - 20.00

Music analysis of evening programme: Mon – Sun, 20.00 - 24.00

Total programme hours analysed: 798

Programme dynamics, particularly with regard to music

The six SRF channels represent four different programme concepts: **SRF 1** is a **full-service format** with a relatively high proportion of verbal content and information. It has undergone relatively extensive changes since 2009 in terms of music, increasing the proportion of older music. Thereby, the channel distinguishes itself more clearly from SRF 3 than before. This trend has continued since 2014, albeit in a weaker form. Since 2014, **SRF 3**, a typical **accompanying channel**, has rejuvenated in terms of music. Moreover, SRF3 plays more Swiss music than before. Thus, SRF 3 has further distanced itself from SRF 1, but is now very close to the youth channel **SRF Virus**. Both channels – SRF 3 and SRF Virus – are quite similar in terms of programme concept. SRF Virus, however, offers far less verbal content and information. The information provided by SRF Virus and SRF 3 is very similar, due to the takeover of news programmes.

SRF Musikwelle is also a music-dominated accompanying channel. Due to its stand-alone music format, it has a special-interest character. It appeals to an older, rural minority audience by focusing on styles that are hardly offered by other channels, like Schlager music and especially (Swiss) folk music.

SRF 2 Kultur is a **culture channel** with a high proportion of verbal content. Its music format is based on classical music with additions from the field of jazz. The strong **international focus** of its information content is characteristic of SRF 2. However, this focus is not quite as pronounced as in previous years.

SRF 4 News is the information channel of Radio SRF. During the period under review, it almost exclusively broadcast word content. Its main thematic focus is (international) politics; economics also plays a comparatively large role, whereas cultural topics are almost entirely absent. Thus, the channel also somewhat differs from the other SRF channels in terms of covered topics. The way information is presented is also characteristic: SRF 4 News heavily relies on dialogic forms as well as longer reports and features.

SRF 4 News occupies a special position within the SRF broadcasting family and is a valuable addition to the music-dominated channels thanks to the density and breadth of the information it provides. SRF 1, SRF 2 Kultur and SRF Musikwelle **complement** one another, among other things, in terms of music format. This does not really apply to SRF 3 and SRF Virus. There is also a certain level of complementarity when it comes to information and main topics, although **at least 55%** of the information which airs in the broadcasting family (on other channels) is **repeated content**.

High editorial quality, redundancies in current information

Information is one of Radio SRF's core competencies. This is reflected not only in the fact that one of the channels (SRF 4 News) almost exclusively broadcasts information and that others (SRF 1, SRF 2 Kultur) place a very high emphasis on information, but also in the fact that great effort is put into the treatment of this information. The channels with a high proportion of verbal content benefit in particular from this **high editorial quality**: SRF 1, SRF 2 Kultur and especially SRF 4 News do not merely provide facts, but put them into context and elucidate the backgrounds. Thereby, they (more often than the other SRF channels) rely on sophisticated journalistic formats such as correspondent reports, commentaries, expert interviews, or on-site reporting. Even though all the channels in principle benefit from the editorial quality due to cross-repeating contributions, there are differences: Within the two channels with the lowest proportion of information (SRF 3 and SRF Virus), the editorial quality does not reach the level of SRF 4 News or SRF 2 Kultur.

Individual channels may have thematic focuses, but all of them offer a broad **range of topics**. With the exception of SRF 2 Kultur, however, politics plays the main role in all channels. In particular, SRF 4 News and SRF Musikwelle dedicate almost half the broadcast time spent on information to political topics. Societal, economic and cultural topics are included in the information provided by all channels. This also applies to the classic tabloid topics (bad news/human interest), which do not occupy much space, however. In terms of **thematic variety** across all SRF channels,

the complementary thematic emphases contribute to the thematic diversity. SRF 2 Kultur naturally takes the lead when it comes to culture, while SRF 3 promotes sport and SRF 4 News stands for politics. However, thematic variety does not necessarily mean that the channels also cover a broad variety of events. Since most current information is centrally processed, the **selection of covered events** is also largely controlled **centrally**. This and the high proportion of repetitions also promote a certain **homogenisation** of the information content, which is also reflected, for example, in the structural similarity of topics for most SRF stations.

There has been little change in terms of the diversity of journalistic formats in comparison to previous survey years. However, the variety of topics has somewhat declined since 2014, because political topics gained even more weight in 2017.

Federal and cantonal authorities more frequently in focus than non-executive protagonists

Most SRF channels report far more frequently on the **authorities** and their activities than on legislative representatives or political parties. Information on Swiss topics focuses on the activities of the Federal Council and Federal Departments. Cantonal and local authorities are also frequently in focus. With the exception of the Central Swiss regional news (Regionaljournal Zentralschweiz), **regional news** reporting is particularly **closely associated with the authorities** – as indicated in the surveys in previous years. They exceed most private radio channels in German-speaking Switzerland in this respect.

Diversity of opinion can be achieved on the one hand by focusing on **protagonists of different party-political directions**, and on the other hand by a balanced consideration of the different actors as sources of information (e.g. in quotations, original statements or interviews). The SRF channels mostly distribute their attention to the entire spectrum of parties. In the analysed artificial week, however, the **FDP** (Free Democratic Party) shows up somewhat more frequently, which is attributable to the specific events taking place in the autumn (Federal Council by-election). The clear decline in diversity of opinion since 2014 could be associated with this specific constellation of events.

It is another question whether the **range** of different opinions and perspectives is apparent to an average audience that listens to the channels selectively. This is the case when controversial opinions and different perspectives are referred to in a given thematic context. This **orientation service**, which requires correspondingly more complex treatment formats, is provided by SRF channels in different ways. This is rarely the case for SRF 2 Kultur, SRF 3 and SRF Virus. The corresponding orientation services of these SRF channels are relatively modest and are scarcely different from the private commercial providers. However, **SRF 1** and **SRF 4 News** in particular offer their audiences an overview of the different positions on a controversial topic comparatively often, making a major contribution to how the public form their opinions.

Consideration of the other language regions stagnates despite "Cassis effect"

A major argument for SRG's fee charter is its integration mandate. Particularly high standards therefore apply to **integration services**. Previous surveys have regularly recorded deficits in this area. The new SRG licence therefore lays down more specific requirements for the integration mandate.

However, the current survey does little to refute the previous findings. The SRF radio channels are supposed to provide a fundamental integration service by helping to increase knowledge of **other parts of the country**, reporting on events in other language regions. There has been a mixture of progress and setbacks since the last survey of German-speaking Swiss SRG channels (2014). Although the SRF channels reported more often on Italian-speaking Switzerland in 2017 than in 2014, this is down to the fact that the FDP brought in Ticino candidate Ignazio Cassis for the Federal Council by-election. Italian-speaking Switzerland was therefore more in focus in journalism for a short period of time. However, this increased attention to Ticino was at the cost of French-speaking Switzerland, which has suffered a drop in attention since 2014. The bottom line is that only a modest **two percent** of the information broadcast on the SRF radio channels is dedicated to the other language regions. When looking at all the channels together, attention to events in the Romandie or Ticino has **stalled at a low level** since 2014, despite the "Cassis effect".

A similar situation applies when it comes to consideration of the **foreign population resident** in Switzerland. Although this group makes up almost a quarter of the population, it is only **weakly represented** on the SRF channels. If there is a lack of event input to which the editorial teams can react, it is highly unlikely that there will be any reporting about foreigners. Consideration of the foreign resident population on SRF radio channels is extremely modest overall, at least in the analysed artificial week. A mere one percent of the information services focuses on the foreign resident population. And it is even rarer for this group to be given the chance to make their own voices heard on issues.

It is hard to use the content analysis to work out whether the SRF radio channels are contributing to the fulfilment of further **integration objectives** such as exchange between religions and cultures, the integration of foreigners and contact with the Swiss nationals living abroad. This analysis can only determine if these topics are addressed on the channels. The 2017 survey confirms the results of previous studies, indicating that these topics are rarely addressed and coverage almost entirely depends on the random occurrence of events.

Swiss music at its highest level since the surveys started

Swiss culture is the only issue relevant to concession law that is substantially dealt with in the information content of almost all SRF channels. Measured in terms of total information content, Swiss culture is most frequently the subject on **SRF 3**, partly because this channel devotes much of its time to the Swiss music scene. In absolute numbers, **SRF 2 Kultur** takes the lead amongst the SRF channels when it comes to references to Swiss culture. In comparison to previous surveys, SRF 2 Kultur makes far more frequent references to the domestic cultural scene.

Music can also strengthen cultural identity directly by giving the local music scene exposure opportunities. This is the case for all channels that play music, albeit to varying degrees. However, differing from the implementation of the integration mandate, it is clearly noticeable that the coverage of **Swiss music** is based on a **strategy** or management tools that produce the desired effects. The proportion of Swiss music is also significantly higher in comparison to most private commercial channels. It has increased further since 2014 and is now at its highest level since surveys began. The highest proportion of Swiss music is played on the **SRF Musikwelle** daytime programme, which especially supports the Swiss folk music sector. Every second song played on SRF Musikwelle is of Swiss provenance. **SRF 3** has significantly increased the proportion of Swiss music it plays since the last survey, with a third of its music being Swiss music in 2017.

Since 2014, the SRF radio channels have increased their performance in the field of **cultural identity** to a high, albeit inconsistent, level. They probably meet the media policy objectives better here than in the field of integration services.