Media release

“No” to “No Billag”: a vote of confidence that puts us under an obligation

Bern, 4 March 2018 – Today the voters clearly rejected the “No Billag” initiative at the ballot box. The result is especially pleasing for the SRG SSR because it was confirmed in all linguistic regions of Switzerland. In the light of the heated debate that has taken place, today marks a new beginning for the SRG, and one that comes with clear expectations: Switzerland's public media company will have to adapt to a new financial framework and meet society's new needs.

“Of course this is a good day for the SRG, because, by voting in this way, the voters have legitimised the concept of public service media,” said the Chairman of the SRG Board Jean-Michel Cina, at a media briefing in Bern on Sunday. “And the result is equally pleasing for the 34 private radio and TV stations which receive some of the licence fee. But above all it's a good day for everyone who believes it is important to have an independent, balanced news service in all four linguistic regions, and that it is important to produce our own Swiss films, support local music and bring Swiss sporting events into people's sitting rooms,” continued Cina. “What the majority supported today is the idea of a cohesive and diverse Switzerland.” The SRG Chairman thanked everyone who had worked hard to promote these values and public service broadcasting.

Reform, efficiency-boosting measures, a focus on news, culture production and digital services

Gilles Marchand, Director General of the SRG, explained: “This result is not just a vote of confidence in us as a public media company that serves the general public – it marks a new beginning for the SRG. We must now adapt our company so that we operate in a new financial framework and meet society's new needs. We intend to take note of all the feedback from the public – whether it was encouraging or critical.” As a first step, the SRG will start to implement three reform packages, while at the same time working on more reform measures.

The first package of measures relates to the financial aspects: Because of the reduction in the licence fee, the cap on income imposed by the Federal Council and the ever-declining advertising revenue, the SRG will implement a programme of savings and reinvestment amounting to 100 million francs. It will make savings and become more efficient in its infrastructure, administration, technology, real estate, production processes and distribution network. This programme will enable the SRG not only to cut costs but also to set three priorities for its activities:

- The SRG regards providing a balanced, independent news service in the four linguistic regions of Switzerland as the essential core of its mandate: 50 per cent of the licence fee revenue will be spent on news programmes.
- The SRG would like to depict the diversity of Switzerland. It will therefore be even more committed in future to productions showing all aspects of Swiss culture – especially in terms of films and TV series.
- As a public service media company, the SRG must also adapt to changes in society. It will therefore work to improve its digital services. It intends to set up a multilingual

platform that will make as many SRG productions as possible – translated as required – accessible to everyone, from all linguistic regions.

SRG to concentrate on its basic mandate
The second area of reform that Marchand mentioned was about concentrating on the special characteristics of a public service media provider and how it can differentiate itself from private media companies. As the debate in recent weeks has shown, the general public likes to be able to distinguish clearly between TV channels from private and public companies. For that reason, in future the SRG will no longer interrupt its evening feature films with advertisements. To ensure that the distinction is also made more clearly online, in future the SRG will no longer publish text that is not related to an audio or video clip on the SRF, RTS and RSI news websites.

More cooperation with private media
The SRG believes that it is more important today than ever to work together to develop Swiss media and to strengthen them in the face of international competition. On the commercial side, the SRG accepts that it will not be allowed to publish online advertising for the foreseeable future. The SRG will refrain from offering regional advertising aimed at specific target groups, even if the regulations permit this at some future date. It would do this to avoid intensifying the competition with regional media. With regard to the marketing company Admeira, the SRG remains open to new and constructive solutions. For example, it would be willing to support taking on new shareholding partners.

Furthermore, the SRG will make its archive material available to private Swiss media providers. The arrangements for this would be based on the established shared content model, under which private media companies can use SRG news videos free of charge. The SRG is also willing to work with other Swiss radio stations to set up a national radio player platform. In addition, the SRG is open to entering into partnerships to run the music channels Swiss Pop, Swiss Jazz and Swiss Classic. To support the SDA news agency during this difficult transformation phase, the SRG will renew its contract with the SDA on the present terms until 2019.

Start of a change process that will last for the next five years
Over the coming years, all parts of the SRG will focus their work on the priorities listed above. The efficiency-boosting and reinvestment programme will be presented in detail in summer 2018. It will start to be implemented in 2019 and will continue over the next 5 years. Gilles Marchand: “This 4 March will go down as a turning point in the history of the SRG. We are pleased about the result of the vote. But we are very aware that it places us under an obligation: an obligation to keep in even closer contact with our target audiences and to change accordingly. We are happy to accept that obligation – while always remaining guided by society, by Switzerland and by its people.”

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