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Radio in Europe

Der Direktor des Forschungsdienstes von BBC World Service äussert sich zur Radio Szene in Europa. Eine Prämisse seiner Ausführungen besteht darin, dass er davon ausgeht, dass die Zukunft des Radios nicht nur durch Profitmotive bestimmt sein wird, sondern dass das Radiomachen auch aus einer öffentlichen Verpflichtung heraus erfolgen sollte.

It was about six months ago that I was invited to speak on radio in Europe at this seminar. I saw from the literature that you were using the occasion to assess the wider European media scene and the future place of the Swiss media within that, especially if Switzerland moves towards greater integration in Europe.

But as I began to think about today I soon realised I had to make some choices. Like a radio producer making a feature or documentary, I had to decide what I was going to cover. What sources would I look to? What aspects of radio in Europe would I emphasise and what would I play down or leave out altogether? In the language of public relations and propaganda, what "spin" would I be giving the subject?

It's no good expecting me to give an impartial and value-free account. Nor can I cover everything in the few minutes given to me. And in the very selection of what I do talk about, my own bias may become apparent.

Let me read something to you that might illustrate what I mean. I found the following in a recent book on radio in Europe:

Rapid progress toward more effective commercial radio is sweeping Europe. . . All markets follow the same pattern: a reduction in prohibitory regulation increasing opportunities for profitable private investment.

. . . As the obstacles to free radio are removed, the medium will be well-placed to benefit from wholesale deregulation and democratisation throughout the continent. . . .

Radio's position can only be strengthened by these changes. The removal of trade barriers and increase in cross-border cooperation and competition accompanying the move toward closer European unity will step up marketing activity to the profit of all media.

This is a short extract from the introduction to "*The 1992 Kagan Book of European Radio*", published just a few weeks ago. The writer or writers see promising opportunities for smart commercial operators who are ahead of the field in seeking out new market possibilities throughout Europe, East and West.

The book gives a lot of information about radio throughout the continent - how much is spent on

advertising on the radio, how many commercial stations there are, how much time people spend listening on an average day, how much listening there is to these so called "free radios" compared to others, what the audience trends are and so on. But especially notice the language used here. "*Progress toward more effective commercial radio*", "*obstacles to free radio are removed*", and the linking of those two words "*democratisation*" and "*deregulation*". Both are seen as a good thing and no one could possibly be against such obvious progress as deregulation unless they had sinister motives.

This book is written from an *American perspective* by people who see radio as simply a product to be marketed like any other. And that is the direction in which much European radio has moved and is moving. I could spend the next few minutes in similar vein. But I am not going to because I believe the *future of radio in Europe* is not purely or even principally to be seen in commercial terms. And I don't think you would all be here if your interest in media in Europe were solely or even chiefly motivated by profit. I proceed on the basis of assuming that we share an interest in radio as a means of communication with some intention to serve audience needs. I assume also that the whole process of radio broadcasting has, or should have, something to do with *public good*. That can, of course, include much of commercially funded radio. The distinction is not about means of finance but is about the basic motivation or *raison d'être*.

My job is mostly about radio. It is the responsibility of my department to find out as much relevant information as possible about radio listening in all parts of the world. We carry out *different kinds of research* designed to find out who listens to the BBC World Service. Where audiences are large, we can discover why this is so. We learn a good deal about the motivations and tastes of those people who choose to listen to the various services that the BBC provides. Where audiences are small, we can find out why, and whether anything can be done to change our services in order *to attract new listeners*. The fact that the BBC is the most successful international radio station has, I believe, a lot to do with the fact that for most of its sixty year history the BBC World Service has spent money on audience research. The listener matters; it is to serve the public - that is the audience - in Britain as well as around the world, that the BBC exists.

Historically, and today, most of the *BBC audience* hears the World Service on shortwave. But our research does

