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HACA Immersion in the Public and Private Audiovisual Sector of Switzerland

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At the headquarters of Léman Bleu TV with the director and editor-in-chief, Laurent Keller.

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Le Journalisme agile



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The use of the Smartphone by the image reporter



At the headquarters of the Radio télévision Suisse with Patrice Aubry, secretary general.

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At the headquarters of the Radio télévision Suisse with the secretary general, Patrice Aubry

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Picture at the headquarters of the RTS

From left to right, the head of the cultural and linguistic diversity unit (HACA) Mr. Ahmed Zahid, secretary general of the RTS Mr. Patrice Aubry, Director General of the HACA, Mr. Jamal Eddine Naji, director of the studies and development department (HACA), Ms. Latifa Tayah, the head of the media Division, OFCOM Mr. Marcel Regnotte.

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As part of its opening to the world, and its strategy of exchanging experience and expertise, the General Directorate of the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HACA) visited Switzerland, on April 5th and 6th 2018, to immerse in its audiovisual sector in Geneva (600.000 inhabitant), and Bienne (50.000 inhabitant).

The Swiss regulator, The federal Office of Communication (OFCOM), organized and directed this exchange and study trip including three members of the HACA, the Director General, Mr. Jamal Eddine Naji, the Director of the Study and Development Department, Ms. Latifa Tayah, and Mr. Ahmed Zahid, a member of the Cultural and linguistic diversity unit, who met with a number of officials from the OFCOM, the Swiss Radio-television and the private TV channel "*Léman Bleu*". This immersion permitted to bring out a number of aspects singular to the audiovisual sector in terms of keeping up with the digital mutations.

The challenge of modernizing the public audiovisual sector in a fiercely competitive context

In the last few months, Switzerland has become scrutinized by numeral observatories and professionals of the audiovisual sector throughout the world. The national debate sparked off by the “No Billag” initiative, aiming at omitting the swiss Broadcasting Corporation’s license fees, launched a national referendum, by the initiative of a group of young citizens, that called for the omission of this fee, therefore the closing of the collector company “Billag”. The initiative went further beyond debating the financing of radio and television to reach the questioning of the legitimacy of the public audiovisual service; an idea hitherto unheard of and unexpected attracting the interest of the swiss population. However, this initiative was rejected on March 4th after referendum by 80% of the citizens. Lingerin in the background was the question raised by this initiative: in this digital era and with the multiplication of information channels, does the public audiovisual sector still hold legitimacy with any added value?

The majority of the swiss citizens in favor of paying the fee for Public Service Broadcasting (PSB)

After a large campaign held by a number of influencers from the public opinion, politicians, intellectuals, artists, and public and private media professionals, against the so called initiative, the majority of the swiss population voted in favor of paying the fee. The debates also shed light on the democratic benefits of the public audiovisual sector that is a guardrail, guide and reference to the rest of the sector in terms of exemplary quality content. The audiovisual sector also assures the preservation of the large diversity that characterizes Switzerland as a federation of cantons with four communities speaking four known languages: French, German, Italian and Romansh.

During the referendum campaign, the national debate permitted the rehabilitation of the public audiovisual sector and emphasized the necessity to have a responsible and demanding regulation for the future. Then, it highlighted the importance of providing the operators with the needed tools to establish the mechanisms that guarantee political pluralism, diversity of opinions, cultures, languages, in addition to the respect of the media professional deontology, and the ethical values that guide it.

The swiss radio-television, as well as the private channel “Léman bleu”, that were visited by the HACA’s delegation, both enjoy a large editorial freedom, yet under the regulators watchful eye : the OFCOM and an independent authority in terms of examination of complaints and radio television in order to regulate political pluralism, ensure diversity, and make deontology respected.

The modernization of the public audiovisual sector

Furthermore, the national debate constituted an opportunity for all the professionals in the field to underline the challenge to overcome in order to modernize the audiovisual sector. In fact, the majority of the citizens who voted in favor of the fee expect to see an innovational transformation in the sector, especially with the consolidation of the national audiovisual production, locally and regionally. In other words, to offer a production to swiss citizens that the foreign competitors cannot.

The innovation of the public audiovisual sector must go through the development of the collaboration between private and public media in order to mutualize the resources, particularly with media of proximity.

As part of the new concession that was signed between the regulator and the public pole the day after the referendum, users of the public audiovisual sector must reinforce the dialogue between them.

Television on demand and streaming considerably transform the formats of the traditional TV that is

charged today with providing an added value that other digital platforms cannot offer. For instance, the swiss television should enhance live programs at the expense of fiction and documentaries that are available on the digital platforms.

It is no doubt that the results of the national swiss debate, that mobilized citizens, civil society actors as well as media professionals, can be a source of inspiration for many other countries. For this reason, outcomes and suggestions emanating from this debate should be closely monitored, not to be duplicated but to be taken into account and adapted, as they concern challenges that are common to all the countries willing to foster the mission of the PSB.

What role does the regulator play in a context of audio-visual accelerated mutation?

This visit to the OFCOM enabled the delegation of the HACA to better grasp the transition from the regulation to the co-regulation. The OFCOM entrusts the SRG SSR (public TV and radio service) with defining its own quality standards, releasing them, controlling their implementation and reporting on the results issued from internal controls.

Nevertheless, a lot of safe-guards contribute to facilitating this mutation for the self-regulation. In fact, audio-visual operators, particularly the public sector, have internal and external controls (the public council, executive boards, controls of the quality management system...). Furthermore, broadcasters are subject, every two years, to an assessment performed by a enterprise of their choice recognized by the OFCOM. The evaluators record the results in a report and suggest measures to take.

The philosophy of the approach adopted by the Helvetic regulator can be summed up as follows:

- Make content editors aware of their responsibilities ;
- Provide the audience with the necessary data/information and enable it to form an opinion on the accomplishment of the broadcasters performance mandates;
- Stimulate a well-documented and reasoned public discussion on the media role;
- Avoid any political influence on the role of media

The private audio-visual sector in permanent mutation.

Equipped with 42 radios and 13 private TVs, Switzerland can boast a dynamic audio-visual private sector, considering the size of its population (8.5 millions).

The visit of *Léman Bleu* TV enabled to discover a model of private TV, which had probably made several transformations to adapt with the competitiveness and the public expectations. The journalistic agility offered by the digital world has been implemented in the service of quality and cost reduction. This television is therefore structured around numerous flagship programs broadcasted live on topics or events affecting very closely the swiss citizens. While the main material used is extremely light and provide journalists with high flexibility to prepare these topics, the smartphone is thus considered as the first work device for reporters, since its image quality is ameliorated thanks to receiving and transforming terminal via a multi-connectivity to the internet.

Lastly, it is to be noted that these meetings between the HACA's delegation and the swiss public policies representatives of media in particular, represented a favourable opportunity to promote the international momentum supported by the Moroccan regulation authority, that falls within the framework of the international networks for regulation, where the HACA is an active and sometimes a founding member. This comes in addition to the computing systems elaborated by the High Authority

which constitute today the main interest for many countries in both Africa and Europe.

Links

[1] <https://www.haca.ma/en/javascript%3A%3B>