

Germany

Manifesto for a “new public service broadcaster”

(Ed. CH-S) The public broadcasters ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio are in turmoil and criticism of the media giants, which are compulsorily financed by the public, is growing louder. Viewers and listeners are deserting them and turning to other media.

Is it so much different at Swiss Radio and Television SRF? Here, too, we only hear “filtered” and framed information and standardised opinions on the key issues of our time. “Nudging” is intended to coax us as media consumers towards the thinking desired by the media makers. In Germany, a group of employees of these media companies is now calling for a “new public service broadcasting”.

Wouldn't the convincing demands set out in this manifesto be even more appropriate for our direct-democratic Switzerland?

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We, the employees of ARD, ZDF and Deutschlandradio, as well as all other signatories, value strong, independent public service broadcasting in Germany as an essential pillar of our democracy, societal communication, and culture. We are convinced of the principles laid down in the Interstate Media Treaty and the programme mandate. However, we believe that both are in danger.

People's trust in public service broadcasting is decreasing more and more. Doubts about the balance of the programme are growing. We have been aware of the increasing discrepancy between programme mandate and implementation for many years. We have written this manifesto so that our voice and expertise on the future of public service broadcasting are heard. [...]

Our principles

- Diversity of opinion and information
- Balance and fairness
- Transparency and independence
- Promotion of culture and education
- Citizen participation
- Financed by contributors



Where do we currently see problems?

For some time now, we have seen a *narrowing of the debating sphere* instead of a broadening of perspectives. We are missing the focus on our core task: offering citizens multi-perspective information. Instead, *opinion-making and reporting* are becoming increasingly blurred in a way that contradicts the principles of serious journalism. Only very rarely is there a relevant debate on the content of *opposing opinions*. Voices that question a social consensus – claimed by the media – are either ignored, ridiculed, or even marginalised. Inflationary use is made of various “fighting terms” for this purpose, such as “lateral thinker”, “conspiracy theorist”, “climate denier”, “Putin apologist”, “pacifist” and others, which are used to *defame and silence minorities* with dissenting opinions.

Careful scrutiny of dubious reports is important. However, the design, headlines and wording of so-called *fact checks* often suggest a *supposedly absolute truth* that rarely exists. Free social discourse is painfully curtailed as a result.

Internal and external conditions mean that employees of public broadcasters can no longer fulfil their *journalistic and ethical standards*. These include internal practices such as the core message of articles being fixed before the start of filming or reporting, the centralisation of reporting via so-called newsrooms or news desks, excessive time pressure during research, programming that is predominantly geared towards audience ratings, programme cost-cutting measures by broadcasters and, last but not least, the fact that two thirds of editorial staff only have tem-

porary contracts or even have to work completely without employment as so-called freelancers. The latter leads to existential fears, which in turn favour “adapted” journalism. Due to the high staff turnover, there is often no time for professional knowledge transfer.

There is currently no *internal freedom* of the press in the editorial offices. Editors in the public media are formally independent, and there are usually also editorial committees that are supposed to monitor journalistic independence. In practice, however, the public media orientate themselves to the opinion spectrum of the political-parliamentary majority. Dissenting voices from civil society rarely make it into the debating sphere.

In addition, *external influence from politics, economy and lobby groups* makes independent quality journalism more difficult. The intertwined interests of politics and business are too rarely highlighted and discussed in daily news reports. Day-by-day research often remains superficial at its core.

Factors such as *audience ratings*, which are currently the omnipresent argument for the dramatic thinning out and populist orientation of cultural and educational programmes, must not play a role in programme design. Public service broadcasting must also depict and attempt to convey supposed “*niche areas*” – which would fulfil its educational mandate but is happening less and less. In addition, public service broadcasting must not take the strictly and uniformly formatted programmes of private broadcasters as a (bad) model, as is currently largely the case. This also applies to ARD radio programmes, especially in terms of music.

The *paying contributors are not directly involved in the selection of the members of the radio, television and administrative boards*, the highest supervisory bodies of the public broadcasters. The administrative boards control the management of the public broadcasters, but who controls the administrative boards?

This means that there is *no participation of paying contributors* in media policy, financial and personnel decisions.

The *programmes* are also largely created *without audience participation*. Most programme complaints from paying contributors are hardly heard and therefore have little influence on reporting and general programme design. Neither the public nor the employees of the public broad-

caster are generally informed about the reactions and complaints about the programme.

Only some of the *content* of public service media is *available on the Internet* and usually only for a *limited period of time*. This practice contradicts the idea of public service broadcasting and the idea of a universal increase in knowledge on the Internet.

The “new public service broadcasting” of tomorrow

The principle of *paying the licence fee* will be retained. It ensures the *independence* of the new public broadcaster. This means that public broadcasters are financed but also controlled by the public.

Financial flows are transparent and open to public scrutiny. This applies in particular to the distribution of budgets between individual departments, editorial offices and the administration. The remuneration of all employees, including management positions up to the Intendant, is transparent and standardised in accordance with a collective agreement that applies to all. The reports of the state audit offices are easily accessible on the public broadcaster’s platforms.

The new public broadcaster does *not receive advertising revenue* of any kind, so that advertising contracts cannot lead to bias in reporting.

The *financial contributors* own the new public broadcaster. Their majority *involvement in the supervisory bodies* is therefore a matter of course. This work is appropriately remunerated. It rules out the exercise of another office that harbours conflicts of interest. The representative composition of the supervisory bodies could, for example, be modelled on the composition of citizens’ councils. Direct election, a rotation principle or a lottery procedure are ways of ensuring that society is represented.

The new public service broadcaster acts as the *fourth pillar of democracy*. On behalf of the population, it assumes *important control* tasks vis-à-vis the executive, legislative and judicial powers. In order for it to fulfil this mandate, its independence from the state, business and lobby groups is guaranteed.

Revolving door effects between politics and the new public service broadcaster are ruled out thanks to multi-year embargo periods; professional distance is always guaranteed. Any kind of *conflict of interest* is declared, as is custom-

ary in academic work. Management personnel are obliged to submit an annual public *transparency* report. *Management positions* must be publicly advertised and filled following a *transparent selection process* and are limited in time. A contract extension is only possible after consultation with the directly subordinate employees.

The *new public broadcaster controls politics* and not the other way round. Politics has no influence on content. Reporting will be neutral, multi-perspective and censorship-free within the framework of the Basic Law.

This includes the obligation to *constantly scrutinise supposed truths*. For reporting, this means open-ended and unbiased research as well as the presentation of different points of view and possible interpretations.

The *public* has a right to be able to analyse the facts and *form its own opinion* instead of being presented with a "categorised" view.

As far as possible, reports from news agencies are not accepted *without verification*. The new public broadcaster fulfils its responsibility to research and report on events beyond agency reports.

Fairness and respectful interaction are the focus of our actions, both within the broadcasting organisations and with our audience. The journalists at the new public broadcaster do not use framing or derogatory language.

Petitions and programme complaints from licence fee payers are *taken seriously* by the new public broadcaster. An ombudsman decides on their categorisation, implementation, and publication. Corrections to the content of reporting are communicated in the same place as the erroneous news item in the programme.

Local journalism is an *essential foundation* of the new public service broadcaster for the presentation of political and social diversity. Topics from sparsely populated regions that are supposedly only of local relevance or affect minorities must also be reflected in the programme. The decision to also report from areas far away from conurbations or metropolises must be guided by journalistic standards and must not bow to cost pressure.

The new public broadcaster fulfils its mandate to the same extent when it comes to education and culture. *Education and culture* have a *substantial share* in the programme offering and are appropriately budgeted and staffed.

Culture in its broad diversity is an *important building block* and expression of a democratic society. This diversity must be extensively presented and documented. This applies to all disciplines such as music, literature, theatre, fine arts, and others. Special attention is paid to the active promotion aspect, for example through own productions and the support of regional artists.

The new public broadcaster sets the tone in cultural life with its *own ensembles* such as orchestras, big bands and choirs and is committed to radio art in the *form of radio plays*.

The *archives* of the new public broadcaster are *freely accessible*. They are essential sources of knowledge and identity for our society and are therefore of great cultural and historical significance with immense appeal. The new public service broadcaster can continue to draw from the archives, which it should continuously expand on a broad scale, and thus assure itself and society of the relevance of culture and education.

The content of the public broadcaster's archives *and media libraries is permanently available*. The programmes and productions that have already been broadcast are available for an unlimited period of time. This means that society's collective memory can be accessed at any time. This is indispensable for the formation of public opinion.

The new public broadcaster has a non-commercial *internet* platform for communication and exchange that is financed by broadcasting licence fees. It uses open algorithms and does not trade in user data. It acts as a counterbalance to commercial providers in this sphere because a *censorship-free, non-violent exchange* is one of the core tasks of the new public service broadcaster.

Quality journalism needs a solid foundation. The new public service broadcaster employs mainly *permanent journalists* so that they are largely free from economic and structural constraints. This means that they are independent and committed exclusively to the press code. Sufficient time is available for research. The individual responsibility of the editor or reporter must be guaranteed and not taken over by a centralised newsroom or newsdesk.

Journalistic autonomy is an essential contribution to ensuring journalistic quality and diversity of opinion. This is why editorial activities are not bound by instructions regarding the se-

lection of topics, the organisation of topics and the use of resources not only in editorial statutes, but also in the state press laws and state broadcasting contracts.

Outsourcing is counterproductive. It prevents public control and promotes wage dumping. The production of programme content, the provision of production technology and personnel and the processing of audience feedback are therefore carried out by the broadcasters.

The new (as well as the current!) public service broadcaster is not in competition with the private media. For this reason, the prioritisation of *ratings and access figures* will be abolished.

The stability of our democracy requires a transparent new public service broadcaster as a sphere for open debate. Its cornerstones include the independence of reporting, the representation of diversity of opinion and the participation of citizens.

Source: <https://meinungsvielfalt.jetzt/manifest.html>

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

First signatories of the manifesto

- Christoph Abée | designer, lecturer, composer, musician
- Dr. Michael Andrick | philosopher and author
- Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Gerd Antes | mathematician and scientist of methods
- Patrik Baab | publisher, former editor of NDR TV
- Isabelle Barth | actress, presenter and artist
- Bastian Barucker | author & wilderness educator
- Prof. Kerstin Behnke | conductor
- Frederic Belli | solo trombonist SWR Symphony Orchestra
- Volker Birk | software architect and civil rights activist
- Georg Blank | camera man, WDR
- Tom Bohn | author, film director, organiser
- Julia Braun | former permanent freelance – ARD-editor / children's television
- Volker Bräutigam | journalist and longstanding staff member of NRD, (ARD-news and main department of culture)
- Philine Conrad | actress
- Michael Denhoff | composer & cellist
- Dorian Dragoi | image designer, BR
- Sabine Erbler | cutter, WDR
- Franz Esser | Munich, music cabaret artist
- Dr. Petra Fischer | until 2022 rbb
- Silvia Fischer | set designer and former radio presenter
- Jens Fischer Rodrian | musician, lyricist, independent publicist
- Lisa Fitz | cabaret artist, actress
- Jürgen Fliege | ARD talkshow presenter, ret.
- Anja Franke | actress among others with public radio broadcasting
- Romanus Fuhrmann | actor and presenter
- Prof. Dr. Ulrike Guérot | political scientist and publicist
- Gabriele Gysi | actress and film director
- Andreas Halbach | freelance staff member ZDF
- Reinhart Hammerschmidt | freelance musician for new music and improvisation
- Anny Hartmann | diploma economist and political cabaret artist
- Silke Hasselmann | Deutschlandradio, country correspondent with MV
- Andrea Haubold | orchestra musician Berlin
- Carlo Himmel | actor
- Beate Himmelstoss | former presenter with BR
- Bianca Höltje | educator, advisor of school founding
- Henry Hübchen | actor
- Claudia Jakobshagen | actress, presenter, RBB
- Luc Jochimsen | former editor-in-chief, hr-television
- Käthe Jowanowitsch | freelance journalist, Deutschlandfunk and WDR
- Kristof Kannegiesser | camera man and author, RBB
- Corinna Kirchhoff | actress
- Carlo Kitzlinger | actor, Lufthansa captain AD
- Friedhelm Klinkhammer | former GPR-chairman with NDR
- Astrid Kohrs | actress
- Dieter Korbely | advisory board «Wir sind Medien» and media critic
- PD Dr. Axel Bernd Kunze | scientist of education
- Dr. Norbert Lamm | virologist & molecular geneticist
- Barbara Leitner | more than 25 years freelance author for radio plays, a.o. in public broadcasting, currently coach and communications trainer (GFK in children's day care centres and schools)
- Ulrich Lipka | radio presenter, DLF culture
- Thorolf Lipp | board member German Academy for TV e.V.
- Prof. Dr. Johannes Ludwig | professor a.o. for investigative journalism
- Prof. Dr. Christoph Lütge | TU Munich, former member of Bavaria ethics council
- Doreen Luther | technician radio broadcasting, rbb
- Henrike Madest | former freelance staff member, WDR
- Almut Masuth | musician and music agent
- Uli Masuth | cabaret artist, composer, piano artist
- Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Jörg Matysik | chemist, University Leipzig
- Prof. Dr. Michael Meyen | professor for general and systematic communications science. at LMU
- Bettina Minutillo | former editor with print media
- Prof. Dr. Klaus Morawetz | Dresden
- Renée Morloc | opera singer
- Annkatrin Mücke | freelance journalist with rbb
- Jürgen Müller | lawyer, children's rights, currently e. V., Wir-Gemeinsam-Bündnis
- Maren Müller | chairwoman Permanent Audience Conference
- Alessandro Nania Pacino | actor
- Dr. Cornelia Nenz | former chairwoman of NDR-broadcasting council
- Franz Neumeyer | coach, initiative Change in Education
- Jeana Paraschiva | actress and film director
- Harring Petersen | former productions engineer in LFH SH, NDR
- Richard Petersen | engineer in LFH SH, NDR, retired since 2022
- Christoph Poppen | conductor, former chief conductor German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, former head ARD music competition
- Christine Prayon | cabaret artist (longstanding "heute show", ZDF)
- Manuel Rabbe | creative director
- Michy Reincke | musician
- Martina Reitmann | deputy horn player, German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, SR
- Alexa Rodrian | lyricist, musician and freelance author
- Martin Ruthenberg | former presenter and moderator, SWR
- Michael Sailer | blogger
- Arnd Schimkat | actor
- Bettina Schmidt | former editor DLF-Culture
- Eva Schmidt | Radio Munich
- Kathrin Schmidt | writer, German Book Award 2009
- Michael Schmidt | former editor NDR MV, member of NDR-Broadcasting Council
- Andrea Schömmel | recording manager, SWR Baden-Baden
- Prof. DDr. Christian Schubert | psycho-neuro-immunologist, University professor at the Medical University Innsbruck, Austria
- Christina Schütz | musician

- Dr. Harald Schwaetzer | philosophical seminar, Stuttgart
- Dr. Thomas A. Seidel | chairman of Bonhoeffer-Haus e.V.
- Ole Skambraks | former freelance staff member and editor with MDR, WDR and SWR
- Markus Stockhausen | musician, instructor
- Tim Strecker | camera man & senior lighting expert
- Dr.-Ing. Beate Strehlitz | advisory board «Wir sind Medien und Medienkritiker»
- Alina Teodorescu | freelance film director a. o. with public radio broadcasting
- Walter van Rossum | former WDR author, media critic and investigative journalist

- Harald von Herget | specialist lawyer for industrial property protection
- Prof. Dr. Dr. phil. Harald Walach | CHS-Institute
- Raphaël Walter | cellist
- Andrea Walz | sound technician, SWR Stuttgart
- Peter Welchering | science journalist
- Hans-Eckardt Wenzel | singer, musician, author, composer
- Tina Zimmermann | visual artist

as well as 33 employees of the public broadcaster, whose signatures have been deposited with lawyer Dr Harald von Herget (vonherget.ch).