

Media, universities and the debate about italianità

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The legal status of a language depends on institutions that use it every day: broadcasters and newspapers that report in it, universities that teach and research in it, and schools that transmit it to the next generation. Italian-speaking Switzerland has built such institutions within a small territory. Outside that territory, the presence of Italian in schools and universities has weakened, and a public debate about the place of Italian in the Confederation has developed since the first decade of this century.

1 RSI and the Swiss Italian press

The *Radiotelevisione svizzera di lingua italiana* (RSI) is the Italian-language unit of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR). The Italian-language radio was founded in 1931 and began experimental broadcasts in 1932 from the transmitter on Monte Ceneri. Television followed in 1961 as the *Televisione svizzera di lingua italiana* (TSI). RSI has its administrative seat in Lugano, its television studios at Comano north of Lugano and its radio studios in the Besso quarter of the city. It operates two television channels, LA1 and LA2, and three radio channels, Rete Uno, Rete Due and Rete Tre.¹ For a population of about 350,000 in Ticino and some 15,000 in the Italian-speaking Grisons, this is a large broadcasting organization. It exists because the SRG distributes its revenue among the language regions according to a key that gives the French- and Italian-speaking regions more than their population share, so that each language region can have a full public service in its own language.²

RSI is also one of the larger employers in Lugano and one of the main producers of Italian-language content in Switzerland. Its programmes are received in northern Italy, where they were for decades an alternative to Italian state broadcasting. For the financial centre, RSI has a further function: it is the main source of economic and financial news in Italian from a Swiss perspective. Its reporting on the Swiss-Italian tax agreements,

on the cross-border commuters and on cases before the Federal Criminal Court shapes the public understanding of the financial centre in its home region.

The printed press of Ticino is concentrated in two daily newspapers, the *Corriere del Ticino*, founded in 1891 and published in Muzzano near Lugano, and *laRegione*, created in 1992 from the merger of the dailies *Il Dovere* and *L'Eco di Locarno* and published in Bellinzona.³ The Swiss news agency Keystone-ATS maintains an Italian-language service, which supplies Italian news on federal politics and the economy to these papers and to RSI. Swissinfo, the international service of the SRG, publishes in Italian as well. The density of Italian-language reporting on federal affairs is thus higher than the demographic weight of Ticino would suggest, because federal institutions and the SRG treat Italian as one of the languages of the national public sphere.

2 Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Radiotelevisione svizzera", https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiotelevisione_svizzera (used as a last resort). ↩
2. Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends, country profile Switzerland, <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/?p=5184>, which notes that additional funds are forwarded to the SRG for French- and Italian-language broadcasts. ↩
3. Wikipedia, "Corriere del Ticino", https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corriere_del_Ticino (founded 28 December 1891; seat in Muzzano), and "LaRegione", <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/LaRegione> (first issue 14 September 1992 as *laRegioneTicino*, from the merger of *Il Dovere* and *L'Eco di Locarno*; seat in Bellinzona) (both used as a last resort). ↩

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