

# 2000 years of Rhaeto-Romanic : a minority consolidates itself

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economical reasons and are indispensable. Experience has shown that the right is delicate and the laws of free enterprise virtually contradict the instrumentation of Import restrictions for the inland wine-producers. Nevertheless it ought to be understood that it is not a licence for the production of inferior and correspondingly over-priced commodities, which during

the past years of abundance have shown that many a cask has in the true sense of the word, overflowed, because the customer was suddenly not willing to go along with it anymore. For all that, it is apparent that out of the mistakes of the past years, a lesson has in the meantime been learnt and once more quality rather than quantity is being promoted. Swiss

wine, if it wants to be sure of a solid footing, has no other choice but to have unconditional quality. What is more, perhaps it may one day succeed in capturing a firm place in the hearts of foreign wine-lovers. Many a Swiss abroad has already had great success.

*Andreas Keller, Chief Editor of the International wine journal VINUM*

**2000 Years of Rhaeto-Romanic:**

## A Minority consolidates itself

The Rhaeto-Romanic Language celebrated its 2000 years of existence. During a whole week the village of Savognin was transformed into a huge University extension: Round Table Conferences and Discussions, Courses on Poetry, Cooking and Philosophy, Introduction to Tarot and Art of Caricature and a Festival of Theatres were all there. Hundreds of Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people took part and thereby depicted their rich language and culture.

2000 years ago, in the year 15 B.C. the Romans conquered the Rhaetian Alps and by degrees imported the Latin language, out of which Rhaeto-Romanic has later evolved. A date, such as this, has naturally something arbitrary in it, for the Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people this birth-date has come in very opportune. They are today, more than ever, determined to un-itedly show themselves to their fellow-Confederates and to assert their existence.

### A Family of Languages

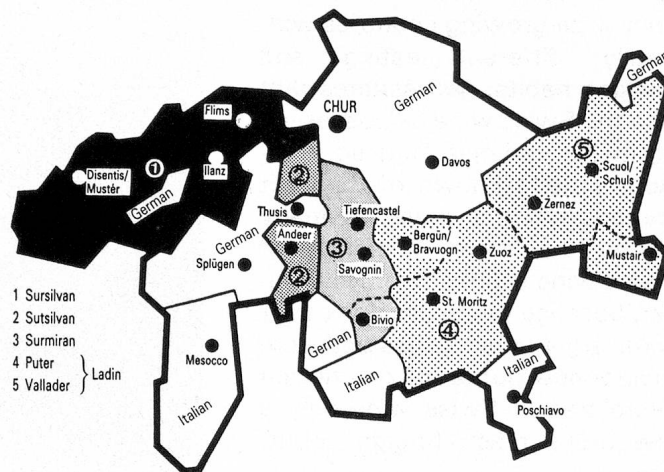
The smallest Helvetian Minority has a somewhat special position. Since 1938, Rhaeto-Romanic has no doubt been acknowledged as a national, though not as an official language of the Confederation. This discrimination has practical reasons. Rhaeto-Romanic is not a single language but a family of languages. One can count not less than five written regional lan-

guages. The difference between the manner of speech from Disentis and Scuol is by far greater than between the Appenzell and the Oberwallis dialects. In its isolation each valley had, during hundreds of years, cultivated its own dialect. Chur, the Capital, very early took over the German language as a unifying factor. As a result of that, it is not surprising that today all Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people know German as well as Rhaeto-Romanic. Their access to the outside world was compulsorily only through the German language. Nevertheless, in the last few years, the community has consolidated itself. In the Grison, as elsewhere, there is a come-back to regional values, which gives the minorities a new confidence. The religious differences have today been wiped out. The radio station gives its listeners the possibility of getting familiar with the dialects

of other valleys. Since 1982, in addition to this, a fascinating experiment is in process: the preparation of a common written language – *The Rumantsch Grischun*. This is so formulated that all Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people would be able to read it, without having had to learn it. But it shall not supersede the traditional dialects.

### Hopes for the Future

If the Rumantsch Grischun succeeds in being carried through, the main objection against the official usage of Rhaeto-Romanic would be dropped. Only a limited few demand that in Bern Rhaeto-Romanic occupies the same position as German, French and Italian. On the other hand, it would be more than justified, if in the Grisons on questions of Federal Law, it could be implemented. That is also the aim of a



The Languages of the Grisons

recent Motion, which has been handed in to the National Assembly. After the celebration in Savognin the Federal Council had no choice but to accept this proposal.

Another part of the Motion is more difficult to realise: it demands that the Confederation adopts measures to defend the Territories of the language minorities. A laudable project, but how to realise it? Should the State mark out an official Rhaeto-Romanic District, in which the Communities would be forced in the Administration and in the Primary Schools to switch over to the Rhaeto-Romanic language. With a policy such as this, to interfere with the language in addition to everything else, would be extremely problematical in a canton, where the autonomy of the community is sacred. The census of 1980 showed that the Rhaeto-Romanic people, as things stood then, belonged to the minority within their own historical territory.

The survival of the fourth national language is indisputably also an economic problem. One must find a way, on the one hand to resist the rural exodus which drains the mountain villages, without, however, on the other hand setting in motion a tourist overdevelopment (as in Engadine), which has inevitably drawn many Swiss German immigrants.

But even though the systematic measures of the Confederation may only have a symbolic character, it is strictly speaking not so important, then the solution would come, not from outside but, from the hearts of this minority itself: the strategy consists in reassuring the doubtful and disappointed Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people to gain confidence that their language is neither wasted nor condemned to extinction.

*Alain Pichard*

## 50 Years of Swiss Radio International (SRI):

# New program, old Worries

**Gerd H. Padel, former Director of Swiss Radio International gives us, in the following, a short glimpse into the history of this institution. This, however, intends in its Jubilee Year to direct all its power towards the future and present us with its innovations.**

The now well-known Swiss Radio International began in 1934 with the attempt to transmit special weekly chronicles for the Swiss abroad over the then newly set-up «Landessender». This was continued with the transmissions of these programs, which were complemented by special contributions over the «Völkerbundsender Prangins». In the hectic years before the outbreak of war, these programs were also transmitted over its own hastily installed short-wave transmitter Schwarzenburg.

### Wartime

As the Founder of the Overseas program, Paul Borsinger, once remarked: it was only in 1939 that this institution, which in those days was not yet clearly named and actually without any exactly described status, had matured «de facto», a provisional coming-of-age which like all temporary

measures needed to remain in effect over a longer period of time. This small working team withstood the critical time of the war years. The «Swiss Broadcasting Service, Short Wave Dept» proved itself to be a welcome pillar of support against the tide of perfidious propaganda of that time. This activity very soon needed round-the-clock work. The broadcasts in foreign languages were increased, and in close co-operation with the «Landessender» studios, a world-wide basis of trust was established, last but not least, thanks to the support of men, whose names directly due to this work, achieved world-wide renown, like Prof. J.R.von Salis and René Payot. The initial line of thought of the pioneer Borsinger and therefore quasi the «de jure» recognition as the seventh studio of the SRG, was accorded the official embodiment much later in the year 1953.

Swiss Broadcasting in 1985

