



### Interview with Ruxandra Obreja: DRM needs attractive programmes

*Radio-Kurier:* Please tell us about your background in radio and what your responsibility at the BBC World Service is today.

*Ruxandra Obreja:* I have been passionate about radio for as long as I can remember. After studying Germanic languages in Bucharest, Romania I started writing and presenting programmes for Radio and Television. Since the mid 1980s I have worked as a Journalist at the BBC World Service becoming Editor, Manager and Commissioner of output for language and English areas. In the past few years I have been involved in placing radio content on different distribution platforms rather than just creating content. For the past two and a half years I have been Controller of Business Development at the BBC World Service. In this role I have been co-ordinating and strategically pushing forward an activity and teams that are proud to look after 1.250 partners and over 150 relays worldwide.

*Radio-Kurier:* Please tell us about your past exposure to Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM) in your organization BBC World Service, and also on the role of the BBC regarding DRM.

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Last year, on the retirement of John Sykes, Vice Chairman of the DRM Consortium, I was nominated to represent the BBC World Service in the consortium and I have also taken over as Chairman of the DRM Board within the BBC World Service. This reflects the view of the BBC that while in the past the focus had to be on the technical standard development, now that the standard is established, we need a more business development and commercial approach to give the standard mass appeal.

*Radio-Kurier:* What is your main task as chairperson of the DRM Consortium?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* I see my main task as giving coherence and strategic direction by ensuring that our various groups of stakeholders are pushing in the same direction, maximising their influence for a single goal i.e. that the DRM standard is taken up on a mass scale, becoming through its clear benefits an important part of the global radio digital landscape.

*Radio-Kurier:* You are following Peter Senger as chairperson of the DRM Consortium. While Mr. Senger came from the technical section of an international broadcaster your background is quite different. Do you possibly have a different perspective on the subject which might also influence the strategy of the DRM Consortium?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* My answers so far have indicated, I hope, that while I value immensely the technical work put into getting the DRM standard recognized and accepted and the current work being done on DRM+, I feel that now is the time for getting the standard into radio receivers and people's living rooms and cars.

*Radio-Kurier:* How do you rate the success of Digital Radio Mondiale so far, and how do you feel about increasing the future impact of it?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* The DRM Consortium was started by gifted and enthusiastic people, the real pioneers of DRM. I value their contribution and they have set a very high standard in their work and commitment. We have now a very good technological solution which technical and lay people have to know more about. Perhaps this is why we felt it was also the time to relaunch our website [www.drm.org](http://www.drm.org), definitely worth a visit. Now it is about translating a technological advancement into a business proposition that ultimately offers choice to audiences.

This is a crucial moment for DRM, which has to establish itself in a crowded marketplace, with many more options for listeners than ten years ago.

*Radio-Kurier:* Could you please name the main obstacles which currently possibly cast a shadow over the image of Digital Radio Mondiale as being an accepted and working system for broadcasting?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* A difficult question as I think more work needs to be done with regulators in particular, chip manufacturers and broadcasters. These are not obstacles, they are challenges and synchronising these various streams of work and getting excitement and acceptance for DRM is what the Consortium and its members are about.

*Radio-Kurier:* DRM as a system needs specific attention and strategy for the various areas during the challenge of deployment into practical usage – technology, broadcasters, receiving devices, audience. Where do you see deficiencies today, and what are your plans to attack and eliminate these?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Please see my previous answer. I am a positive „can do“ person so obstacles and deficiencies, while may be there and be challenging for us, can be overcome by working together. Our biggest assets are a demonstrably excellent standard and the international nature of the consortium and our networks of supporters and interested parties.

*Radio-Kurier:* How will the DRM Consortium or you as the chairperson be able to encourage certain parties to increase their commitment and their contribution for a joint success? As an example, we as radio listeners expect more programmes from the broadcasters belonging to the DRM Consortium. This includes English from the BBC World Service, which for many of our readers remains a main source of international news.

*Ruxandra Obreja:* The take up of DRM Standard is intrinsically linked to good content. One of our first tasks will be to see how a different, richer content than what is available currently on the current distribution platforms can be made available. There are some ideas around and we hope to be more precise about this very point in the near future. The BBC World Service remains committed to DRM, is maintaining its level of broadcasts and is exploring, as said, new avenues for boosting content.

*Radio-Kurier:* We have been hearing repeatedly of delays in chip availability, hence also receiving devices. Will this situation not jeopardize the overall success of DRM?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* The success of DRM is dependent on chip availability and quality. There are several receivers on the market already. The question is to ensure enough content to make acquiring a receiver at reasonable price of real interest to listeners. So, chip availability, while crucial, is only part of a much more finely balanced business proposition.

*Radio-Kurier:* Digital Radio Mondiale as a technical system meets all ITU regulations and at least in the laboratory supports the co-existence of analogue and digital transmissions in the existing broadcast bands. In the real world, however, listeners have experienced interferences between DRM and AM signals making it difficult or impossible to listen to them. As a solution for shortwave, broadcasters could place their DRM signals in a separated section of each band. This would both eliminate the interference issue and support a smooth transition from analogue to digital technology. Do you see a perspective for such an initiative among DRM members, especially international broadcasters?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Though not a technical person I understand from my better informed colleagues that DRM broadcasters have been reluctant to assign portions of the spectrum to DRM and AM broadcasts for a number of reasons. These include the need for both systems to use all parts of the band to achieve propagation at different times of day, levels of solar activity and latitudes.

We agree that it is all very well to see good performance of adjacent channel DRM and AM in the laboratory but that the majority of AM receivers are not very good at rejecting adjacent channel signals. Our experience is that DRM signals are usually less intrusive than AM signals, since the signal is more like noise and should be much weaker. Of course, sometimes, on a given day, the DRM signal propagates much better than expected and this can result in problems. If a problem persists, DRM broadcasters are very responsive and will reduce signal power to assist the AM reception. The BBC has done this in the past. It would be a good idea, as part of the normal coordination activity, to group together AM signals where possible and minimise the number of cases where DRM signals are adjacent to AM signals. Adjacent channel AM/DRM interference has been a specific measurement goal of the BBC's trial in Devon and we look forward to the results of that trial.

*Radio-Kurier:* During the past months several European countries closed down domestic mediumwave services and/or reduced their international shortwave services. Do you still see a market for DRM in Europe or



*Ruxandra Obreja übernahm am 27. März 2008 den Vorsitz im DRM-Konsortium.*

could it be too late for it in this part of the world?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Europe remains the laboratory for DRM developments. It is after all a vast area extending to the Urals which can benefit from the extensive coverage DRM affords. That is not to say that developments in other parts of the World e.g. China, India and Latin America are not equally important and who knows, might be ultimately be the ones which will give a real boost to the spread of DRM receivers.

*Radio-Kurier:* Today we listen to the radio in good audio quality on FM, DAB, the internet and via Satellite. Especially FM radio is on the increase in many parts of the world, including Africa, Asia and Latin America. Leading international broadcasters – like your own BBC World Service – expand their local FM networks around the globe for reaching listeners in good audio quality. In the light of this development, do you still see a perspective for international broadcasting on the shortwave bands – be it digital (DRM) or analogue (AM) – for reaching the targeted audience?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Very much so. Shortwave transmissions, with their great advantages of covering extensive areas in good audio quality without any interference from Gatekeepers and at relatively low cost, are benefits that have stood well the test of time. There are limitations to FM migration and the reality is that SW audiences are still significant and ready in some parts of the world. A digital option for delivering these benefits is unique and has still a lot of attraction for international broadcasters. FM, DAB and the Internet can all co-exist with Digital AM but none can deliver the full sui-

te of benefits which DRM is offering. This is why the standard is still being developed and the bigger international broadcasters are involved in supporting it.

*Radio-Kurier:* Every project will come to an end. How long will the DRM Consortium be operational?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* Once DRM is accepted and used on a mass scale the Consortium will have achieved its main goal. In a paradoxical way the full measure of the DRM success and its best manifestation would be the dissolution of the Consortium.

*Radio-Kurier:* Is there something else you would like to share with us regarding the future of Digital Radio Mondiale and/or about the expectations concerning your new task as the chairperson of the DRM Consortium?

*Ruxandra Obreja:* As a Chairperson of just over a month or so I must stress how honoured and excited I am to have been entrusted with this challenging task. There are excellent companies supporting the Consortium and excellent professionals representing them. It is a unique group of international people working hard just as we might be on the brink of great success. I hope more companies and individuals will want to get involved in the consortium while the Consortium itself will come across in time as better organised, more focused and really dedicated to the mass take up of the standard. DRM offers a unique solution, which I hope that business people and listeners alike will appreciate and use.

*Radio-Kurier:* Thank you very much indeed for taking the time for answering our questions.