



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

12 June 1990

Dear Charles,

BBC World Service

You will probably have seen last week's announcement by the FCO and BBC of changes in BBC World Service output. You may like to have details.

In recent months we have undertaken a rigorous review with the BBC World Service of the prescription for languages and hours for broadcasts, as the basis for funding arrangements for the next Triennium 1991/2 - 1993/4. The review has resulted in a package of changes which are designed to make the best use of resources, taking account of foreign policy priorities. The package was agreed with the BBC who, though naturally reluctant to accept some of the cuts, have accepted that it is a sensible compromise.

The elements are:

- small increases in the hours broadcast in Russian, Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese to bring them up to 49 hours 30 minutes, 24 hours 30 minutes, and 10 hours 30 minutes a week respectively;
- an additional half an hour a day in English regional programmes for Western Europe as the basis for a new breakfast time broadcast;
- some increases in English regional programmes for the Indian sub-continent and South East Asia (a special 15 minute programme to each region every weekday, instead of once a week as at present), and a new service (5 hours a week) for South East Asia to encourage the learning of English;
- ending the one hour a day broadcasts in Japanese. Audiences are small and declining; surveys show that our target audiences do not listen to the radio (short-wave radio even less); and there are many other sources of news and information about Britain. World Service broadcasts to Japan in English continue;
- ending the fifteen minute a day broadcast in Malay. Audiences are tiny and include few of our target listeners, who can and do listen to the World Service in English;

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- reduction of short wave broadcasts in Spanish and Portuguese for Latin America (which have low audiences, particularly because of poor reception), but with expansion of material for rebroadcasting by local stations in the region.

The net result is a reduction of one hour forty five minutes a week, giving a total of 784 hours a week broadcasting in English and all vernaculars together (the present 785 hours 45 minutes a week is an all time high). This small reduction is outweighed by the additional material for rebroadcasting in Latin America.

These prescription changes were announced with the caveat that they are part of the Triennium package. The proposed increases will therefore depend on the outcome of the PES round. The announcement was made at this stage at the BBC World Service's request, to enable the language services concerned to plan for change. Our overall bid for the Triennium - based on a thorough examination of priorities with the BBC - takes account of the need to improve programme quality so as to enable the World Service to retain its competitive position among international broadcasters.

I am copying this letter to Carys Evans (HM Treasury).

Yours,  
*Stephe Wall*  
(J S Wall)  
Private Secretary

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10 Downing Street