



WE CAN WIN WITH THE QUALITY

As a journalist and reporter **Nahida Nakad** has worked in London, Rome, Paris, and as one of TF1's special correspondents she has covered the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa. Now she juggles three jobs: Head of the Arabic service at **Audiovisuel Extérieur de la France**, Deputy Director at **Monte Carlo Doualiya**, and at **France 24** Nahida is Deputy Director of the Arabic Service which launched in April 2007

Audiovisuel Extérieur de la France decided to create an Arabic-speaking pool to bring closer together the work of the journalists of Monte Carlo Doualiya – which is part of RFI – and the France 24 Arabic service. So my task in these three jobs is to find the synergies, to plan what we can do in common. For example, we send one correspondent either from the radio or from TV and he/she covers the news for both channels. We also have some programming that is produced and aired at France 24 in Arabic and also broadcast on the radio - we are working on improving the sound quality for

radio transmission. For the moment we share the economic news bulletins, some debates, and sometimes when we have breaking news and live video feeds we decide to change our programming on both France 24 Arabic and at MCD to air that programme.

Why is France 24 broadcasting in Arabic to the Middle East?

Everything that happens there has implications all over the world. A lot of people who live in the Arab world know very little of France, except of course North Africa and Lebanon. French values, our way of life, the economy, the diversity of people in France – all this we would like to show people in the Arab world. It's very important to be able to give this

vision of France and the French way of doing news in Arabic, and to provide another choice for the Arab-speaking people so that they don't have to rely mainly on the Arabic speaking media which have a political stance.

Is the editorial agenda the same as for your English channel?

We give the same information, we might just stress more what interests an Arab public more. But we are not trying to have an Arabic channel, we are not trying to show the Arabic speaking viewers what they can see on other Arab channels. We show them what the French do, what the Europeans, the West does but that may also interest an Arab audience. For instance for the European elections at France 24 Arabic we don't have debates every day or are on live till midnight, but we will talk about the European elections in every news bulletin.

Does France 24 Arabic have content that you can't find anywhere else?

Yes, about France. French news and a lot of cultural stories – l'art de vivre, fashion, beauty – in France we give art and culture almost the same importance as the economy. It's a mixture, quite balanced. That you won't find anywhere else.

What are the challenges in dealing with an Arabic-speaking world?

One is a logistic challenge – we don't have one prime time. Programming is difficult when you have +2 hours in the Gulf, +1 hour in the Maghreb, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian territories, and -1 in North Africa. The most important thing is to say what you have to say without shocking. You can go against the beliefs – I'm not talking about the religious beliefs – , you can show them another way of life, you can even show things that could seem disturbing to them, as long as you don't shock them. The line is quite fine there, but when you have respect for both cultures, you can do it. For the rest, we just do our job like we do it in France. There are things

that the French don't like, there are things that the Arabs don't like, if it has to be aired then it will be aired. But it's not easy to work in the Arab world, to move around and work freely in some countries, and this is why a lot of information that we could have from the Arab countries is lacking.

Let's talk about online and mobile.

It's extremely important for the Arabic service because a lot of people cannot get information otherwise. Also people have this need to express their views – which they can't in most of their countries. The net is a way to get these views out, and we are using it more and more – we have a programme called "Observers" which is working really well. We were the first on the iPhone, you can receive France 24 in French, English and Arabic, it will get better and better technically.

Who is your audience?

We are targeting decision-makers, young people, women. We were broadcasting initially for four hours and it was very hard to know who was watching, now we do know that our audience is rising quite substantially in North Africa. A survey we did in January suggests that in the Maghreb, France 24 has become Al Jazeera's main challenger amongst its target audience of opinion leaders – we're ahead of CNNI and BBC World in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. We are concentrating now on the Maghreb, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and the Gulf – we are still very little known in the Gulf.

Can a channel like yours compete with Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera?

Not at all. We cannot compete because we don't want to have the same line and we don't have the same means either. What we are trying to do is fill the gap – an independent Arabic speaking channel which shows the news in a clear way. We attach a lot of importance to the way our product looks, the way the pictures are

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edited etc, and I think there is a real place for a channel like France 24 who shows the news in a clear and pleasing way, with short news bulletins, with breaking news when there is breaking news, but also life in general and not only politics. A lot of people in the Arab world appreciate our French values. We are not talking here about the majority of the Arab world, but about a certain group that will watch us because they are looking for news presented in this particular way. We don't have the ambition to become the most watched channel in the Arab world.

Where are you heading?

We went from four to 10 hours of broadcasting in April and we are more reactive now. We are organising things with Monte-Carlo Doualiya and this mixture of MCD with its 30 years of experience and the new team at France 24 is going to be one of our strengths. Of course the French and English channels at France 24 also give us a lot of content, so we hope that next year we'll be broadcasting 12 hours. Our goal is – even if we can't compete in terms of audiences – to be one of the top quality 24 hour news channels in Arabic. I really think we can win with the quality.

Nahida Nakad, thank you. ■

Audiotel Extérieur de la France was established in February 2008 to co-ordinate and modernise France's international broadcasting activities. AEF is responsible for four companies which were previously operating separately: RFI, the multilingual radio station; Monte Carlo Doualiya, the Arabic subsidiary of RFI; FRANCE24, the non-stop news channel broadcasting in French, English and Arabic; and TV5MONDE, the French-speaking generalist TV channel with a worldwide distribution.

