

We need an ARTE for the mainstream

A EUROPE-WIDE PUBLIC-SERVICE BROADCASTER COULD HELP FORGE A EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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It's quarter to ten one Sunday evening in the year 2023. On the TV, we no longer have perennial talk show guests Peter Altmaier and Karl Lauterbach in conversation with Anne Will, but rather the president of the European Commission, climate activist Greta Thunberg and the head of a European environmental organisation arguing about the climate crisis. The host is French presenter Hugo Clément, and it's not just French and German audiences watching. People are tuning in to or livestreaming this talk show from right across the continent.

It's high time we had a public-service broadcaster for the whole of Europe. One where the talk show is followed by Jan Böhmermann's humorous take on a sex party scandal in Brussels. Where every Sunday, audiences get to watch satirists from a different European country – and a set packed with groanworthy jokes is then followed up by a Polish crime drama. The language barrier shouldn't be seen as a problem for the project of using a common broadcaster to strengthen a sense of European identity. Here's to artificial intelligence and live translation!

'It's time for a pan-European public-service broadcaster, either state-funded or in collaboration with commercial channels. We need Arte on a bigger scale, we need an Arte for the mainstream.'

ESTABLISHING A EUROPEAN DISCOURSE

The fourth estate of any democracy is press freedom. In every European country, critics can comment on, analyse and critique a variety of different media, and so help to establish a discourse. This is something that's lacking at European level.

There is very little in the way of Europe-wide media that is truly capable of generating a discourse. Media that encourages people to form an opinion or allows us to peer over the shoulders of the people in power. At the moment, EU correspondents only make it into national news coverage when there are really big stories. But there are many other stories to tell too, about backroom deals, political debates, conflicts within political factions or between European politicians. And we don't get to hear human interest stories from other European countries either.

WITHOUT THE FOURTH ESTATE DEMOCRACY IS UNDER THREAT

Some experts even go one step further and claim that populists find it easier to push their nationalist views because there is no common space where discourse can take place, no European public sphere. As Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, once put it, 'If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter.'

THE TIME HAS COME

So it's high time for the European Broadcasting Union to produce more than just the Eurovision Song Contest and Euronews. It's time for a pan-European public-service broadcaster, either state-funded or in collaboration with commercial channels. We need Arte on a bigger scale, we need an Arte for the mainstream. With Sunday night talk shows and cookery programmes watched by audiences across Europe. So that, one day, a majority of Europeans might actually feel European.



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