

# One Continent, 27 Different Media: The German president appeals for a European Public Sphere

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On 23 February Joachim Gauck, the German President, delivered a much anticipated [speech](#) on Europe in which he appealed for a more European media and a European Public Sphere. It is worth quoting him verbatim:

“It seems to me that one of the main problems we have in building a more integrated European community is the inadequate communication within Europe. And by that I mean in everyday life rather than at the diplomatic level.

To this day, it is often the case that each one of the 27 member nations sees the same European events in its own way. Media coverage is almost exclusively dominated by national considerations. Knowledge about neighbouring countries is still scanty – with the exception of a comparatively small group of students, business people, intellectuals and artists. To date, Europe does not have a single European public space which could be compared to what we regard as a public sphere at national level. First of all we lack a lingua franca. There are 23 official languages in Europe, plus countless other languages and dialects. A German who does not also speak English or French will find it difficult to communicate with someone from Portugal, or from Lithuania or Hungary. It is true to say that young people are growing up with English as the lingua franca. However, I feel that we should not simply let things take their course when it comes to linguistic integration. For more Europe means multilingualism not only for the elites but also for ever larger sections of the population, for ever more people, for everyone! I am convinced that feeling at home in one’s native language and its magic and being able to speak enough English to get by in all situations and at all ages can exist alongside each other in Europe.

A common language would make it easier to realize my wish for Europe’s future – a European agora, a common forum for discussion to enable us to live together in a democratic order. This agora would be even more wide-ranging than the one pupils perhaps know from the history books. In Ancient Greece, it was a central meeting-place, a place for ceremonial gatherings and a court at the same time, a place for public discussion where efforts focused on creating a well-ordered society. Today we need an extended model. Perhaps our media could produce an innovation to foster more Europe, like an [ARTE](#) channel for everyone, a multichannel linked to the Internet for at least 27 states, for the young and old, for onliners and offliners, for pro-Europeans and eurosceptics. It would have to do more than broadcast the Eurovision Song Contest or European detective series. For example, it would have to broadcast reports on the founders of companies in Poland, young unemployed people in Spain or family policies in Denmark. It would have to organize discussions which bring home to us the sensibilities of our neighbours and help us to understand why they may regard the same event in a very different light. And on the grand political stage, the doors would open after a crisis summit and the cameras would show everyone at the negotiating table, not just one face.

With or without such a TV channel, we need an agora. It would disseminate knowledge, help to develop a European civic spirit and also act as a corrective when national media adopt a nationalistic approach and report on neighbouring countries without sensitivity or real knowledge. I know that many media companies have already attempted to create a European public space by reporting on other countries, by focusing on Europe and by putting into practice many good ideas. But let us see more of this – more reports on and more communication with Europe!! do not regard communication as a side aspect of the political process. Rather, providing adequate information on issues and problems is politics itself. Politics which expects the participants in the agora to be responsible and does not discount them as subservient, disinterested and ignorant.”

