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REPORTING EUROPE: FROM UNITED IN DIVERSITY TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE ENTITY

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"Europe is what Europe is not", states the title of an article by the Dutch website *De Correspondent*. The author (Wijnenberg, 2014) observes that the European sentiment is not strongly held amongst Europeans. Yet. Europe as a primarily economically-motivated partnership hinders its inhabitants from seeing the rather ideological dimensions of its alliance as well. The extensive size of the continent, the diverse cultures it holds and the adverse interests of the European countries do not contribute to unification either. Besides which, people tend to identify more easily with their known, near and familiar country than with the relatively new and abstract unity of Europe.

Few citizens contemplate their European sense of belonging. This mindset could be very different, as Europeans experience a lot of benefits from their continent. The disappearance of many armed border posts between European countries makes it possible to smoothly travel around the continent. People can just carelessly pack their bags and go, as Europe is predominantly safe and proper. The European surroundings of peace, freedom, security and prosperity are taken for granted. Except by travelling outside of Europe – where one might have to worry about matters such as being a lone female traveller, LGBT prohibition, corrupt authorities, vaccinations, unsafe food and water and money exchange – a remedy to this European lack of awareness has not been found so far.

The media can largely provide a substitute for non-travellers to experience what will be absent when Europe is suddenly out of reach. There is an ongoing debate on how the media could play a significant role in creating awareness of Europe amongst Europeans. When reporting on European-related issues, national media generally adopt a domestic focus. This continuously reinforces the distinction between the nation State and Europe: that is not increasing Europeanisation. Whereas various pan-European platforms have been established to convey the European story, not all of these turned out to be viable. Due to language barriers, for instance, pan-European media largely serve a niche audience. And whereas reporting across borders should create understanding for diversity around Europe, in practice, pan-European media often present one point of view on different topics. Transnational media,

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where journalists from different countries work together on one topic and provide different points of views, could offer a solution. This way reporting across borders can support European integration.

In addition, national media tend to pay more attention to negative rather than positive news concerning Europe. Issues such as high unemployment rates, economic depths and increasing xenophobia in some European countries are often reported on in the media. This is less the case with subjects that are going well in Europe, like the exchange of knowledge in science and art. Here it seems the more success, the less newsworthy it is and consequently the fewer people will hear about it. National media could therefore contribute to European awareness by reporting more on positive news concerning Europe.

Lastly, by slowly and constantly implementing more European news in the national media, people will get more familiar with Europe. It is especially stimulating for people that have never travelled either in or outside the continent to see how they benefit from being European. At the same time, European-related news should focus less on politics, as citizens are only marginally interested in this topic. Instead, the media strategy should be more Eurovision and less European Union.

These ideas are a challenge for today's financially unstable European media landscapes. Besides this, it demands a new mindset for European journalists. Many established journalists started their practices in a different time, yet the new generation of journalists is educated with a more globalised worldview. It will take a while before this has a discernible effect on the European media landscape. But, the enlargement of the Schengen area from five to twenty-six states took sixteen years, there had been discussion about a European currency for almost two decades before implementing it, and Europe is still not unrest-free. Patience is a virtue.

It is a matter of time before citizens genuinely want to turn on the television to watch European news, but there is already a demand for a new view on (trans)national media that focusses on stimulating people to go beyond their current understanding of Europe.

Reference

Wijnenberg, Rob. "Europa is wat Europa niet is". *De Correspondent* (6 May 2014) (online) [Date accessed 29.09.2014] <https://decorrespondent.nl/1127/Europa-is-wat-Europa-niet-is/28885010-dc248a74>