DELPHI *Media Platform*

γνῶθι σαυτόν

(Know Thyself)

Draft for a cornerstone of the European public sphere

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The Language of Europe is Translation

Umberto Eco

The task

Europe is at a crossroads. Due to the global threat to democracy and the current geopolitical shifts, fundamental decisions must be taken in the next legislative period of the future EU-Parliament and -Commission to strengthen democracy and European integration and to fend off attacks from outside and within.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is also directed against Europe: it is a hybrid war in which, alongside military weapons, the weapons of propaganda, fake news, and the manipulation of public opinion are used. These weapons are primarily used in the digital space, which is extremely vulnerable despite the EU's leading role in digital regulation. Disinformation is the biggest hybrid threat to democracies in Europe and European integration. While autocratic systems increasingly seal off their cyberspace, Europe offers the enemies of democracy one of the most vulnerable public spaces in the world.

The classic separation of external and internal security is not practicable in cyberspace due to the borderless nature of attacks. Europe must quickly find appropriate responses to this threat. In addition to increased efforts to protect against external and internal attacks, measures to strengthen trustworthy sources of information must be put in place.

Europe sees itself first and foremost as a community of values based on human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. Every democracy needs a public sphere in which verified facts are freely accessible and open to criticism, based on which discourse and opinion can freely form and from which decisions for the common cause can emerge. In Europe, the formation of a common public sphere has failed so far due to language barriers. But today, digital technologies enable translation into all the languages of Europe in real time and can thus overcome a crucial obstacle on the way to a democratically united Europe. The rules of the current public sphere are determined by a few large companies whose algorithms promote fragmentation and enable less and less inclusion. That is why it is time to finally create a democratic digital public sphere that allows European citizens to exchange across language and national borders. A media platform that at the same time makes Europe's cultural memory accessible and helps to create understanding and trust instead of hostility and isolation.

Without a public sphere that enables free self-understanding and opinion-forming, and thus ultimately the legitimization of rule through free elections, democracy is not

viable, as the analysis of Jürgen Habermas has pertinently shown. Most recently, the eminent philosopher warned: "A democratic system suffers damage on the whole when the infrastructure of the public sphere can no longer direct the attention of citizens to the relevant issues in need of decision-making and can no longer guarantee the formation of competing public and that is: qualitatively filtered opinions."

The current dysfunctionality of the European public sphere favors populists who have already come to power in some countries, working off their anti-European agenda with cross-border digital tools and yet in national filter bubbles. At the latest, since the start of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, it has also become clear how strongly systematic disinformation threatens Europe's democracy.

Europe, therefore needs its own secure European Public Open Space more urgently than ever. A digital space that is independent of the oligopolies of GAFAM (Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) and Cloud TV (Netflix, Disney+), that is not market-driven, but that makes Europe's information, knowledge, and culture accessible to all, in conformity with democracy and fundamental rights, and thus makes it a living factor in their education. The TV news streaming platform proposed here under the title *DELPHI*, which is intended to make news and information programs accessible to all Europeans, aims to provide an important building block for this.

Delphi stands for a significant place in European history: the sanctuary of Apollo there was literally the navel of the ancient world for over a millennium. It was here that people sought advice in difficult personal and political situations. The divination of the oracle was supposed to provide them with security in an uncertain world. On the pediment of the temple was the famous saying: *"Know thyself!"* Despite the ambiguity of the individual Delphic prophecies, the oracle always called for self-knowledge through self-understanding. Today, Europe needs a common digital space for precisely this self-recognition across language barriers.

The *DELPHI* platform will be a first building block for the self-understanding of European citizens in the digital space, across language borders. It is a first contribution to bringing the publics in the different Member States closer together and into a dialogue. A dialogue in which citizens can talk to each other rather than about each other. They are enabled to do this by the possibility of getting to know the perspective of other Europeans through direct access to corresponding quality media content from the other member states.

If Europe knew what Europe knows, it would be stronger and more resilient. A platform like *DELPHI* will help to make the immense existing knowledge in the different regions of Europe visible and available to all Europeans.

Such a networked information platform will be an essential step on the way to European, democratic, and digital sovereignty, which the current EU Commission has made its program. It can and should be an important forum for European self-understanding by making European perspectives accessible to everyone in all their diversity and richness. The pan-European platform does not create a centralised

Brussels perspective on the world. It merely combines what is already available everywhere in Europe and, by making it accessible to all citizens in all languages, increases the range of professional news and thus the diversity of opinion in every member state at a stroke. It is **plural, decentralized,** and **subsidiary** in a technical and content-related sense and, thus, corresponds to the spirit of Europe.

Now is the right time to realize such a goal because technological progress and the development of law have made it possible to solve the problems that have so far prevented the realization of a European television streaming network.

The idea is not new, yet it has not been realized to date.

Critical issues that have emerged in the discussions on a European Public Space so far are:

1. Content Rights - often only acquired nationally

2. Linguistic Diversity

3. Regulatory Requirements and Precise Mandate

4. Technology, Interoperability

5. Data Science at Platform Level

6. Stakeholders so far structurally not Interested in the Overarching Solution

But these obstacles have already been solved or can be solved very quickly with small measures:

1. Content Rights

It has been argued time and again that there can be no European platform because there are no European rights to television content. Rights allocated according to linguistic territories create a patchwork quilt that would prevent content from being used across Europe. European rights would have to be acquired for each individual content, which would overburden the project logistically and financially.

The fact is that **Art. 3 of the European Cable and Satellite Directive** already regulates that the country-of-origin principle applies to news and information programs in the case of cross-border distribution, i.e., no additional rights are required. This regulation was created in 2019 specifically to enable the supranational use of information programs.

In addition, TV broadcasters have been increasing the share of in-house productions for many years. In doing so, they rely on the strategy of buy-out contracts, which transfer all rights of use to them. They are thus in possession of such Europe-wide rights to a considerable extent. This applies to the areas of information, education, and culture, which consist predominantly of in-house or in-house/outside productions. These areas will be included in a later expansion stage at **DELPHI.**

The deliberate avoidance of fictional content for **DELPHI**, where the legal situation is often more complex, facilitates the launch of this first European platform.

Incidentally, cross-border streaming of online content has become mandatory for commercial providers such as Netflix with **Regulation EU 2017/1128** of June 14th, 2017, on cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market. It would be an irony of history if the commercial providers of entertainment covered by this EU regulation remained the only providers of cross-border programs or platforms, and the public service broadcasters in the member states, which are important for political opinion-forming and culture, did not counter them as providers with Europe-wide information offers.

2. Linguistic Diversity

The next popular killer argument against a European platform is Europe's linguistic diversity. There are 24 official languages spoken in the EU: Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish. In the past, the argument of linguistic diversity was often used to declare the emergence of a European public sphere impossible, but now it is being used again as a cost argument against the idea of a European platform: the production of the necessary language versions would break any economic viability of the project.

But in the meantime, technical solutions have been available for a long time, which are used not least by *YouTube* to localize content worldwide. Automatic speech recognition programs such as *Aegishub Open Source, Amara.org,* or *Amber Script* have the proven technical prerequisites to create subtitles automatically in real time.

In addition, *DeepL GmbH* in Cologne, for example, already offers fully automated translations into nearly all European languages. The translation performance of the AI used is generally judged to be superior to Google Translate or other GAFAM translation programs. The European strengths in multilingualism and automatic translation should be brought together in a European platform with the strength of public service broadcasting. Then what Umberto Eco remarked many years ago when he formulated that **the language of Europe is translation** would also be realized technically.

YouTube proves daily that automated subtitling of VOD and live video into other languages is possible. So, why shouldn't it be possible for a European media platform?

Arte has extended the subtitling of its programs to six languages (in addition to French and German, now English, Spanish, Polish, and Italian). Which, according to *Arte*, makes it accessible to 70 percent of all Europeans in their mother tongue. But *Arte* does not offer all the quality news and information programs available in Europe and, above all, this content is not centrally discoverable for all European citizens, as **DELPHI** aims to do. The translation tools that will be used in **DELPHI** will also, unlike the commercial providers, particularly promote translation in language communities that have few speakers and have, therefore, been neglected by the Big Data players so far.

And last but not least, a study by the European Parliament's STOA has shown that the technical requirements for the operation of such a decentralised platform have long since been met: "European streaming platform for national news accessible in all EU languages: Technical feasibility study" (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/de/document/EPRS_STU(2023)740249). A second STOA Study on the Government of such a platform is under way and will be presented in the EU Parliament in May 2025.

3. Regulatory Issues and Precise Objectives.

DELPHI is a federated platform that pursues the clear goal of making news and information, and at a later stage, also education and culture, available and discoverable for all Europeans at any time and to enable a free exchange of information. This mission touches the innermost core of the European project: the creation of a European public sphere, which is a prerequisite for European democracy and solidarity-based cohesion even in times of crisis.

The objective is to link quality news and political documentaries from a wide variety of providers with a powerful search engine in such a way that they can make their contribution to the formation of the European public sphere.

An open, non-commercial platform can become an important element of a European Public Open Space with content and offers from institutions from culture, education, and science such as museums and universities.

Thus, the regulatory framework of such a platform is defined by its mandate as a public institution of European character, like the case of the digital library *Europeana*. The financing of the initiative and operating costs will be carried out by the European Union, analogous to *Europeana*. This is the only way to ensure sustainable operation that does not follow only economic imperatives. In view of the scarcity of resources at media companies in Europe it is clear: such a platform must be financed from the EU budget and must not cost PSM or private Media anything extra.

The Model

Broadcasters licensed in Europe make their TV news available free of charge. This is done automatically as soon as content is posted on the broadcasters' national media libraries and released for use by **DEPLHI** without any further work. **DELPHI** is, in the first step, a *decentralized federated platform*, a *virtual meta search engine*, which enables the search and access to national media libraries in a search system across language borders, and allows the corresponding subtitling or, depending on the customer's wishes, automated dubbing during playback, as well as translating introductory texts and background material. The participating broadcasters benefit from the additional reach, from the evaluation of the user data obtained and made available anonymously, as well as from the practical and technological experience of this new form of cooperation in Europe. And: The providers do not have to hand

over their news items, they remain on their own servers and are played out there with translations throughout Europe. This is feasible thanks to the *decentralised technical architecture*, which is based on the elements of *Fediverse* and the *Activity Hub protocol*.

The governance of the platform is strictly non-governmental, state-far and without the involvement of the EU institutions.

Further details on the Governance, such as the "all give all news" principle, are explained in the new **STOA study on the governance** of such a platform, which will be presented in Parliament in Strasbourg in May 2025.

The European Commission must ensure that there is no unequal treatment between platforms such as *YouTube* and *Facebook* on the one hand and platforms operated by publishers and broadcasters on the other, as has been the case up to now under Art. 13/14 of the E-Commerce Directive. If the preferential treatment of American platforms, as it currently exists in European law, is not eliminated, European platforms operated by publishers and public broadcasters will not be able to hold their own against *YouTube* and others.

4. Technology, Interoperability

Previous attempts to develop a European platform also failed due to the technical difficulties and complexity of the project.

DELPHI consistently follows the path of a virtual platform whose heart is a powerful search engine.

The virtual platform connects the existing *decentralised* news libraries of the participating broadcasters and creates space for additional partners who can submit their content via a public interface. In a later stage also private Media as well as theatres, opera houses, museums and film and documentary festivals.

The principles according to which the search engine weights its recommendations are verifiable at any time due to open-source software. They must comply with the principles of transparency and plurality in democracy. **DELPHI** also pursues a consistently *decentralised* technological approach by relying on a *Fediverse architecture* based on the *Activity Hub protocol*. This means that the contributions remain with the respective provider and can still be searched for and displayed in translated form throughout Europe and across languages. The use of the Activity Hub protocol ensures interoperability with existing social media and microblogging services, which increases the visibility, reach, and relevance of news items.

The **DELPHI** recommendation algorithms work with the users' data and produce their personalization in absolute compliance with the GDPR, to generate valuable recommendations that pay attention to diversity instead of creating filter bubbles.

This is done by creating maximum transparency via the algorithms. At the same time, users can create their own data and interest profiles, based on which content is then

recommended to them. The selection criteria comply with the principles of diversity and plurality as well as the educational and information mission of the public broadcasters and, at the same time, allow the user to set individual priorities. Of course, all this data is subject to the strictest data protection rules and is not used commercially.

DELPHI thus becomes the core cell of a European search engine driven by democratic counter-algorithms and shows that a digital public space does not have to undermine democracy, as it has done so far, but can, on the contrary, strengthen it.

5. Data Science at Platform Level

It is crucial that the search engine used is powerful and at the same time compliant with fundamental rights, i.e., democracy- and plurality-friendly. The task is not trivial, also because the quality of the search engine and the recommendation algorithms, in addition to the content, determines acceptance among users. For example, the Netflix algorithm is said to calculate 174 x 10 to the power of 10 combinations of number of people, gender, sociographic and geographic data, etc., in real time when it processes a query.

Only through such intelligent high-performance algorithms can the heart of the platform display suitable and inspiring results, a prerequisite for its acceptance by users.

Currently, *Google* dominates the European search engine market with a market share of almost 90%. But the development of a complementary, open, and transparent search engine is possible. In this way, the European platform *DELPHI* can also fuel the general further development of democracy- and plurality-friendly concepts for search engines in Europe. Overall, the whole spectrum of alternative search engines and browsers should be involved in the work.

The re-establishment of an improved "fair search", which uses user data exclusively to improve search results and links with social media exclusively to promote recommendation algorithms that deepen knowledge, make other points of view experienceable, in a word empower the user. In a word, enabling the user to enter a matter-oriented exchange and to form an opinion in a democratic space and to develop further, instead of being sucked dry for the purpose of profit, also makes the *DELPHI* platform project a model project for a new search for content oriented towards freedom, democracy, and self-determination.

6. Involving Stakeholders and Driving *DELPHI* forward Independently

The development of *DELPHI* will involve the relevant stakeholders, i.e., the directors and boards of major European broadcasters and media companies.

The DELPHI initiative is, therefore, explicitly open to all those who are willing and able to create a European public sphere for trustworthy news. To all of you, we extend an

explicit invitation: **Let's talk about how we can incorporate your plans and our concept.** Or do you have a better plan? We are open to all suggestions and ideas because there is no golden bullet that solves all the problems of the sceptic public in Europe, nor would it be European not to work together from the start in a strong and broad network with diverse actors.

However, an independent institution, accountable only to the European Parliament and the Commission, is needed to pursue implementation with determination. There are various considerations as to how such an institution should be structured, but in any case, it should be open to participation by the main stakeholders, such as the European public broadcasters.

Close cooperation with *Arte,* single national Broadcasters, and the *EBU*, which is already working on corresponding technologies, is also conceivable.

The motto for the consortium should be the same as that for a Europe facing historic challenges from within and without: **Together we are stronger than alone!**

The Kairos

Who are you?
I am Kairos, who conquers all!
Why does a lock of hair fall into your forehead?
So that whoever meets me can seize me.
Why are you bald at the back of your head?
Once I have slipped by with flying foot,
no one will catch me from behind
however hard he tries.
Posieidippos of Pella, 300 BC.

For the Greeks, Kairos was the god who embodied the favorable moment. He floated through the air, appeared unexpectedly, and disappeared just as quickly. To seize him, you had to get hold of the lock of hair on his forehead. If he flew past you, there was no way to hold on to him because of the bald patch on the back of his head. The moment was over, "no matter how hard you try... "

Today, it must be clear that the time is ripe for the creation of a European Public Open Space. In the new State Treaty on the Media, the German Federal States recognize for the first time that the functioning of the democratic public sphere can only be ensured through a cross-border perspective. The State Treaty regulates platform intermediaries for the first time, and the increasing power of streaming services to influence public opinion is also recognized. Even more importantly, the new treaty gives German public broadcasters a European mandate for the first time. Section 30 states: 'The state broadcasters united in the ARD broadcasters, ZDF and Deutschlandradio enable participation and networking for European public service partners and regularly examine a possible opening for private providers.'

Now it is time to bring these concepts into the European debate on the further development of the Digital Services Act and to broaden the narrowed perspective of European digital regulation on market and business to include a democratic public sphere perspective. However, this will not be done by regulating and obliging the main American and Chinese platforms. Rather, what is also needed is a determined, positive shaping of the public sphere in Europe by means of the new possibilities offered by digital technology. The project of the joint digital television platform **DELPHI** presented here serves this purpose.

In a first step, **DELPHI** should be launched with provisionally estimated € 40-50 million euros per year from the EU budget, under the condition that at least public and private television broadcasters from 5 Member States participate with their content at the beginning. The project must be open to all broadcasters in all Member States. Access from all Member States must be ensured by the EU, including access from countries such as Hungary, where the work of journalists is becoming increasingly difficult and where there is a particular interest in access to news and cultural content from other Member States.

Concrete initiatives must now follow. For it is precisely in view of the flood of disinformation that such a platform becomes an indispensable democracy project. **Political sovereignty will no longer exist in the future without digital sovereignty**. And a democratic Europe only has a future if we create a democratically constituted public sphere for this Europe.

So let us seize the *Kairos* while it is approaching us. It can fly by faster than we think. Then, it may be too late for the democracies in Europe. Fallen without tanks and missiles, defeated only by the digital weapons of disinformation.

To end with a poet's words: *Where there is danger, salvation grows,* wrote Friedrich Hölderlin. If we act now, the chances of self-salvation are good.

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