

The Success of ARTE, a Joint Franco-German, European Cultural Television Station, in the Context of Building the European Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

The paper contains an analysis of the success of ARTE, a unique Franco-German European cultural television station. **Scientific objective:** To check the validity of the key conditions leading to the success and development of ARTE, confronting it to the model of the properly functioning European public sphere as defined by Jürgen Gerhards. **Research methods:** Analysis of strategic and program activity of ARTE based on scientific works, corporate documents, as well as on station's broadcasting content. **Results and conclusions:** Conditions for the stable development and success of ARTE are: political will, stable type of financing, technological development, freedom and media independence, high quality of programs—these conditions are consistent with the assumptions of the model designated by Jürgen Gerhards. Additional factors of success are the application of the European Union media policy and close Franco-German cooperation. **Cognitive value:** The paper answers the question: „What conditions must be met so that such an ambitious, bi-national cultural channel as ARTE could exist and establish its stable position on the audiovisual map of Europe?”

KEYWORDS

ARTE, culture media, cultural television, European public sphere, media and technology



The subject of discussion is ARTE, a Franco-German free-to-air television station, which name comes from the initial letters: ARTE—“*Association relative aux télévisions européennes*” (ARTE—Association for European Television). Whereas the name of the headquarters—ARTE G.E.I.E—is an acronym arranged from the first letters of the French name—“*Groupement européen d'intérêts économiques*” (European Economic Interest Grouping)—defines the structural and legal form of action adopted for this “enterprise.” TV headquarters—ARTE G.E.I.E—is based in Strasbourg, ARTE France in Paris, ARTE Deutschland in Baden-Baden.

ARTE is a media experiment, often called “*le cas d’Arte*” (the case of ARTE). Since 1991, the TV station successfully has successfully its mission included in the sentence: “ARTE, permanent opening” (French: *ARTE, ouverture permanente*), which is currently its broadcasting motto. Within one bilingual station there is a close cooperation of two cultures and two nations, and the broadcasting program is used to communicate people in Europe and to build a European identity, taking into account cultural diversity. The idea of such a television was created for many years, and at the beginning, in the 80s of the 20th century, it seemed unrealistic. This was stated by the founder and the first director of Arte—Jérôme Clément, in a report entitled “Utopia Has Become a Reality,” published on the 10th anniversary of ARTE: “The cultural dimension of the programs aroused skepticism. For many, the creation of high quality bi-national television was a utopian project, because TV media seemed inherent in national cultures and habits (...). Today, ARTE is no longer a utopia, its name is a synonym of creativity and quality” (ARTE une utopie, 2010).

The project came into existence, although criticism was far-reaching—the Germans believed that they were being exposed to unknown French television, for which they would have to pay, and the French could not imagine cooperation with the Germans, culturally distinct, differing in terms of mentality. The Franco-German press was also very critical, accusing the project of the political nature and “elitism.”

Many questions raised regarding technical and linguistic matters, work styles (different in both countries), and difficulties in reconciling two audiovisual models, French and German (ARTE une utopie, 2010). Both in the sphere of politics and the media, the two countries are very different—in France for centuries the tradition of centralist governments has been alive, while Germany is characterized by far-reaching regionalism, federalism, and decentralization. Mentioning the daily overcoming of the difficulties associated with the Franco-German duality, Jerome Clement emphasized: “What first seemed to be the main obstacle and barrier—turned out to be the greatest asset (...) and allowed to cross cultural and language barriers” (ARTE une utopie, 2010).

The process of ARTE’s creation itself was divided into several stages, and the model of cultural television was based on the British station—Channel 4. The important stage on the way to the creation of ARTE was the establishment of French culture television in 1986, La Sept (Seven) (Société, Edition, 1993). A several-year period of its transformations was a kind of “testing ground” for later ARTE television.

ARTE fully fits in with the process of building the European media sphere. This is a difficult task, as emphasized by many experts, such as Sergio Cantone: “For both films and news programs, the rule applies: Europe sells badly (...) there was and there is no real single European media market” (Raport o kulturze, 2007). Ever since the creation of the European Union, fundamental issues have been considered on how to inform EU citizens about what is happening in the European institutions. From the very beginning, the media’s role in this process was appreciated, as described, among others, by Agnieszka Stępińska (2014). This is a wide range of topics that has evolved with the enlargement of the EU. The European Commission’s policy towards public media was an element favorable to the development of the European public sphere. One of the

most important assumptions of the European Television Without Frontiers Directive has been the promotion of European films and programs by supporting the production and distribution of European film productions. Deirdre Kevin pointed out: “Only through the educational mission of public media can the foundations of stronger identification with the European Union be created” (Raport o kulturze, 2007). Such a role, educational and cultural, ARTE has adopted in its strategy. Its European character is expressed not only in the written declarations, but also in the policy realized on a daily basis—the station promotes European creators and directors, and as much as 85% of its programs are European productions. It permanently cooperates with European televisions, and this partnership includes: co-productions, exchange of own programs and membership in ARTE decision-making bodies, in an advisory capacity. European public TV channels affiliated with ARTE television are: RTÉ (Ireland), RAI (Italy), ČT (the Czech Republic) ORF (Austria), SRG SSR (Switzerland), RTBF (Belgium), TVE (Spain), SVT (Sweden), and on the basis of a cooperation agreement: ERT (Greek television), and YLE (Finnish television). Since 2001, ARTE cooperated closely with TVP, but in January 2016, it suspended cooperation due to controversy over the draft of the new public media law and doubts about violations of independence, pluralism, and freedom in the media sphere in Poland (Francuska TV ARTE,” 2016).

Since 1991, the successive development of ARTE 1991 has been determined by various factors. The very creation of this experimental bi-national station can be considered a success. Nahima Vianna (2000) from the University of Bordeaux points out that the creation of ARTE is the result of an “interactive logic” consisting of three elements: a political initiative at the level of the French and German government, and its goal is to secure a position on the European audiovisual map; appropriate use of media and culture in the process of European integration; proper use of technology, in which from the very beginning of ARTE’s existence prospects for future development were seen.

Due to the fact that ARTE is a kind of “European medium,” it can apply the research criteria proposed by the German media expert Jürgen Gerhards—he defines the conditions necessary for the emergence of the European public sphere, such as: political will, providing permanent sources of financing, appropriate technological solutions, media independence, high attractiveness, and quality of communication. According to this scheme, the “case of ARTE” was analyzed.

Political Will as an Decisive Element for the Creation and Development of ARTE

The origins of ARTE arose from a political initiative established by French President Francois Mitterand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl—leaders of two nations with a difficult historical past who sought to deepen the process of reconciliation. The French President was looking for ways to use the media in this process because he thought it was the right way. Maitre Lucile writes about this in her work on ARTE (Maitre, 2011), published at the University of Lyon: in February 1984, President François Mitterrand wrote to Georges Duby, from the Collège de France, asking him to reflect on a new type of media education. Together with Claude Levi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu, they wrote to the President that the best form of education would be to create a television channel that would broadcast cultural programs. Pierre Bourdieu published a report (Maurice, 2011) entitled “*l’éducation de l’avenir*» (Education of the Future), ordered in 1984 at the Collège de France by French President Francois Mitterand. The last chapter was devoted to the education and culture-forming role of television, arguing that “the best form of education and culture would be to create an appropriate television station with a cultural and European profile.” In July 1984, the project of a “cultural channel with a European dimension” was ready and included three main assumptions—that cultural events will be broadcast live,

television programs with other European channels will be exchanged, and European themes—by showing the specificity of each country—will be presented. In May 14, 1985, François Mitterrand came to the Collège de France. During his speech, he said to the prime minister Laurent Fabius: “Study the conditions and possibilities for the creation of a new educational and cultural channel.” Jean Michele Meurice treated this sentence as a “foundational phrase” (*C’est la phrase fondatrice*) (Meurice, 2011). In February 1986, François Mitterrand established the French culture television station—La Sept (Seven), which gave a strong expression to the will of the French government to create a European audiovisual space that would strengthen a European identity (Maitre, 2011). As Maitre Lucile writes: “At the foundation of ARTE’s creation was the creation of this French cultural station (La Sept)—it was the origin of the idea of a truly European station, and pioneers of such joint action were to be France and Germany” (Maitre, 2011). A similar view was given by the author of the publication “The Real History of the Origins of ARTE”—Jean-Michel Meurice, who believed that ARTE “was born on the day of calling La Sept.” He believed, however, that there would be no continuation, if not for political will (Meurice, 2011). By the decision of President Mitterrand, a process of many bilateral talks and meetings was launched. In October 1986, at the 48th Franco-German Summit in Frankfurt, a decision was made to cooperate, the aim of which was to be a joint television station. In 1987 a Franco-German Consultative Working Group for Media Cooperation was established, and on October 4, 1988, at the 52nd Franco-German Summit in Bonn, French President François Mitterrand officially addressed the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl with the proposal to create a European Culture Channel (*Chaîne Culturelle Européenne*—abbreviation: ECC), based on the existing French channel La Sept. The signing of the founding treaty (*Traité interétatique*, n.d.) took place on October 2, 1990, on the eve of the unification of Germany. The heads of the German Lands, representatives of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the government of the French Republic submitted their signatures under the document. In April 1991, a formation contract (*contrat de formation*) was signed and ARTE G.E.I.E was inaugurated. (*Traité interétatique*, n.d.). ARTE organized the first program conference in November 1991—a few months before the ceremonial inauguration of ARTE’s entrance to the audiovisual market. This ceremony took place at the National Opera in Strasbourg in May 1992.

ARTE was supposed to take care of, among others promotion of European audiovisual productions and European creators, and thus be part of the global audiovisual landscape. An important element of the political decision about the creation of ARTE was the desire to defend against the establishment of too many programs and networks from the United States, which were and are the main producer and provider of audiovisual programs in Europe. The USA provided 70% of production, at the expense of audiovisual European producers (Nahima, 2000). That is why France signed an international agreement with Germany in order to use the Ariane rocket to put the satellite SATL and TDF1 in orbit. This allowed ARTE to join the global audiovisual market, so far dominated by American companies.

This means that the political will indicated by Jürgen Gerhards as an essential element necessary for the creation of the public sphere in the media, played an important role in the creation and development of ARTE and led to the merger of two culturally, mentally, and organizationally antagonistic partners—Germany and France.

Technology in ARTE’s Strategy

From the beginning of its existence, ARTE’s authorities have decided to use modern technologies, which allowed for the full implementation of goals related to the promotion of culture in the European sphere, using programs broadcast in different languages (*Aplikacje Arte*, n.d.). This

rule was implemented by successive ruling teams, and ARTE's technological development is also included in the current company's strategy implemented in 2017-2021.

From the beginning, the programs were broadcast in the French and German language versions, thanks to which ARTE reached at the beginning (1992) 32% of Europeans. Currently, since 2018, programs in the native language reach already 70% of Europeans; they are broadcast in French, German, Polish, English, Spanish, and Italian. At the time, Véronique Cayla, a chairman of ARTE, emphasized: "ARTE was the first to apply new technologies, including 'Replay' and TV on demand (VoD), and today is the most technologically advanced station in Europe." Technology not only supports high quality of emission in the sphere of image and sound, but also creates opportunities for wider and easier access to all social groups, including young people who use the Internet media more often than traditional television (Pourquoi et comment, 2016). The former chairman of ARTE, Gottfried Langenstein, commented: "Although the costs of using new technologies are high, we do it because we are also dealing with a young generation whose audiovisual habits differ from older generations—that is why, for example, we created the ARTE creative platform."

Since 2005, ARTE programs have been placed on the French digital TNT platform, and now they are already available on all media and on all screens—in the traditional TV space and on the Internet—TV, computer, tablet, and smartphone. "TV on Demand" (VoD) is also available through the application for hybrid TVs and tablets (Aplikacje Arte, n.d.). The latest application "ARTE 360" gives one the possibility of virtual transfer to a given place and watching it from one's own perspective, also using the Ultra HD technology.

Stable Financing

The basis for financing public television in Europe is the subscription, while private television networks use funds from advertising revenues (Abonament..., 2013). Audiovisual fees are the basis for financing public media in most European Union countries (Kaźmierska, 2014), and the subscription is the main source of financing in 21 out of 40 European countries.

ARTE is embedded in the public media system in Germany and France. In Germany, a mandatory public contribution, a subscription type (*Rundfunkbeitrag*), is the main source of financing public channels. In Germany, the agreement between the German federal states determines the financing of public broadcasting for four years (currently for the period 2017-2020). The amount of the broadcasting fee is proposed by the independent Commission on Financial Needs Determination (KEF) after analyzing the needs of individual broadcasters and then determined by the law in the federal states (*Finanzierung*, b.d.). Also in France, the radio and television subscription (*french la redevance audiovisuelle*) is the main source of financing for audiovisual media.

ARTE does not have the capacity of advertising, however, it can develop its own revenues, in particular by seeking sponsors (*Źródła finansowania*, n.d.). It is financed in 95% of radio and television charges collected in France and Germany—the French and German contributions are parity ones, and both partners are represented at the General Meeting of ARTE GEIE and vote together on the budget. ARTE's budget for 2018 was EUR 135.04 million.

ARTE GEIE, ARTE France, and ARTE Deutschland are three independent legal entities, each of them presents a separate balance sheet: profit and loss account and management report (*Financement*, n.d.). Financing ARTE France, like other public channels, is determined by the "Contract of Objectives and Measures" (COM), concluded with the state for a period of five years. The distribution of the contribution to the public audiovisual sector is approved annually by the French Parliament as part of the vote on the Budget Act. In order to get acceptance for

its budget, ARTE does not have to compete with other entities present on the private and public media market. It is supposed to prove that its mission and strategy are still in line with the initial assumptions included in the founding documents. This is a prerequisite for the approval of ARTE budget from public funds on the basis of the mentioned-above “Contract of Objectives and Measures”—COM (Projet..., n.d.) and the annual report of ARTE (Rapport..., 2018), based on financial results and strategies of company development. Although the station presents fixed “viewers” distribution, maintained at a low level (2.5% in France and 0.9% in Germany), it has no impact on its budget and does not disturb its stable financing.

The rules for financing public media are mentioned in various EU documents. Already in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999, the leading role of public broadcasters in realizing the democratic, social, and cultural needs of the society, which are not satisfied by market services, has been confirmed. Therefore, government subsidies for public broadcasters are not covered by strict EU state aid rules—provided that this type of funding is used for public purposes and does not work against private broadcasters (Aides..., 2010).

ARTE and Media Independence

ARTE has a special legal status (Maitre, 2011), which does not comply with the general rules, applicable to media and regulations, and the European institutions and the governments of France and Germany from the beginning accept this unique legal status. Although the supervision of all media in France is exercised by the CSA (*Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel*—High Audiovisual Council) (Protéger, n.d.), ARTE is not supervised by it, but is subject to the control of separate monitoring entities whose operation has been written in the founding treaty.

The independence of the “ARTE media body” is already written in the first point of the founding treaty: “CEC (European Culture Television) bears sole responsibility for programming and is also responsible for the implementation of programs, as well as for personnel and budget management under the supervision and control of the members themselves. Thus, it excludes any intervention by public authorities, including independent bodies responsible for regulating broadcasting in the host country.” The preface to the formation contract states: “The founders of ARTE want to provide its citizens with a common German-French television channel, which is to be an instrument for presenting the cultural heritage and artistic life of individual EU members, regions, and nations of Europe and the world, to ensure the dissemination of such a European program which is compatible with the principles of free flow of information and ideas and retains full independence” (Traité..., 1990).

Such a strategy coincides with the European Union’s audiovisual policy and is fully reflected in EU documents (Holtz-Bacha, 2016), such as the Treaty of Amsterdam or the Television Directive Without Frontiers, later transformed into the Audiovisual Media Services Directive Directive on audiovisual media services (Audiovisual..., n.d). Their most important message is to ensure pluralism in the media, preserve cultural diversity, and independence of national bodies regarding media regulation (Polityka audiowizualna..., n.d.).

Quality of Programs as a Distinctive Feature of ARTE

High quality of broadcasting programs is related to the modern technology used by ARTE, which indicates that—as it was written above—technology development is from the beginning one of the strategic assumptions of the station. Planning and dissemination of programs is done by the headquarters of ARTE G.E.I.E. in Strasbourg. Most of the programming offer is delivered by a French and German team—40% by ARTE France and 40% by ARTE Deutschland; 20% comes from European partners. ARTE is an antenna open to all kinds of audiovisual cultural

productions. The program consists of 55% of documentation, 25% of feature and television films, 15% of information programs, and 5% of concerts, music festivals, and stage performances. Two thirds of all programs are premieres (Arte, n.d.). The program of ARTE includes: feature films—comedies, historical and cult films, and amateur cinema; short and long films; masterpieces of animation and silent film; series and retrospectives. These are films often awarded at prestigious international festivals. ARTE also includes educational programs, news services, reports, debates, reports on festivals and cultural events, classical music, opera, rock, hip-hop, and jazz; chamber music concerts, reports from music festivals, presentation of young talents and well-known performers and idols.

ARTE is not conducive to so-called tastes of a wide audience, but offers an ambitious, high-level broadcasting program. With its 28-year activity, it proves that this type of ambitious television cannot only survive, but can also find its own place and establish its position on the audiovisual map of Europe. An important element shaping the program is culture. ARTE is also called the “Culture Television” (German: *Arte. Der europäische Kulturkanal*; French: *Arte. La chaîne culturelle européenne*). Thomas Isaak writes about this dependence in his work “*Arte—Europäische Tele-Kultur*” (2008) (ARTE—European Tele-Culture) and Katja Hettich in the work “*Kultur als raumbilden der Faktor für Europa: die Konzeption von ARTE*” (Europe as a Building Block and a Factor in the European Sphere: The Concept of ARTE). The authors analyze ARTE as a model example of cooperation. This issue was given a lot of attention in numerous scientific publications, and the European Commission has developed a comprehensive collective document called “Understanding European Union Policy—Culture and the Sector” (“Zrozumieć...,” 2014).

Conclusions

The aim of the analysis was to try to answer the question: „What are the reasons for ARTE’s success and the fact that since 1991 the station is developing in a harmonious way?” The analysis of documents concerning the way of management and missionary activity of ARTE shows that its success is consistent with the “five elements” adopted by Jürgen Gerhards. ARTE functions harmoniously also because the goals and assumptions of the European Commission’s media policy, favorable to the development of the public sphere and the media in Europe, have not changed for years. It should be considered, if not the EU’s favorable audiovisual policy on the public sphere and state media, could ARTE develop harmoniously? In the United States, ARTE’s existence would not be possible, due to the lack of a sufficiently developed public sphere in the American media and insufficient legal regulations favoring the development of public media (Miłoszewska, 2011). The conclusions from the analysis can be summarized in several points:

- ARTE’s development is possible because the station enjoys constant and full political support from Germany and France;
- stable funding is ensured in line with the system of financing public media in Europe;
- ARTE uses modern technology accordingly—Europe has been taking care of the technological development of the media from the very beginning;
- ARTE is characterized by a very high level and quality of audiovisual production—Europe supports domestic, European production and its creators;
- ARTE is an independent station, both in the sphere of law and its own programming policy—it sets itself and others high standards in the field of media ethics, it does not accept any insinuations in the sphere of media law and freedom, like the European Union that safeguards pluralism and media independence.

ARTE is an excellent example of “European television,” one of the few media completely fitting into the European public sphere—from the very beginning realizing the program of opening to others, trying to reach the inhabitants of our continent with a message based on culture (Traité..., 1990). The symbol of its Europeanness is its timing, marked with the date of signing the document establishing ARTE in 1990 (coinciding with the date of German reunification), and the date of the Franco-German concert of reconciliation, on the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I (11/11/2018), transmitted on ARTE from the battlefields of Verdun (Kreß, 2018).

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