

Thomas Krüger, President of the Federal Agency for Civic Education,
Welcome Address, Friday, December 02, 2005, 07:00 p.m., dz-Bank, Pariser Platz, Berlin

“Creating a European Public Space for the Future of Europe”

Dear guests,

on behalf of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, I'd like to bid you a warm welcome to this evening's event.

We've invited you after a long day's work to this exceptional building, which was designed by Canadian architect Frank O. Gehry as a place for communication and encounters. As with his other buildings, here Gehry combined sensuous, curving forms with complex deconstructive mass. You are now sitting in the building's primary conference hall, which is located within a sculpted shell resting on a glass floor in the centre of the atrium. The four-story high structure above, its curved form resembling an enormous prehistoric horse's head, is clad in stainless steel on the exterior and wood on the interior. The hall appears to float in the fluid depth of the space. Another of Frank O. Gehry's better-known designs is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.

To pick up the thread of our conference... this morning we heard from Rolf Annerberg and others about the EU-Commission's "Plan D", and how we need to start improving communication and shaping better policies at all levels. This is vital to gaining Europeans' trust.

All of us -- teachers, multipliers, trainers and practitioners in the field of citizenship education -- have experienced common challenges in our respective fields of work nationally. Today, we saw that again and again.

Now this evening is designed to acquaint you with two online-projects that have been developed to help to overcome the public opinion-building processes that are, to a great extent, nationally defined. These projects are aimed at assisting public awareness across borders, one of the preconditions of transnational participatory debate.

The first presentation this evening will be made by Bettina Knaup from the The Laboratory of European Cultural Cooperation in The Netherlands: A warm welcome to you, Bettina.

And the second presentation will be delivered by my colleague, Torsten Schilling, who is the head of department for IT and multimedia at the bpb.

We are very honoured indeed that Erhard Busek, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Republic of Austria and now the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, is also here tonight on behalf of the Austrian EU-Presidency, which will be starting next year. Mr. Busek, thank you very much for coming to Berlin!

Before we gone on, please allow me to make some organisational remarks: From the end of this evening until 11 a.m. -- to help you replenish your energy, we invite you to help yourself to the buffet, as well as another glass of wine and water, juice or coffee. After that, if you wish to consume more wine, beer or prosecco – in short alcohol - you are of course welcome to do so, BUT we have to kindly ask you to pay for it yourself. You can find all of the necessary information in the "Lists of Beverages" on your tables. Thank you.

I now pass you on to Professor Oliver Rathkolb, the Director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres in Vienna....a qualification that makes him the perfect person to guide us through the rest of this evening: Thank you very much, Professor Rathkolb!