



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
on the occasion of the presentation of the  
CIVIS European Media Prize  
in Berlin  
on 12 May 2016**

Democracy needs institutions, including free media, that people can trust. That is why I am impressed by the idea behind the CIVIS Media Prize of paying tribute to reporters and film makers who are credible because they look at situations in depth and are mindful of nuances, particularly when dealing with topics as sensitive as migration or the integration of migrants. The prize is today being awarded for the 29<sup>th</sup> time, which shows that CIVIS was already active in this area at a time when others had little or no interest in it or even deliberately shut their eyes to it. We can be happy today that the German-speaking countries have a media landscape in which integration and migration are important topics.

There is no doubt that the media informed people about the society of immigration long before politicians showed a broad interest in the topic. The CIVIS Media Prize shows what intelligent and sensitive journalists and film makers are capable of showing and of achieving.

They do this in a press landscape that is unparalleled. The press is respected and defended by the state. This is not something that can be taken for granted, as we unfortunately see in many countries around the world, including Turkey in recent days.

We actually have an exemplary media scene in Germany. And when I say "actually", you can hear a certain amount of worry and concern. It worries me when I hear people say that media reporting has sometimes been one-sided and does not reflect the full picture, particularly on problems associated with fleeing and migration. There is talk about discrepancies between what people see and what is reported, about a credibility crisis in journalism, about disillusionment with the media, indeed even about the "lying media".

Please believe me when I say that I know what lying media are. I experienced them – for decades, in the GDR, where a central office

decided what information and opinions were mandatory. Censorship and disinformation were the order of the day in the media. And now? It is so utterly different – and yet conspiracy theorists are saying in the internet and on the streets that our press is being steered, thus creating what they call “system media”. All of you here in this room know that this is not true.

But do let’s ask ourselves this: how is it possible that the “lying media” defamation has caught on with part of the public? Has concern about the stigmatisation of foreigners, for example, sometimes made journalists hesitant to report about crimes committed by migrants? And why were the attacks in Cologne, for example, only reported a few days later in the major media?

The best thing about the current debate on the credibility of reporting is the debate itself, which gives the media the chance to outline their approach, but also to look at themselves and to rethink journalistic standards. And various media have been discussing their own reporting in a self-critical way for some time now.

In an agitated environment in particular, it can be helpful to recall principles that are both simple and iron-cast: to tell it like it is; to clearly separate information from opinions; to remain detached; not to allow oneself to be swayed by a good cause to report the facts selectively.

Reporters who take liberties with these recognised principles can soon find they have turned into political actors. And from there it is not long before the curse of good intentions leads them to keep something hidden so it does not provide the wrong people with ammunition. However, experience of life shows that it is not those who draw attention to a problem who make it bigger, but rather those who do not mention it.

The nice thing about the media in our free democracy is that they are in fact a self-correcting system. Journalists have learned from the far too crude reporting during the debate on asylum in the 1990s. They have also learned from the at times educational approach to integration and migration issues. It is this, along with the ability to be self-critical, that readers, viewers and listeners can ultimately trust in.

Allow me to conclude by expressing my gratitude for the fact that our media and you here today have played a key role in ensuring that the Germany of 2016 is far more open to refugees and migrants than the Germany of 1988, when the CIVIS Media Prize was awarded for the first time. And this is thanks in no small measure to the CIVIS Media Prize, its founders, donors, initiators and all its prizewinners.