i2010: digital libraries

2006/2040(INI) - 27/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 481 votes in favour, 26 against and 3 abstentions a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Marie-Helene **DESCAMPS** (EPP-ED, FR) on i2010: towards a European digital library. It recommended setting up in stages a European digital library in the form of a single, direct and multilingual access point for the European cultural heritage. Although the long-term aim is to establish a tool that covers all categories of cultural material, such as audiovisual content, the European digital library must initially concentrate on the potential offered by text material that is free of rights. To this end, Parliament invited all European libraries to make available to the European digital library works that are free of rights which they already hold in digital form. It called on European universities and other higher education institutions to open up access to doctoral theses and other scientific works whose subject matter and fields of study relate to the European cultural heritage under conditions to be determined and without in any way infringing copyright. Other European cultural institutions, including regional and local institutions, are asked to take part in this project. Parliament stressed that the European digital library does not aim to disseminate content exclusively, but to coordinate access to digital works. Member States are encouraged to continue their efforts and speed up the rate of digitisation of cultural content to achieve a sufficient mass of content. They are also encouraged to draw up digitisation plans at national or regional level, establishing a European map of all digitisation activities, thus enabling synergies to operate while avoiding duplication of the efforts and costs undertaken by many public and private institutions to digitise their holdings.

Although Community programmes are not able to fund digitisation as such, new methods of financing must be developed, including partnerships with the private sector, on the understanding, however, that every effort must be made to prevent digitisation proceeding at different paces in different Member States.

Structure and content of the European digital library: Parliament encouraged the establishment of a common interface providing access to content of guaranteed quality via an integrated search engine enabling searches for meta-information and direct text when documents have been digitised in text mode. It underlined the importance of achieving a multilingual interface giving direct access to content in all European Union languages. The European digital library must be planned and organised on the basis of a pool of resources and technical capabilities able to facilitate the creation, research and utilisation of information and should not consist merely of a digital catalogue of European works.

MEPs welcome the establishment of the high-level expert group and in particular supports its proposals to list all orphan and out-of-print works and to develop mechanisms to facilitate the search for right holders. They stress that the proposals formulated by the high-level group of experts in its first report primarily concern the book publishing sector, and that a decision on whether to extend them to other sectors should be taken in conjunction with their representatives. It would be desirable at a later stage for the European digital library to offer, if possible, copyright-protected documents as well as documents which are free of rights, whilst strictly complying with national, Community and international law on intellectual property.

Parliament proposed :

- that users of the European digital library should be able to find any kind of digital document, in image and text mode, and consult it freely, in their entirety in the case of works which are free of rights or in the form of short extracts in the case of protected works, with the agreement of the right holder;
- that provision be made for on-line browsing of works which are subject to rights through specialised sites providing the security guarantees required by right holders;
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- in this case that the European digital library act as a simple conveyor of information;
- Specialised sites could provide access to the whole of a protected document in agreement with the right holder and in return for fair remuneration.

Management and monitoring : Parliament called for the establishment of a steering committee in which cultural institutions play a major role to determine the priorities for and the guidelines of the European digital library and to ensure the coordination, management and monitoring of its activities. There must be coordination between the groups established by the Commission, in particular the Member States' expert group on digitisation and digital preservation and the above mentioned high-level expert group, to achieve genuine synergy at European level. The report suggested the establishment of a Europe-wide coordination body, equivalent to TEL, for national museum and archive collections which generate every kind of digitised material connected with the European cultural heritage so as to integrate it into the European digital library search system.

Parliament felt it was essential to intensify the exchange of experience and good practice with other European institutions, such as the European Commission on Preservation and Access, institutions in third countries, such as the library of the US Congress, international associations, such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, public or private organisations, such as the Online Computer Library Centre, and others, endeavouring wherever possible to use software and solutions already tested and in operation.

Lastly, it recommended that part of the resources earmarked for the European digital library be devoted to its promotion with the broadest possible public.