New frontiers in book production : electronic publishing and printing on demand

2000/2037(INI) - 09/01/2001

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Barbara O'TOOLE (PES, UK) on electronic publishing and printing on demand. The committee took the view that cultural policies which had hitherto played an important role in maintaining Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity and in safeguarding universal access to the written word should take into account the specific nature of electronic publishing. It also stressed that small providers of electronic publishing services should be subsidised by the Commission in order to create a counterweight to media conglomerates. It was essential to uphold a number of principles, such as separation of the regulatory regime for providers and infrastructure from that for the content provided, as well as the principle of neutrality between different means of delivering the same content. The Commission was asked to propose a legislative framework for e-publishing and to support technological developments to improve authenticity protection and the rights of right holders. However, it was important to enable Member States to choose whether to adopt a national book price system in legislative or contractual form. Moreover, the Commission should be sufficiently flexible with regard to permitted methods of remunerating authors, and support should be given to emerging authors. On the issue of VAT rates, the committee felt that Member States should consider applying special VAT arrangements to publications downloaded from the internet. They should also ensure that VAT exemptions or reductions granted to educational and cultural institutions for the purchase of non-electronic publications were extended to include the purchase of electronic publications. In addition, the committee urged the Commission to take measures to foster creative European content in e-publishing in all languages and to enable workers in the publishing and book retailing industries as well as authors to benefit from EU training schemes to adapt their skills. Lastly, it called on the Commission to designate 2003 "European Year of Books and Literacy" in order to increase public awareness of the importance of books and electronic publishing in the knowledge-based economy.