

Digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material, and digital preservation – Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions (14466/06):

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Considering that:

- cultural heritage and cultural content and expressions embody and convey the European Union's common and fundamental values and demonstrate Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity;
- cultural content plays a key social and economic role. There is a real demand for digital content among citizens as well as within the research community. Digitisation and online accessibility of our cultural heritage can fuel creative efforts and support activities in other sectors, such as learning and tourism, thereby enhancing competitiveness and growth across Europe in line with the Lisbon Strategy.
- to avoid duplication of efforts and to create synergies, coordinated action at Community level is imperative; this action must nevertheless take into account that current levels of progress and coordination in Member States regarding digitisation of content and digital preservation vary considerably, as do the national priorities in these areas.

1. Welcomes

- the Commission Communication and Recommendation on 'the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material, and digital preservation' as part of the i2010: digital libraries initiative.

2. Endorses

- the underlying strategic objectives and main elements of the Commission Recommendation on the Digitisation and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material, and Digital Preservation.
- the vision of a European Digital Library as a common multilingual access point to Europe's distributed - i.e. held in different places by different organisations - digital cultural heritage, hospitable to all types of cultural material (texts, audiovisual, museum objects, archival records etc.) and targeted at delivering rapidly a critical mass of resources to the users.

3. Recognises

- the variety of efforts ongoing in Member States to digitise and make accessible online the content of their archives, libraries and museums, as well as their different stages of progress.
- the valuable coordination work done by the National Representatives Group on digitization (NRG) to exchange Member States' experiences and monitor progress, inter alia through the Dynamic Action Plan¹
- – the need to anchor this coordination work within the Community's institutional framework.

4. Underlines

- the instrumental work done at European level by CENL (the Conference of European National Librarians);
 - in organising and creating The European Library (TEL) as a gateway to the collective resources of national libraries across Europe;
 - in carrying this work forward towards the creation of the European Digital Library
- the work ongoing in the Michael² and Michael Plus projects in describing and linking digital collections of museums, libraries and archives from different Member States and providing access to these collections;
- that future work should be based on these and related initiatives, towards the goal of achieving a balanced cooperation between libraries, museums and archives;
- that while making from the outset conceptual and technical preparations for all categories of cultural material (texts, audiovisual, museum objects, archival records etc.), the European Digital Library may exploit in its early stages the potential of a critical mass of multilingual textual material;
- the importance of undertaking work in the field of digitisation, preservation and availability of content with full respect for Community and international legislation in the field of intellectual property.

¹ The Dynamic Action Plan for the EU co-ordination of digitisation of cultural and scientific content.

² Multilingual Inventory of Cultural Heritage in Europe.

5. Takes note

- of the Commission intention to carry out studies on progress in the digitisation of culture within the European Union, on the socio-economic impact of long-term preservation of digital resources, and on the socio-economic impact of public domain resources;
- of the Commission intention to co-finance a network of centres of competence for digitization and digital preservation under the 7th Framework programme for Research and development.

6. Invites the Members States

- To address the issues related to digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation identified in the Commission Recommendation, and in particular those aspects highlighted in these conclusions;
- As first steps, in line with the indicative timeline in Annex and taking into account the different starting points in the Member States, to
 - reinforce national strategies and targets for digitisation and digital preservation;
 - contribute to the European digital library, a multilingual common access point to Europe's distributed cultural heritage;
 - improve framework conditions for digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation;
 - reinforce co-ordination within and between Member States on related issues;
 - contribute to an effective overview of progress at European level.

7. Invites the Commission

- As first steps and in line with the indicative timeline in Annex , to
 - stimulate and co-ordinate work towards a European digital library as a common multilingual access point to Europe's distributed digital cultural heritage;

- contribute to improved policy co-ordination on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation, in particular through the creation of a group of Member States' representatives to take forward the coordination work of the NRG within the Community's institutional framework, securing continuity – including effective transitional arrangements - and building on the experience and expertise gained.
- address framework conditions for digitisation, online accessibility and digital preservation.
- assess overall progress in the Member States on the relevant themes taking into account their different starting points; and to assess overall progress towards the European digital library and to report to the Council accordingly.