



EBLIDA Press Release

6 November 2014

EBLIDA EU Parliament Breakfast 5 November, 2014

EU Parliament breakfast discusses the role played by libraries in the European Union of improving access to information and knowledge in the digital era.

Yesterday morning, Wednesday 5 November 2014, EBLIDA organised a breakfast debate at the EU Parliament to discuss the role played by libraries in the EU of improving access to information and knowledge in the digital era.

The breakfast debate was kindly hosted by Vice-President of the European Parliament, Sylvie Guillaume (French, S&D's), chaired by the EBLIDA Director, Vincent Bonnet and featured speakers including: MEP Julie Ward (UK, S&D's), MEP Julia Reda (Germany, Greens), MEP Georgios Katrougkalos (Greece, GUE/NGL), Klaus-Peter Böttger, EBLIDA President, Susan Reilly, Interim Director, LIBER and Jukka Relander, President of the Finnish Library Association.

Mr Vincent Bonnet introduced the framework of the debate by mentioning the opportune time with the beginning of incoming EU Commission to reiterate the importance of libraries and their key role of supporting the citizen's need to access information and knowledge if Europe wants to deliver a knowledge-based and highly educated society.

Ms Julie Ward opened the debate by mentioning her continued fruitful experience with libraries and authors in the UK, with particular emphasis on the fact that content is key. Nowadays digital technologies offer immense opportunities to share content and this cannot be done without an awareness of the risk of abuse.

Ms Julia Reda welcomed the high response rate from institutional users to the public consultation on copyright rules in the EU and warned about the risk if the EU fails to provide libraries with the necessary tools to operate online. She strongly believes that libraries and their users should benefit from the same level of rights online as they do offline. She also believes in the right to e-read, with the same exceptions and limitations to copyright so that libraries can operate across borders.

Mr Klaus-Peter Böttger talked about the important role libraries play in improving people's reading skills and the current threats to this core mission with the shift from copyright law to private law (contract law) where libraries are left dependent on licensing terms they can't negotiate. For instance in Germany 50% of best sellers titles are not available for libraries. This is not the case for printed books. In the absence of a clear set of rules, i.e. a reform of the copyright system, the rise in court cases leaves all stakeholders with legal uncertainty. Mr. Böttger concluded by mentioning a short term solution concerning licensing, with mandatory fair licences and a mid-term solution with copyright so that libraries can fulfil their role of democratising structures in the digital age.



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Ms Susan Reilly gave a talk about the need to create an information infrastructure that enables research in Europe to be world class. 3 key focusses are need to acquire this: transparency, collaboration and innovation. Ms Reilly stated that libraries are working not only to provide the infrastructure but also to encourage a shift towards a culture of openness by providing support and training. She then mentioned the high level of collaboration in Europe supported by the effective provision of services by libraries. With copyright harmonisation at the European level and agreement on library exceptions at global level, this would enable greater cross-border collaboration.

She concluded by highlighting the key role libraries play in providing access to information. New, digitally adapted copyright laws put in place at European level, would be a platform for enabling innovation.

Mr Jukka Relander gave a talk about the fact that copyright enables the existence of a lot of stakeholders acting as authors, publishers and libraries. In the current context, libraries don't want to become mere digital distribution hubs renting books and being mixed with commercial players. Mr Relander reiterated the importance of the existence of laws at European level that guarantee that libraries will remain public services funded by tax payers money, acting as support centres for the community and its citizens, as meeting points from which to network, study and read, for fun and entertainment, providing citizens with the opportunity to enjoy the treasures of our civilisation.

The last (but not least) speaker was Mr. Georgios Katrougkalos who talked about the damage caused by budget cuts in Greece where 2/3 of librarians lost their jobs. He highlighted the fact that the language used in the copyright debate is largely influenced by the market and that the way librarians expressed their needs should become a Human Rights issue. Access to information and knowledge is a right that should be advocated for and remain outside of the influence of the market. Libraries are a perfect vehicle to ensure access to information and knowledge for all without discrimination.

At the end of the presentations, a lively discussion took place at each table about the challenges for libraries in the digital era, and the need to ensure that rights are preserved, exceptions and limitations are guaranteed and that copyright is reformed and protected from being damaged by a shift to contract law.

EBLIDA would like to thank all of the participants for their dedication and wonderful contribution, and to Ms Julie Ward and Ms Julia Reda for their inspiring speeches and Ms Sylvie Guillaume and her team for having generously hosted the debate.