



EBLIDA's comments on the draft Treaty of Amsterdam

EBLIDA welcomes the opportunity to comment on some of the aspects of the draft Treaty of Amsterdam, at the invitation of the European Parliament's Committee on Institutional Affairs.

EBLIDA functions as the umbrella association for library, information, documentation and archive associations and all kinds of libraries throughout Europe. The organisation was founded in 1992 and has established itself as a vital link between the European institutions and library and information professionals. At the moment EBLIDA represents over 95.000 libraries throughout Europe. On behalf of the European library community EBLIDA would like to make the following contribution:

Culture:

Maastricht Treaty 1993:

Article 128 (4)

The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty.

Draft Amsterdam Treaty 1997:

Amended Article 128 (4)

The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty, **in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures.**

EBLIDA's comments:

Libraries are storing and maintaining huge parts of the European cultural heritage, and they promote books and reading. EBLIDA supports the intentions of Article 128 but also advocated to change the Article in a more operational way, especially concerning Article 128 (5) where EBLIDA asked for a change to a qualified majority voting procedure instead of unanimity voting. The failure to implement this change is a missed opportunity to improve procedures in the cultural sector, which EBLIDA deeply regrets. Especially in the light of the enormous delay in implementing the cultural programme ARIANE and RAPHAEL caused by the unanimous voting procedure, it is not acceptable that it was not possible to have Article 128 (5) amended, given that amendment in Article 128 (4) ensures respect and promotion of cultural diversity.

Consumer Protection

Maastricht Treaty 1993:

Article 129a

1. The Community shall contribute to the attainment of a high level of consumer protection through:

- a) measures adopted pursuant to Article 100a in the context of the completion of the internal market;
- b) specific action which supports and supplements the policy pursued by the Member States to protect the health, safety and economic interests of consumers and **to provide adequate information to consumers.**

Draft Amsterdam Treaty 1997:

Amended Article 129a

1. In order to promote the interests of consumers and to ensure a high level of consumer protection, the Community shall contribute to protecting the health, safety and economic interests of consumers, as well as **to promoting their right to information**, education and to organise themselves in order to safeguard their interests.

EBLIDA's comments:

Libraries have always played an important part as providers of information to the general public in all kind of formats. This is based on the fundamental democratic principle that each citizen has a right to information. We therefore welcome the amended version which acknowledges this right to information on European level.

Transparency

Draft Amsterdam Treaty 1997

New Article 191a

1. Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, shall have a right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents, subject to the principles and the conditions to be defined in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3.

2. General principles and limits on grounds of public or private interest governing this right of access to documents shall be determined by the Council, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b within two years of the entry into force of the Treaty.

3. Each institution referred to above shall elaborate in its own rules of procedure specific provisions regarding access to its documents.

EBLIDA's comments:

The right of information can only be exercised if there is also a right of access to documents. EBLIDA therefore welcomes the introduction of a new Article 191a. EBLIDA nevertheless points out that this right of access to documents must be reflected in a better provision of local public libraries with these documents to ensure that each citizen can easily get access to them. Therefore the widespread setting up of a network of Euro Info Points in public libraries in all Member States must be supported. Although many public libraries are willing to co-operate in this effort, the setting up is depending on the policy and the financial resources of the European Commission offices in the Member States. What is urgently needed now, is a formal recognition of these networks by the European institutions and the allocation of a budget by the European Commission in Brussels.

Strengthening the role of local and regional authorities

Maastricht Treaty 1993:

Article 198 c

The Committee of the Regions shall be consulted by the Council or by the Commission where this Treaty so provides and in all other cases, in which one of these two institutions considers it appropriate.

Draft Amsterdam Treaty 1997:

Amended first subparagraph of Article 198 c

The Committee of the Regions shall be consulted by the Council or by the Commission where

this Treaty so provides and in all other cases, **in particular those which concern cross-border co-operation**, in which one of these two institutions considers it appropriate.

Additional new fourth subparagraph to Article 198c

The Committee of the Regions may be consulted by the European Parliament.

EBLIDA's comments:

Public libraries are in many Member States under the responsibility and funding of regional and local authorities. EBLIDA therefore welcomes the strengthening of the Committee of the Regions's role which was established by the Maastricht Treaty as representative of regional and local authorities at European level. It also welcomes that the European Parliament will be able to formally consult this representative body in the same way as the Council and the Commission, and that the special role played by regions in the area of cross-border co-operation is now recognised.

Streamlining of legislative procedures in Parliament and Council

EBLIDA's comments:

EBLIDA supports the streamlining of legislative procedures whereby the co-operation procedure in the European Parliament will be replaced by co-decision in many areas now including also transparency, vocational training, Trans-European Networks, European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and the Framework Programme for research and technological development. This will increase the responsibilities of the European Parliament in important areas. EBLIDA also approves that the voting procedure in the Council on the Framework Programme for research and technological development has now been transferred from unanimity voting to qualified majority voting.

EBLIDA regrets that not enough has been achieved to make the European Union's institutional structure more efficient with a view to the enlargement of the Union. Libraries in the European Union already co-operate in many different areas with their colleagues in Eastern and Central Europe, not least supported by the pro-active approach of DG XIII in the framework of LISKAT, which is the libraries' part of an action plan for EU/CEE co-operation to create a user-friendly Information Society. But to avoid fragmentation of efforts in this extremely important area, it is suggested that the potential for creating a multi-country PHARE programme on "Libraries and the Information Society" is examined and that its scope and work programme are defined as the next steps in the pre-accession assistance building on ongoing reforms of PHARE.

EBLIDA, The Hague, August 1997

