



EBLIDA functions as the umbrella association for all sorts of libraries and library, information and documentation associations 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.

The basic role of libraries is to collect, maintain, organise and provide access to information and knowledge resources. Libraries have a continuing role as physical entities, but they are also key links in the information chain in support of educational, cultural, technical, scientific and economic developments. In the information society they have a crucial role as gateways to the information resources on the global superhighways. Our societies are dependent on democratic access to information, and as citizen we should have access to our cultural heritage. Likewise our ability to run a stable economy is dependent on our access to information. Libraries are the only places that can handle all kinds of information whatever the medium or form of publication may be. Libraries are becoming increasingly interdependent. The overall European policy in this field should be to support their cooperation and development.

The main positions of EBLIDA are:

1. Libraries can play an important role in the information society as providers of electronic information and access points to information for citizens all over Europe. They are vital institutions in the efforts to bridge the gap between the information rich and poor. The widening of this gap is a major threat to society in the near future. Copyright should be handled in a way that recognises the right of the citizen to have access to published material. Copyright problems must be solved at a European level.
2. Libraries are storing and maintaining huge parts of the European cultural heritage, and they promote books and reading. To improve this role a better framework for cooperation than the one we see today is needed. EBLIDA supports the intentions of article 128 in the Maastricht Treaty, but also supports the efforts to change the article in a more operational way. The most important change affects article 128, section 5. The following change is proposed: "The Council shall act by a qualified majority voting procedure" and (the Council) "acting with the approval of qualified majority of Member States on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations".
3. The Libraries Programme run by DG XIII has played an important role in the technological development of libraries. Standing as we do at the threshold of the information society it will be even more important in future. The first priority of EBLIDA is to keep an independent Libraries Programme in DG XIII under the Fifth Framework Programme. The cooperation between the Telematics Application Programme and the Cultural Programmes in DG X, relevant for the promoting of books and reading, should be encouraged.
4. The importance of libraries as supporters of education on all levels is growing due to new ways of learning, in which access to and gathering of information is an integrated part of the process. Media-competence is needed at a still broader level and adult independent learners are growing in number all over Europe. To increase Europeans' awareness to continually acquire new skills and professional qualifications, this year had been declared the European 'Year of Life Long Learning'. Programmes supporting the libraries' role in

this field are needed. They should focus on the continuous training needs of the librarians themselves and on their role in guiding users in handling equipment and accessing information.

5. In the information society electronic access to information is of growing importance. However, physical library collections will remain necessary components in the information chain and vital parts of our cultural life for decades. A new library concept is evolving taking into account the intermingling and integration of the physical and the virtual role of most types of libraries. New kinds of meeting places and a new kind of cultural centre are developing, in which librarians are pro-active mediators of information. If efficiently supported, this concept could be extended to benefit all citizens. Likewise libraries can play a role in the ongoing efforts to revitalize the concept of citizenship.

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