



European Commission steps up efforts to put Europe's memory on the Web via a "European Digital Library"

The European Commissions' plan to promote digital access to Europe's heritage is rapidly taking shape. At least six million books, documents and other cultural works will be made available to anyone with a Web connection through the European Digital Library over the next five years. In order to boost European digitisation efforts, the Commission will co-fund the creation of a Europe-wide network of digitisation centres. The Commission will also address, in a series of policy documents, the issue of the appropriate framework for intellectual property rights protection in the context of digital libraries.

"Information technologies can enable you to tap into Europe's collective memory with a click of your mouse", Information Society and Media Commissioner Viviane Reding explained. "The European Commission will help to turn this into reality by co-funding centres of competence for digitisation and providing a truly European framework for protecting, accessing and using intellectual property rights in digital libraries. Member States will have to do their bit by providing the basic means for digitisation". "This is a very exciting prospect for Europe's libraries and we are eager to make this happen", added Dr Elisabeth Niggemann, Director General of 'Die Deutsche Bibliothek' (the German national library) and chair of CENL, the Conference of European National Librarians.

The Commission today published an overview of the results of a major online consultation on the digital libraries initiative which had been launched on 30 September 2005 (see [IP/05/1202](#)). The 225 replies came from libraries, archives and museums (46%), publishers and right holders (19%) and universities/academics (14%). The replies generally welcome the initiative and see it as an opportunity for making Europe's cultural heritage more accessible and usable on the Internet. They also show that opinions are divided on copyright issues, in particular between cultural institutions and right holders.

The consultation results have helped the Commission to further define the practical set-up of the European Digital Library, which will provide a highly visible, multilingual access point, dedicated to the digital resources of Europe's cultural institutions. It will build upon the TEL-infrastructure, currently the gateway to the catalogue records of collections in a number of national libraries, which also gives access to a range of digitised resources of the participating libraries. TEL, The European Library, was set up by members of the Conference of European National Librarians and received European Community funding in its early stage.

By the end of 2006, the European Digital Library should encompass full collaboration among the national libraries in the EU. In the years thereafter, this collaboration is to be expanded to archives and museums. Two million books, films, photographs, manuscripts, and other cultural works will be accessible through the European Digital Library by 2008. This figure will grow to at least six million by 2010, but is expected to be much higher as, by then, potentially every library, archive and museum in Europe will be able to link its digital content to the European Digital Library.

This European Digital Library is a flagship project of the Commission's overall strategy to boost the digital economy, the i2010 strategy (see [IP/05/643](#)). The main elements of this flagship project, which is meant to promote getting Europe's cultural and scientific heritage digitised and available online, was unveiled in September 2005 in the "i2010: Digital Libraries Communication (see [IP/05/1202](#)). In November 2005, the Council of Culture Ministers endorsed the Commission's approach to digital libraries.

The Commission intends to present a proposal for a Recommendation by mid-2006 to tackle together with Member States and with the European Parliament barriers to digitisation and online accessibility. Later this year, the Commission will also unveil its strategy for digital libraries based on scientific and scholarly information. Before the end of the year, a Commission Communication on "Content Online" will address broader issues such as intellectual property rights management in the digital age.

A High Level Group on the European Digital Library will meet for the first time on 27 March 2006 and will be chaired by Commissioner Reding. It will bring together major stakeholders from industry and cultural institutions. The group will address issues such as public-private collaboration for digitisation and copyrights.

Useful links:

- overview of the results of the online consultation on digital libraries:
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/communication/results_of_online_consultation_en.pdf
- contributions to the online consultation on digital libraries:
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/consultation/replies/index_en.htm
- Portal of The European Library:
<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/index.htm>

See also [MEMO/06/102](#)