

European Commission
Information Society Directorate

To: infos-taskforce-media@cec.eu.int

This is the response from EBLIDA to the European Commission's consultation on 'Strengthening the competitiveness of the EU publishing sector' (Commission staff working paper, pre-release 22.9.05). EBLIDA, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations, is an independent, non-profit umbrella organisation of national library, information, documentation and archive associations in Europe. Subjects on which EBLIDA concentrates are European information society issues, including copyright and licensing, culture and education and EU enlargement. We promote access to information in the digital age, and the role of archives and libraries in achieving this goal. We represent the interests of our members to the European institutions, such as the European Commission, European Parliament, and the Council of Europe.

In this response we address, at one and the same time, two of the questions in the consultation, numbers (2) and (5), namely:

(2) Are there any further issues you would add in respect of publishing, notably with regard to the policy approaches set out in the Commission's recent i2010 Communication?

(5) How far is there tension between the need for open outcomes in economic terms at a time of rapid technological change and the political desire to support democratic values including diversity?

We call attention to two key quotations from page 5 of the staff working paper:

'In summary, the future role of public policy is to create favourable conditions for the industry'

and

'Maximising the potential of publishing will also promote the diversity of opinion and culture that the peoples of Europe need in order to derive the richest benefits from the information society'.

We absolutely agree that public policy should promote diversity of opinion and culture and secure for citizens the richest benefits from the information society. Libraries depend on the publishing industry and a symbiotic relation has existed for centuries between them. We welcome attempts to support publishing, with one proviso. By changes in policy, a more lucrative publishing industry might be achieved at the expense of the potential benefits for citizens from the information society. In particular, it would be very detrimental to education, learning, research, and innovation, if the copyright regime were to change so as to increase the rights enjoyed by publishers and reduce the availability of material in the public domain.

Copyright is a monopoly right and therefore by its nature anti-competitive. We are therefore wary of the idea of a 'supportive copyright régime' on page 4, since a régime that is over-supportive of rights-holders works inevitably to the disadvantage of the ordinary citizen, to

the teacher, and to the researcher. The balance of copyright should on no account be shifted further in favour of the publisher.

It is time to examine the tradition in which copyright is regarded solely as an economic support for business. Copyright should work to encourage creativity in all kinds of ways: not only in a commercial environment. Wide availability of documents outside commerce (for example in libraries or openly on the World Wide Web) supports markets and maintains literacy.

We believe that although the publishing industry is undoubtedly important, even more important is the European infrastructure for learning and research. We hope for a thriving publishing industry within an information society that respects the principles of the Adelphi Charter recently published in London (http://www.thersa.org/acrobat/adelphi_charter.pdf). If public policy with regard to media and publishing is fully in accordance with basic rights then European citizens will truly 'derive the richest benefits from the information society'.

Yours sincerely

Toby Bainton
Chair of the Copyright Group of EBLIDA
(www.eblida.org)

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Toby Bainton
SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries)
102 Euston Street London NW1 2HA England
Tel:020 7387 0317 (+44-20-7387-0317) Fax:020 7383 3197 (+44-20-7383-3197)
