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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment

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1. MEDIA LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Media literacy is increasingly becoming an important component of European and national policy agendas in the media and communication sectors. The new Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMS), for example, sets out a reporting obligation for the Commission to measure levels of media literacy in all the Member States¹.

Whereas the media remain key enablers for European citizens to better understand the world and participate in democratic and cultural life, media consumption is changing. Mobility, user generated communication, Internet and booming availability of digital products are radically transforming the media economy. As a consequence, it is crucial to build up better knowledge and understanding of how the media work in the digital world, who the new players in the media economy are and which new possibilities, and challenges, digital media consumption may present. It largely conditions users' confidence in digital technologies and media and, therefore, the take-up of ICT and media, which is a priority for the European Commission, as confirmed in its "i2010" strategic policy framework². More generally, it is also important that citizens better understand the economic and cultural dimension of media and that a discussion takes place on the importance for Europe's economy to have strong and competitive media at a global level, delivering pluralism and cultural diversity.

A higher degree of media literacy can significantly contribute towards achieving the objectives set for the European Union at the Lisbon European Council in 2000. It is particularly important for the establishment of a more competitive and inclusive knowledge economy through boosting competitiveness in the ICT and media sectors, for the completion of a Single European Information Space and for the fostering of inclusion, better public services and quality of life.

This European approach to media literacy in the digital environment responds to calls from the European Parliament³ and the media and ICT industries. It supplements the ongoing EU

¹ Article 26: the Commission shall submit "a report on the application of this Directive and, if necessary, make further proposals to adapt it to developments in the field of audiovisual media services, in particular in the light of recent technological developments, the competitiveness of the sector and levels of media literacy in all Member States".

² See: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

³ For instance, in a resolution of 6 September 2005, on the "Television without Frontiers Directive (89/552/EEC), the European Parliament asks the Council and the Commission "to develop and to implement media literacy programmes to promote active and aware citizenship in Europe". In a report of 22 November 2006 (A6-0399/2006) on the same subject, media literacy is referred to as a fundamental skill. The European Parliament adopted, on 27 April 2006, a resolution on the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting (2005/2212(INI)). At Union level, it "calls on the Commission to produce a communication on media literacy". In the questions put to Ms Reding in the European Parliament hearings in 2004, several of the themes of this Communication were already present, such as

initiative on media pluralism⁴, the modernisation of the regulatory frameworks for audiovisual media services and for electronic communications, the strategic initiatives on mobile television⁵ and on creative content online and the forthcoming initiative on eInclusion.

Furthermore, this Communication adds a further building block to European audiovisual policy. In particular, it links to the provisions of the AVMS Directive (the Communication will encourage research into criteria for assessing media literacy which are a first step towards the Art. 26 reporting obligation)⁶ and the MEDIA 2007 programme. The latter underlines the importance of media literacy and image education initiatives in order to access European audiovisual works and to enhance Europe's cinematographic and audiovisual heritage. Its main objective is to highlight and to promote good practices in media literacy at European level and to propose actions. The Communication builds on the results of the work of the Media Literacy Expert Group (established in 2006), on the findings of the public consultation which was launched in October 2006 and on the experience of the Commission's previous and current media literacy-related initiatives.

This Communication has no financial impact on the Community budget other than on that foreseen and set down in the financial framework 2007-2013.

2. A EUROPEAN DEFINITION OF MEDIA LITERACY

Media literacy is generally defined as the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts. This definition has been validated by a large majority of the respondents to the public consultation and by the members of the Media Literacy Expert Group⁷. Mass media are the media able to reach a wide public via different distribution channels. Media messages are informational and creative contents included in texts, sounds and images carried by different forms of communication, including television, cinema, video, websites, radio, video games and virtual communities.

inclusion and accessibility. In response to a question on the safety for children on the internet, Ms Reding also said that "media literacy or media education programmes" are means of empowering minors and improving their awareness.

⁴ A Three Step approach to Media Pluralism was launched by the European Commission on 16 January 2007. The first step consisted in a Commission Staff Working Paper, the second is an independent study to define and test concrete and objective indicators for assessing media pluralism in the EU Member States (results expected by early 2009) to be followed by a Commission Communication on the indicators for media pluralism in the EU Member States, due in 2009. See: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/media_taskforce/pluralism/index_en.htm

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Strengthening the Internal Market for Mobile TV COM/2007/0409 final.

⁶ Audiovisual Media Services Directive, recital 37: "'Media literacy' refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely. Media-literate people are able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They are better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore the development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and its progress followed closely." See also footnote 1.

⁷ See: http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/report_on_ml_2007.pdf

A European approach to media literacy should relate to all media. The various levels of media literacy include:

- feeling comfortable with all existing media from newspapers to virtual communities;
- actively using media, through, *inter alia*, interactive television, use of Internet search engines or participation in virtual communities, and better exploiting the potential of media for entertainment, access to culture, intercultural dialogue, learning and daily-life applications (for instance, through libraries, podcasts);
- having a critical approach to media as regards both quality and accuracy of content (for example, being able to assess information, dealing with advertising on various media, using search engines intelligently);
- using media creatively, as the evolution of media technologies and the increasing presence of the Internet as a distribution channel allow an ever growing number of Europeans to create and disseminate images, information and content;
- understanding the economy of media and the difference between pluralism and media ownership;
- being aware of copyright issues which are essential for a "culture of legality", especially for the younger generation in its double capacity of consumers and producers of content.

This Communication does not aim at dealing with all of these issues, many of them being dealt with under ongoing initiatives, but to concentrate on some of them.

3. INITIATIVES TO DATE

A **Media Literacy Expert Group** was set up in 2006 with the aim of analysing and defining media literacy objectives and trends, of highlighting and promoting good practices at European level and of proposing actions in the field. The analysis and assessment of the European Commission's previous activity (for instance, media literacy projects funded within the eLearning programme) were also discussed and examined. The group was composed of a number of European media literacy experts. It has a mix of different competences and backgrounds, including academics and media professionals. It met three times in 2006 and twice in 2007.

In addition, the Commission launched a **public consultation**⁸ in the last quarter of 2006. The response to the consultation was satisfactory both in quantitative terms and in terms of the quality and variety of the respondents. Respondents included media organisations and industry, formal and non-formal education institutions, content providers and producers, research and cultural institutions, regulators and citizens' and consumers' associations. From the analysis of the replies, it emerged that analysing, highlighting and spreading local and national good practices in this field throughout the European Union is the right answer to

⁸ See also the "Report on the results on the public consultation on Media Literacy: http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/report_on_ml_2007.pdf

speed up progress in media literacy. It also emerged that criteria or standards for assessing media literacy are lacking and that good practices are not available for all aspects of media literacy. Accordingly, the Commission sees an urgent need for larger-scale, longer-term research into developing both new assessment criteria and new good practices.

A **study** on "Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe" was commissioned in May 2006. It maps current practices in implementing media literacy in Europe, confirms the tendencies which emerged in the public consultation and recommends some measures to be implemented at Community level to help foster and to increase the level of media literacy. Finally, it briefly outlined the possible economic and social impact of an EU intervention in this field. The final report of the study is available on the European Commission's website⁹.

The **MEDIA 2007** programme Decision¹⁰ highlights the importance of media literacy and film education initiatives, in particular those organised by festivals for young audiences in cooperation with schools. A call for proposals, with a specific award criterion related to film education, was launched in early 2007 and a number of projects selected¹¹.

The **SAFER INTERNET PLUS** programme (2004-2008) aims at empowering parents, teachers and children with Internet safety tools. It also covers other media, such as videos. In the context of this programme, a qualitative study¹² was conducted in May 2007, based on a Eurobarometer survey and aimed at improving knowledge about Internet and mobile phone usage by children, their on-line behaviour and their perceptions of risk- and safety-related questions.

The **EU legal framework** related to content also deals with media literacy. For instance, a **Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of minors and human dignity** and the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry was adopted on 20 December 2006¹³. It stresses the importance of the development of media literacy programmes by the Member States and recommends a series of concrete actions to be undertaken by the Member States and the Commission in that field. Examples of such actions are: encouraging the audiovisual and on-line information services industry to avoid and to combat all discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, without infringing freedom of expression or of the press; establishing codes of conduct in cooperation with professionals and regulatory authorities at national and Community level; promoting measures to combat all illegal activities harmful to minors on the Internet. The Commission would also draw attention to the fact that all Member States, except one, and the European Community signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 21 describes the obligations to encourage the mass media, including providers of information through the internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities.

⁹ See: http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/index_en.htm

¹⁰ Decision No 1718/2006/EC.

¹¹ Examples are: Thessaloniki Film Festival (Greece), Festival Premiers Plans (Angers, France), Festival Européen du Film Court de Brest (France), Festival Internacional de cine para jóvenes (Gijón, Spain), International Short Film Festival (Berlin, Deutschland), Crossing Europe Film Festival (Linz, Austria) and the 20th European Youth Film Festival of Flanders (Belgium).

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/eurobarometer/index_en.htm#overall_report

¹³ Recommendation No 2006/952/EC.

In line with the subsidiarity principle, the national authorities have the primary responsibility for including media literacy in school curricula at all levels. The role played by local authorities is also very important, since they are closer to the citizens and support initiatives in the non-formal education sector. The recently approved text of the **AVMS Directive** contains a recital referring to media literacy¹⁴, and its Article 26 sets out a reporting obligation for the Commission to measure levels of media literacy in all the Member States.

In May 2007, media literacy was the subject of a session at the German Presidency Leipzig Seminar, "More trust in content". In June 2007, at a conference on media literacy organised by UNESCO, the need to strengthen international cooperation was jointly stressed by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the Commission.

4. MEDIA LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT - GOOD PRACTICES

This Communication focuses on three areas: commercial communication, audiovisual works and online.

4.1. Media literacy for commercial communication

Advertising is part of everyday life and is one of the building blocks of a market economy. It is important to raise awareness among all audiences about the role of commercial communication in the value chain of the audiovisual industry. This is notably true for free-to-air television as advertising and other forms of commercial communication, such as sponsoring, teleshopping or product placement, enable broadcasters to acquire premium content. It is also important to avoid negative images of older persons and people with disabilities in the media. In this field, media literacy for commercial communication has at least three aspects:

- giving young audiences tools to develop a **critical approach** to commercial communication, enabling them to make informed choices¹⁵;
- raising awareness and knowledge among all interested parties about self- and co-regulatory measures and mechanisms and about the development and implementation of codes of conduct¹⁶;
- encouraging public/private financing in this area with adequate transparency¹⁷.

¹⁴ See footnote 6.

¹⁵ For example, Mediakompassi, a media literacy site developed by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE's, has a section focusing on advertising for youth, parents and teachers alike; the Swedish Consumer Agency has produced several books and co-financed educational material about commercials in television.

¹⁶ For example, the Consell Audiovisual de Catalunya (CAC) promotes platforms of dialogue to establish codes of self- and co-regulation.

¹⁷ For example, Media Smart is a non-profit media literacy programme for school children aged 6 to 11 years old, focused on advertising. The initiative was launched in the UK in November 2002 and is now operating in Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Finland and Sweden. It is also being developed in Italy, Portugal and Hungary. It is funded by the advertising business in the UK and is supported by the UK and other Member States governments.

In view of the reporting obligation in the AVMS Directive, the Commission sees a strong need to develop and to exchange good practices on commercial communications (e.g. through input to the development of codes of conduct) with a view to proposing them as an alternative to restrictions or bans on certain practices.

4.2. Media Literacy for audiovisual works

Digital technologies and broadband penetration strongly facilitate access to audiovisual works, creating new distribution channels such as video-on-demand and mobile television. This in turn creates new markets for catalogue/heritage content. In addition, digital technologies lower the entry barrier for creating and distributing audiovisual works and help create an audiovisual market without borders. In this context media literacy means:

- providing, notably to young European audiences, better awareness and knowledge about our film heritage and increasing interest in these films and in recent European films¹⁸;
- promoting the acquisition of audiovisual media production and creativity skills¹⁹;
- understanding the importance of copyright, from the perspective of both consumers and creators of content²⁰.

4.3. Media literacy for online

In the rapidly evolving information society, media literacy skills are needed for awareness and inclusion in relation to technological, economic and cultural innovations. Internet profoundly changes media consumption, as it is an additional means to access traditional media (IPTV or Internet Radio for instance) and texts, images and sounds from all over the world in an interactive way. This offers huge opportunities, for example, as regards multimedia digital libraries²¹ but also huge challenges in terms of media literacy. Media literacy for online means:

- empowering users with tools to critically assess online content;

¹⁸ An example is Europa Cinemas, created in 1992 thanks to the financing from the MEDIA Programme of the European Union and of the Centre National de la Cinématographie. Europa Cinemas has become the first cinema theatre network with a mainly European programming and, it organises, *inter alia*, promotional activities concerning European films for young audiences.

¹⁹ An example is Community Media Network (Ireland) promotes community development and empowerment, using video, radio, photography, print and Internet as resource tools. www.cmn.ie. Also, FILM-X is the Danish Film Institute's computer-based, interactive film studio for children and adolescents. It gives children, young people and adults a chance to experience film production and it helps them to learn different ways to communicate through film. <http://www.dfi.dk/filmx>

²⁰ The BBC offers users a very wide range of opportunities for interactive engagement, including online message boards, comment fora, blogs and audio and video contributions. The BBC also recently completed a pilot of the Creative Archive which has generated a significant level of engagement from licence fee payers with nearly 100,000 regular users. The Creative Archive pilot enabled people to download, re-edit, use and share appropriately cleared content clips for their own, non-commercial creative purposes within the terms of the Creative Archive Licence Scheme.

²¹ The Digital Libraries Initiative is a project under the framework of i2010, the Commission's overall strategy to boost the digital economy. Digital libraries are organised collections of digital content made available to the public. The three main strands of the initiative are online accessibility, digitisation and preservation and storage.

- extending digital creativity and production skills and encouraging awareness of copyright issues²²;
- ensuring that the benefits of the information society can be enjoyed by everyone, including people who are disadvantaged due to limited resources or education, age, gender, ethnicity, people with disabilities (e-Accessibility) as well as those living in less favoured areas (all these are encompassed under eInclusion)²³;
- raising awareness about how search engines work (prioritisation of answers, etc.) and learning to better use search engines²⁴.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission will continue to promote the development and exchange of good practices on media literacy in the digital environment through existing programmes and initiatives. It will also encourage research into criteria for assessing media literacy. To achieve this, a specific study will be launched in 2008 with the aim of investigating criteria to assess media literacy levels. This study will feed into the report foreseen in the AVMS Directive, which the Commission will table at the latest four years after the adoption of the Directive.

For the above reasons, the Commission calls on the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to support the objectives and priorities set out in this Communication and to organise in 2008 events devoted to the exchange of good practices on media literacy in the digital environment, including on the economy of the media sector in Europe. Having regard to the position expressed by the other institutions and to the reactions of the stakeholders to the current Communication, the Commission will highlight further these good practices, adopting if necessary a Recommendation. Also, bearing in mind that 2008 will be the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Commission invites the European institutions to incorporate an intercultural dialogue concern in their media literacy activities.

The Commission calls on Member States to:

- encourage the authorities in charge of audiovisual and electronic communication regulation to get more involved and to cooperate in the improvement of the various levels of media literacy defined above;
- promote systematic research into and regular observation of and reporting on the different aspects and dimensions of media literacy;

²² An example is <http://www.internet-abc.de/kinder/> which enables children to familiarize themselves with internet and with creation and production of on-line content.

²³ The third priority of i2010 is to promote, with the tools available to the Commission, an inclusive European Information Society, supported by efficient and user-friendly ICT-enabled public services. See: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/index_en.htm and http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/inclusion/index_en.htm

²⁴ See for instance this search engine for children: <http://www.blinde-kuh.de/>

- develop and implement codes of conduct and, as appropriate, co-regulatory frameworks in conjunction with all interested parties at national level, and promote self-regulatory initiatives.