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Media Literacy Expert Group Draft 2006

INTRODUCTION

The media are a very powerful economic and social force. The media sector is also an accessible instrument for European citizens to better understand the societies in which they live and participate in the democratic life. Hence a higher degree of media literacy can significantly contribute to reaching the objective set for the European Union at the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000 by the Heads of State and Government in particular as regards a more competitive knowledge economy, while contributing to a more inclusive society.

The Commission has been requested to launch an initiative on this subject by the European Parliament (during the hearings of Commissioner Reding before taking up her new mandate, as well as in the Weber Report on the transition to digital TV) and the industry together with a number of Member States. In the debate on the modernised Television without frontiers Directive the question of advertising will be a central issue where it will be necessary to demonstrate that education is better than bans. In the ongoing discussions on film online and in those to follow on content online, education and awareness of copyright have an important role to play. Finally, as an increasing number of Europeans access content through the Internet, media literacy initiatives should include the various aspects of this complex and important subject.

A “Media Literacy Expert Group” is therefore being set-up with the aim to analyse and define media literacy objectives and trends, to highlight and promote good practices at European level and propose actions in the field.

Initially, **the group will be asked to focus on certain specific areas**, such as:

- **audiovisual literacy (notably as regards commercial communications),**
- **media literacy and the Internet, and**
- **education and awareness of copyright.**

The group is composed of **25 European media literacy experts** including a mix of different competences and backgrounds and **will meet three times a year**. The group will reflect both the leading role industry itself plays in media literacy as well as academic research and findings.

The first meeting will be held on 30 March 2006.

The Commission intends to use the findings of the Media literacy **experts group to launch a public consultation on the different issues referred to above.**

The next step could be for the Commission to adopt a Communication on this subject and further media literacy policy at a European level.

MEDIA LITERACY - DEFINITIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Media Literacy may be defined as the ability to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis and are an important part of our contemporary culture, as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis. Media literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies. The aim of Media Literacy is to increase awareness of the many forms of media messages encountered in their everyday lives. It should help citizens to recognise how the media filter their perceptions and beliefs, shape popular culture and influence personal choices. It should empower them with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious consumers and producers of information. Media Education is part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and it is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy. Today Media Literacy is indeed one of the key pre-requisites for active and full citizenship and is one of the contexts in which intercultural dialogue needs to be promoted. Also, media education is a fundamental tool to raise awareness on IPR issues among media users and consumers.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A world-wide movement in media literacy improvement has been growing for roughly twenty-five years now. The importance of media literacy has been widely recognised but progress varies according to the country or region and suffers from lack of funding and recognition. Australia, New Zealand and Canada are currently the most advanced countries in the world; media education forms part of school curricula either as a separate subject or as part of the mother tongue language curriculum. In these countries there are also well established partnerships with the media industry and regulators; many associations publish journals and newsletters and some maintain extensive websites.

EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

In Europe, numerous countries have also begun to develop and support their own Media Literacy initiatives both in the formal and non-formal education sectors; in general in most Member States, elements of Media Literacy are taught within the formal education system

either as a separate subject or integrated into other subjects. Just to mention a few examples, in Ireland, new school curricula include Media Literacy for primary schools; in the UK it is compulsory from “Key Stage 3” of the National curriculum primarily as a part of English; in Sweden Image Education and Media Literacy are included in the Primary School Curricula as revised in 2000. In the UK there are five Universities offering a Masters degree in Media and Education.

Also, many non-formal Media Literacy projects and initiatives are run at national, regional and local level throughout the EU Member States. These include initiatives run by the press and broadcasters.

COMMISSION’S ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

Since November 2000, in the framework of the Lisbon Agenda, the Commission has organised three workshops on Media Literacy and provided 3.5 M€ of financial support to some 30 projects (through the eLearning initiative). These initiatives have proved to be very effective in helping media literacy organisations and practitioners from different European Countries to establish contact and create networks which are a first step to a steady and profitable exchange of knowledge and experiences (i.e. good practices).

In particular, projects have received European financial support in with the objective to:

- analyse media representations and media values in a multimedia perspective;
- encourage the production and distribution of *Media Literacy* related content;
- stimulate the use of media in order to improve participation in social and community life;
- intensify networking around media education related issues;
- concentrate on the implementation of media literacy initiatives bridging the media industry and the education world, in a “hands-on” approach.

EU financial support came to an end in 2005 and an analysis and assessment of the projects will be carried out by the Grenoble Management School.

The future MEDIA 2007 programme has, among its operational objectives, the education and creation of an audience for European cinematography. The proposal underlines the importance of Media Literacy and Image Education initiatives and in particular those organised by festivals for a young public, in close cooperation with schools and other institutions. The full exploitation of the economic and cultural potential of the European audiovisual sector depends also on the integration of the European audiovisual heritage within the educational and cultural policy frameworks of the Member States.

Also, in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2005 on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities, Member States are urged to promote the use of film heritage in education and fostering and promoting visual education, film studies and media literacy in education at all levels.

The Proposal for 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 of 30 April 2004 stresses the importance of Media Literacy and Media Education programmes

The Safer Internet plus Programme builds on the previous Action Plan, aims to empower parents and teachers with internet safety tools. It also covers other media, such as videos, and explicitly addresses the fight against racism, and “spam”. It will focus more closely on end users: parents, educators and children.

The recent Publishers’ forum mined the rich seam of activities promoting media literacy at Member State level. This issue notably as regards publishing online is part of the remit of the Task Force on the media industry created by Commissioner Reding.

MEDIA LITERACY EXPERT GROUP REMIT

As previously mentioned the main aim of the “Media Literacy Expert Group” will be to analyse and define media literacy objectives and trends, to highlight and promote good practices at European level and propose actions in the field. In particular, certain issues should be highlighted such as the importance of promoting the protection of children, young people and human dignity in the media and support the creation of a media environment appropriate for citizens’ social, educational and cultural needs. Also, working on the development of reliable means of evaluation is fundamental.

The work of the group will focus on certain areas such as audiovisual literacy (notably as regards commercial communications), media literacy and the Internet, and education and awareness of copyright.

Commercial Communication literacy

The audiovisual sector contains a number of complex messages. Some of these are of a commercial nature. Young people represent both an important audience and a future audience to the different media players. It is important for them to acquire the necessary skills to enable them to interpret the different messages and make informed choices. In this area a number of different commercial strategies are used, such as product placement, sponsorship, direct marketing, data mining and branding across different media platforms. Not all of these messages are aimed specifically at children but the skills acquired can be used to decipher and evaluate all information. European legislation already exists in this area, in respect of advertising for children. It could be useful in the context of the discussions on the new media services Directive to exchange best practices on education on commercial communications with a view to proposing them as an alternative to bans of certain practices.

Media Literacy for film

Audiovisual works represent the main vector for the transmission of our cultural, social and democratic values to European citizens, notably in respect of the younger generations. This must also be seen in the economic and market context within Europe. Media literacy action at a European level should enable young people to watch stories, dramas, documentaries and other works that reflect the reality of their own lives and histories, as well as those of their neighbours, to recognise and understand them fully.

The global objective would be to encourage young audiences to appreciate and understand the cultural diversity within the European Union and forge a strong European identity in addition to their national or regional identity.

The Expert Group will make specific proposals to the Commission on how to translate into action the broad media literacy objectives outlined in MEDIA 2007 and the “Film Heritage” Recommendation.

Media Literacy in the online environment

The Internet contains an ever increasing amount of content, and is becoming the preferred way of accessing information and entertainment. This raises questions of the remuneration of creators (copyright), and of the origin and relative importance of content where such issues may not be clear.

At the same time publishing faces a difficult migration to new business models on the Internet against a backdrop of declining readership and lower interest among youth in reading print media compared with audiovisual media.

As young people use increasingly new tools such as blogs, and open sources media literacy initiatives have to be adapted to the reality experienced by these users. Moreover, media literacy for the online environment should include awareness of copyright issues. Finally, the analysis and assessment of the European Commission’s previous activity (Media Literacy projects funded within the eLearning initiative) will also be discussed and examined.