



Foreword

On behalf of the former Finnish EU Presidency, I am delighted to introduce the 2006 Progress Report “Coordinating Digitisation in Europe” of the National Representatives Group (NRG). This year saw several significant developments in the field of digitised cultural heritage, both in the form of evolving and ongoing projects as well as steps taken forward in strengthening the political and strategic framework. We have now come to the point where the issues of digitised cultural heritage and digital preservation lie at the very heart of the European agenda.

The digitisation of cultural heritage is an effective way of improving the accessibility of information and knowledge. It is important to guarantee citizens equal access to up-to date and reliable information, irrespective of their place of residence. Cultural heritage can also provide a basis for content creation, the international presentation of European culture, and various projects. The most efficient way to improve the usability and visibility of digitised materials in museums, archives and libraries is to make them available through a joint European access point.

It is self-evident that the European Digital Library will foster knowledge exchange, new business opportunities and new partnerships. But no less importantly it can be developed into a service that will be of vital meaning for the future of Europe. Success in this venture will contribute to the construction and reinforcement of identities, and increase cultural dialogue. In this sense, it will have strong positive impact on the stability of societies - a factor that is essential for the future of Europe. We simply cannot afford fragmentation.

Europe has always been a continent of cultural dialogue. In the material world, the evidence of our common yet diverse past and present – the collections – are bound to be dispersed also in the future. But in the digital world, they will be united and intertwined.

In the National Representatives Group the Member States have been working together since 2001 to improve cooperation and the coordination of national activities. This important work will now be carried on within the framework of the European Commission after the establishment of its new Member States’ Expert Group on Digitisation and Digital Preservation.

This report encapsulates the most significant steps taken towards the European Digital Library in 2006 and represents the considerable investments made by the member states, the projects and the experts involved in the field of digitisation of cultural heritage. I thank all those involved for your support for the coordination action and also for those important issues that were on the agenda of the Finnish EU Presidency.

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