Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Media literacy' and 'Creative content online'

(2008/C 325/12)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

— asks the Council and the European Parliament to further develop EU media literacy policy (with strategic objectives and progress monitoring) and to adopt a Recommendation on media literacy, taking into account this CoR opinion and the subsidiarity principle. A specific strand on media literacy should be added to the future MEDIA programme. In parallel or as an alternative, pilot programmes should be launched that will receive EU funding;

— stresses that the reports as set out in Article 26 of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the related activities of the Commission and Member States must allow for the differences and progress made in media literacy at regional level in Europe and provide examples of good practice by local and regional authorities and other stakeholders;

— urges national, regional and local authorities to support media literacy and to facilitate civil society involvement in particular. It recommends local and regional authorities to develop collaborative projects on media literacy in formal and non-formal education and training, targeted at citizens, especially children and young people, the disabled and social groups that are at risk of exclusion;

— encourages local and regional authorities to play a key role in managing their cultural and linguistic heritage by means of creative content online — promoting new business models in creative industries and media, promoting creative works that are (co-)financed by media organisations or even in practising eGovernment;

— is critical of the European Commission's failure to take into account the cultural and social implications of the emerging creative content online sector; the scope of the proposed Recommendation and of the 'Content Online Platform' need to add cultural diversity.
Rapporteur: Evangelia SCHONARAKI-ILIAKI (EL/PES), Prefect of Heraklion

Reference documents

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment
COM(2007) 833 final

Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Creative content online in the Single Market
COM(2007) 836 final

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

A. Media literacy (1)

1. tasked with promoting social cohesion at regional level, a key aspect of which is digital convergence, welcomes the publication of the Commission communication on media literacy in the digital environment and in particular its comprehensive definition of media literacy, which includes the ability and opportunity to access and use media as well as the acquisition of knowledge about their functioning and critical evaluation of their content;

2. endorses the goals and priorities set by the Commission in its communication and notes in particular that for the CoR media literacy means:

a) supporting active and creative use of media by citizens, especially by younger people in their dual roles as consumers and producers of creative content and developing and maintaining media literacy among older people and people of working age;

b) supporting a critical approach towards all media on the part of the general public;

c) promoting plurality in the media;

d) contributing to the debate about commercial advertising and issues of respect for and protection of private life;

e) promoting active involvement of citizens, bearing in mind that the media play a decisive role in framing Europe’s audio-visual heritage, local and regional identity, intercultural dialogue and democracy;

f) promoting social inclusion;

(1) After consulting a large number of citizens and specialist bodies, the rapporteur considers the Greek translation of the term 'media literacy' as 'γραμματισμός' to be unsatisfactory because it does not make the meaning of the term clear to ordinary people. She therefore proposes that the term be replaced in the text of the opinion by 'αγωγή' (media education). (Translator’s note: it has been decided to leave the English version unchanged, in line with the Commission text.).

3. would refer to the Council Conclusions of 21 May 2008 (2) in this context:

— recalling that promoting media literacy has been a priority for the CoR since 2004;

— recognising the efforts made by the Council to promote media literacy despite differences in practice and progress among Member States;

— agreeing with the Council on the importance of pooling information and good practice on the development of media literacy, while noting that this can also tie in with measures taken by local and regional authorities, which can play an important role in this field;

— believing that media literacy can be promoted through additional financing for existing and new initiatives alike;

Promotion of media literacy at EU level

4. notes that the CoR asked the Commission as far back as 2004 (3) to pay particular attention to promoting media literacy in all the EU Member States and to ensuring a minimum level of information content for each of them. Consequently it commends the Commission for initiating a Community media policy with this communication;

5. encourages the Commission to further develop its media literacy policy (programmes with strategic objectives and progress monitoring) in collaboration with all the EU institutions and with local and regional authorities, and to step up its cooperation with UNESCO and the Council of Europe in this area;


6. asks the Council and the European Parliament to adopt a recommendation on media literacy, as mentioned in the communication, taking into account this CoR opinion, the subsidiarity principle, and the remits established at local and regional level in the EU in relation to media literacy;

7. is pleased that the Commission is required to submit reports, as set out in Article 26 of the new Directive on audiovisual media services, but notes that these reports and the related activities of the Commission and Member States must allow for the differences and progress made in media literacy at regional level in Europe and provide examples of good practice by local and regional authorities and other stakeholders;

8. commends the stepping up of Commission action aimed at harnessing the know-how acquired through local and regional programmes on media literacy issues throughout the EU by promoting platforms for dialogue, events and networks for exchanging best practice;

9. calls on the EU institutions to add to the future MEDIA programme a specific strand on media literacy, since the current version of this programme makes only a small contribution to this area. In parallel or as an alternative, the Commission is asked to launch pilot programmes for media literacy that will receive EU funding;

10. stresses that existing EU programmes and initiatives, e.g. to improve internet security, are very limited in effect with regard to developing and exchanging good practice in media literacy, and calls on the Commission when renewing these programmes to adapt them so as to include issues of media literacy;

11. urges national, regional and local authorities to support plans, programmes and initiatives relating to media literacy, with the following main objectives:

- collaboration between all stakeholders, in particular the audiovisual industry (cinema, television, radio, providers and producers of internet content), media organisations, educational bodies, regulatory authorities, research and cultural institutes, and social organisations;

- running of services to promote media literacy;

- evaluation of progress in promoting media literacy at local and regional level;

- implementation of information strategies on media literacy issues, promoting media desks (information centres on the MEDIA programmes) and setting up information centres for media literacy issues that will operate at regional level;

- provision of incentives and promotion of policies on the production and dissemination of European content and development of media by civil society;

- involvement in national and Community cooperation networks;

12. calls on public authorities to facilitate civil society involvement in particular, given that only a small number of civil society organisations are currently taking part in the debate on media literacy, while also supporting greater participation of regulatory authorities in the Member States and the regions;

13. welcomes the Commission’s explicit reference to the key role played by local and regional authorities in supporting initiatives in the non-formal education sector, while noting that in many cases local and regional authorities are also responsible for incorporating media literacy into the formal education system at all levels;

14. urges local and regional authorities to incorporate issues of media literacy into the training of teachers and trainers, school curricula and lifelong learning, and to promote educational media and skills in the use and production of multimedia by schoolchildren and students;

15. encourages local and regional authorities to develop long-term public and private collaborative projects on media literacy in both the formal and non-formal education and training sectors (e.g. publishers of local or regional newspapers promoting study of the press and electronic journalism in schools, cinema festivals involving media literacy activities and campaigns on media literacy issues by public audiovisual channels and hardware and software companies);

16. urges the Member States to promote media literacy further by implementing the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related activities of the film industry (4), and the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and on-line information services industry (5);

Promoting media literacy at national, regional and local level

17. urges national, regional and local authorities to support plans, programmes and initiatives relating to media literacy, with the following main objectives:

- collaboration between all stakeholders, in particular the audiovisual industry (cinema, television, radio, providers and producers of internet content), media organisations, educational bodies, regulatory authorities, research and cultural institutes, and social organisations;

- running of services to promote media literacy;

- evaluation of progress in promoting media literacy at local and regional level;

18. implementation of information strategies on media literacy issues, promoting media desks (information centres on the MEDIA programmes) and setting up information centres for media literacy issues that will operate at regional level;

19. provision of incentives and promotion of policies on the production and dissemination of European content and development of media by civil society;

20. involvement in national and Community cooperation networks;

21. calls on public authorities to facilitate civil society involvement in particular, given that only a small number of civil society organisations are currently taking part in the debate on media literacy, while also supporting greater participation of regulatory authorities in the Member States and the regions;

22. welcomes the Commission’s explicit reference to the key role played by local and regional authorities in supporting initiatives in the non-formal education sector, while noting that in many cases local and regional authorities are also responsible for incorporating media literacy into the formal education system at all levels;

23. urges local and regional authorities to incorporate issues of media literacy into the training of teachers and trainers, school curricula and lifelong learning, and to promote educational media and skills in the use and production of multimedia by schoolchildren and students;

24. encourages local and regional authorities to develop long-term public and private collaborative projects on media literacy in both the formal and non-formal education and training sectors (e.g. publishers of local or regional newspapers promoting study of the press and electronic journalism in schools, cinema festivals involving media literacy activities and campaigns on media literacy issues by public audiovisual channels and hardware and software companies);

25. urges the Member States to promote media literacy further by implementing the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related activities of the film industry (4), and the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and on-line information services industry (5);

(4) Recommendation No 2005/865/CE.
(5) Recommendation No 2006/952/CE.
Media literacy in commercial communication (advertising)

17. reiterates the position set out in its opinion on the new Directive on audiovisual media services (CdR 106/2006 fin.), where it asked that the possibility be considered of banning advertising during children's and news programmes, which regrettably was not taken on board, and disagreed with the Commission's approach, whereby promoting media literacy is considered a more appropriate method than banning advertising (10). Obviously there is a need for better public education, especially of children and young people, when it comes to developing a correct and critical approach to the media, but the CoR has expressed doubt regarding the ability of children to distinguish programmes from advertising or to correctly assess advertisements, for which reason it supports the option of regulating and stepping up regulatory provisions in the Member States;

18. shares the Commission's view that there is an urgent need to develop and exchange good practice in this particular area. This applies to both developing and applying of codes of practice and, where applicable, self-regulatory and co-regulatory frameworks. At the same time, there is a need to protect consumer rights in relation to content services, to ensure that services are of adequate quality in terms of reliability and validity;

19. would like to see media literacy programmes at all levels of government with public/private funding, provided of course that they are transparent, so that the interests of those taking part (especially private sector actors) are easily discernible;

20. urges local and regional authorities, supported by the Member States and the EU, to promote activities based on the priorities set out in the Commission communication. These activities are targeted at citizens, especially children and young people, the disabled and social groups that are at risk of exclusion:

(a) familiarising people with Europe's cultural heritage and increasing interest in European audiovisual works;

(b) providing opportunities for citizens to learn about the production of audiovisual services and works from close up, and to acquire creative skills, and to express their views on and reflect on their cultural identity;

(c) understanding the significance of intellectual property rights;

(d) critical appraisal of internet content and better use of search engines by users;

(e) promoting digital inclusion, as emphasised by the CoR in its opinion on the subject (CdR 5/2008 fin.);

21. emphasises the need for Europe's audiovisual heritage to be taken into account in the education and cultural policies of the Member States, cities and regions, and for young content creators to be supported and encouraged, since they are effectively the future of Europe's audiovisual sector. In this context the CoR has already taken a position with earlier recommendations (10) to increase financial support for and promotion of regional and local audiovisual festivals in order to further development of works by young European content creators and on improving training of audiovisual professionals in countries and regions with a low audiovisual output and/or with a limited geographical and linguistic range:

B. Creative content online in the single market (19)

22. welcomes the Commission communication on creative content online in the single market and shares the Commission's view that the transfer of creative content services to the internet environment is a major change; digital technologies facilitate the creation of audiovisual works and make it possible to distribute creative content in an audiovisual market without borders, while at the same time increasing access to creative content via tools, networks and services. This content covers audiovisual creative works online such as films, television, music, radio, internet games, internet publications, educational content online, and content created by users;

23. stresses that more measures must be taken to fully activate the potential of European creative content, with the aim of boosting the production, availability and circulation of high-quality, innovative European works, enhancing Europe's cultural diversity and European competitiveness;

24. notes that existing challenges must be met not just by the EU, the Member States, companies that produce and distribute content, network operators, right holders, consumers and independent regulatory authorities, but also by local and regional authorities;

25. calls on local and regional authorities to play a key role in managing their cultural and linguistic heritage, promoting new business models in local creative industries and local media, promoting creative works that are (co-)financed by media institutes and organisations or even in practising eGovernment with multi-channel service delivery;

(19) After consulting a large number of citizens and specialist bodies, the rapporteur considers the Greek translation of the term 'online' as 'επιγραμμικό' to be unsatisfactory, because it does not make the meaning of the term clear to ordinary people. She therefore proposes that the term be replaced in the text of the opinion by 'διαδικτυακό' ('internet'). (Translator's note: it has been decided to leave the English version unchanged, in line with the Commission text.)
26. supports the two key initiatives announced by the Commission in its communication, (a) the proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on creative content online and (b) the creation of a stakeholders’ discussion and cooperation platform, the ‘Content Online Platform’, in order to develop dialogue on addressing the issue, and asks that local and regional representation be ensured;

Creative content online and cultural diversity

27. is critical of the European Commission’s failure to take into account the cultural and social implications of the emerging creative content online sector and to propose measures that are essential to promote cultural diversity and ensure universal access to the benefits of ICTs; as already pointed out in the opinion on the i2010 strategy (11), the CoR considers that policies relating to new services and new digital media, as well as creative content, must not be framed on the basis of economic criteria alone, but must take cultural and social factors into account. In view of this, creative content must promote social cohesion and inclusion, particularly in the case of groups at risk of exclusion (women, young people, people with disabilities);

28. observes that where policies and legislation on creative content online are concerned, a balance must be found between its importance as a cultural good and as an economic asset. The increased interplay between culture, audiovisual media and ICTs makes it necessary to develop a cohesive policy for industry, creative content businesses and online content;

29. asks the Commission to include protection of cultural diversity under the heading of online content and to this end consider:

(a) broadening the scope of the proposed recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on creative content online and of the ‘Content Online Platform’ to include cultural diversity;

(b) the way in which the EU intends to implement the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in this context. In its opinion on A European agenda for culture the CoR called on the European Commission to make progress — based on the principle of subsidiarity — in taking measures to implement this global convention (12);

(c) the way in which the EU applies the cultural compatibility clause (Article 151(4) ECT) in this policy area;

(d) information pooling between the Member States and exchange of best practice in this sphere;

30. wishes to preserve cultural diversity and identity in a pluralistic European society in the future digital world, and therefore reiterates its previous calls (13) in relation to:

(a) maintaining content and services in all languages, given the increased use of a single language in creative content online;

(b) supporting digitalisation, dubbing, subtitling and multilingual copies of European audiovisual works;

(c) ensuring that providers of offline media services promote production of and access to European and independent works;

(d) ‘positive discrimination’ in EU support measures in favour of countries with a small capacity for creative content online and/or a limited geographical and linguistic range;

(e) taking on board the needs of users in different languages areas in developing digital libraries, whose digital data should be available beyond national borders notwithstanding rights of use;

Specific actions

31. shares the Commission’s concern in relation to the question of orphan works and the fact that many artists still hesitate to give their rights for internet distribution for fear of losing control as a result of illegal copying. This is a barrier to creating new markets for European creative works and cultural diversity in the digital environment, and the Committee therefore calls on the Member States and local and regional authorities to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders with the aim of finding appropriate solutions for terms of contract between right owners and internet distributors, and to strengthen their commitments in relation to implementing the 2006 European Film Online Charter;

32. sees a contradiction between the possibility for providers of online content services to reach the general public at global level and the traditional association of intellectual property rights with limited territorial scope, and similarly between the cultural policy objective of increasing the exchange and distribution of European creative content online and the fact that many rights holders only try to get licences in very few Member States where the licence is of economic interest to them;

33. voices its satisfaction with the Commission’s proposal to further clarify options for improving existing mechanisms, including multi-territorial licensing, before dealing with this complex issue in the announced proposal for a Recommendation;

34. acknowledges — as it did in a previous opinion (14) — the Commission’s contribution to developing a framework for digital rights management (DRM) and inviting stakeholders to joint discussions, where digital rights owners are encouraged to agree on the degree of interoperability;

35. considers that while a major part of Europe’s older cultural heritage is already free of copyright restrictions and thus available online, a reform of copyright legislation relating to more recent cultural heritage is highly relevant (15);

36. supports the Commission’s proposal to initiate cooperation procedures (‘codes of conduct’) between access/service providers, content producers, right holders, and in particular consumers, so as to guarantee consumer-friendly measures for adequate protection of copyrighted works and the fight against piracy and illegal copying;

37. calls on local and regional authorities to support formal and informal educational and awareness-raising activities on the importance of copyright for creative content;

38. recommends that as part of the Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009) measures should be planned at local and regional level to raise awareness and understanding of access to creative content online, respect for intellectual property rights and combating piracy;

39. believes that measures launched by the European institutions to strengthen and promote the production and availability of creative content online must be accompanied by corresponding initiatives in relation to media literacy.

Brussels, 9 October 2008

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE