

Boosting cultural heritage online: the European Commission sets up a Reflection Group on digitisation

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso has announced that the European Commission will entrust three personalities - Maurice Lévy (CEO of Publicis), Elisabeth Niggemann (Head of the German National Library) and Jacques De Decker (writer) - to come up with recommendations on how best to speed up the digitisation, online accessibility and preservation of cultural works across Europe. This Reflection Group will examine the various ongoing initiatives involving both public and private partners (notably the Google Books project) and copyright issues to find ways to boost the digitisation efforts of the complete collections held by libraries, museums and archives in Europe. These recommendations will ultimately help Europeana, Europe's digital library, reach a new dimension: today the Europeana portal (www.europeana.eu) already offers access to over 7 million digitised books, maps, photographs, film clips, paintings and musical extracts, but this is only a small part of all the works held by Europe's cultural institutions. The establishment of the Reflection Group is part of the Commission's broader strategy to help the cultural sector make the transition towards the digital age. The Group, who will report to Commission Vice President for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes and Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth Androulla Vassiliou, has been requested to submit its conclusions before the end of the year.

Commission Vice-President Neelie Kroes said: "We expect this Reflection Group to come up with innovative solutions to ensure that Europe's rich cultural heritage is made accessible to all on the internet – lack of money or rigid laws are no excuse: it is a duty of our time, we must do it for our generation and for future ones".

Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou added: "The cultural sector is going through an enormous transition. We have to make sure that it reaps benefits from technological advances. This means finding new business models for the creative industries, and expanding the traditional role of cultural institutions to the digital world, to give – access to cultural content and to preserve it for future generations".

The Reflection Group ("*Comité des sages*") will consist of Maurice Lévy (Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the French advertising and communications company Publicis), Elisabeth Niggemann (Director-General of the German National Library and chair of the European Digital Library Foundation) and Jacques De Decker (Belgian writer and journalist).

The Group has been invited to provide a set of recommendations for the digitisation, online accessibility and preservation of Europe's cultural heritage. It will look at how to fund digitisation, including the possibilities and conditions for public-private partnerships. It will also address copyright issues and licensing practices to facilitate the digitisation of copyrighted material – in particular out-of-print works and the so-called orphan works, which represent a large part of Europe's collections.

Of course, the current digitisation challenges go beyond the need to put online our cultural heritage. We thus need to address subsequently in a second phase the broader question of digital (i.e. online) distribution and accessibility of all cultural content in Europe. Setting up the Reflection Group is part of a broader strategy that will also include the search for new and effective business models as well as a favourable environment for creative industries and a fair remuneration for creators.

Background

Europeana was launched in November 2008 ([IP/08/1747](#)). Its website allows internet users to search and get direct access to digitised books, maps, paintings, newspapers, film fragments, and photographs from Europe's cultural institutions. About 7 million digitised objects are currently available and the number is expected to rise to 10 million in the course of 2010.

The Group was created following a suggestion made by the French Minister of Culture and Communication at the Education, Youth and Culture Council of 27 November 2009 ([MEMO/09/526](#)). The analysis of the Group will build on the work of the [High Level Group on Digital Libraries](#) set up between 2006 and 2009.