

Editorial

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DOI:10.3916/C34-2010-01-01

The European Union Passes a Recommendation on Media Literacy in the European Digital Environment

La Unión Europea dictamina una nueva Recomendación sobre alfabetización mediática en el entorno digital en Europa

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In December 2007, the European Commission (see COMUNICAR 32, 2007) through the European Parliament (COM 2007: 33) passed a communication that urged member states to promote media literacy for commercial communication covering advertising and the media in general, partly to raise awareness of European cinema and enhance the creative and communicational skills of citizens applied to the new digital media.

Recently, several European bodies have backed the proposal to promote media literacy. In May 2008, the Education, Youth and Culture Council considered that media literacy was a key factor for active citizenship in today's information society. In October 2008, the Committee of the Regions adopted a global opinion on creative content on line and media literacy. The Council of Lisbon (CdR 9472008), within the framework of the i2010 initiative, has endorsed the promotion of the ICT sector with the aim of creating a Single European information space.

This European Commission recommendation, endorsed in Brussels on August 20, 2009, falls within the framework of a broad European movement that considers media literacy to be the key factor in the i2010 initiative that aspires to a more competitive knowledge economy while contributing to a more inclusive information society.

A public consultation at the end of 2006 highlighted different practices and uneven levels of media literacy across Europe. Therefore, a large-scale investigation is required to establish levels of media literacy among European citizens. In 2007, the «Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe» study carried out for the Commission recognized the barriers to the development of media literacy at European level. These include a lack of a shared European vision in initiatives taken at local, regional and national level, and the lack of networks to strengthen these initiatives in the Union. This study emphasises the need to analyse, highlight and spread good practices in the field through the European Union and promote coordination networks among stakeholders. It is also desirable to boost access to media and facilitate the ability of citizens to make informed and diversified choices as media consumers. The new challenges generated by digital content and the multiplication of distribution platforms require a standard of literacy that embraces all types of media to «increase people's awareness of the many forms of media messages...encountered in their everyday lives». As a consequence, «media literacy today is regarded as one of the pre-requisites for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and diminish the risks of exclusion from community life». This



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is vital because «democracy depends on the active participation of citizens to the life of their community, and media literacy would provide the skills they need to make sense of the daily flow of information disseminated through new communication technologies».

The Commission points out in its recommendation that inclusion of media studies in school curricula at all levels is the primary responsibility of member states. The role of local authorities is also important, since they are close to the citizens, for supporting media literacy initiatives. Civil society should also make an active contribution to media literacy from the grassroots.

Section 21 of the Commission's Recommendation of August 2009 states the necessity for research projects into media literacy. Likewise, it aims to create a consensus around fundamental aspects in media literacy, via the Media initiative of 2007 (support programme for the audiovisual sector), the cooperation of other European institutions and international organizations like UNESCO, the United Nations Alliance of Civilization, and the promotion of a private-public partnership on media literacy.

The Commission's recommendation urges member states to 1) develop the co-regulation of the audiovisual sector and self-regulatory initiatives and guidelines; 2) promote systematic research through studies and projects on media literacy in the digital environment; 3) open a debate in conferences and other public events for the inclusion of media literacy in the compulsory education curriculum as part of the provision of the key competencies for lifelong learning, as established in the Recommendation of the European Parliament on December 18, 2006; 4) enhance awareness via training on the risks of processing personal data through information and communication networks; 5) encourage the media industry's commitment to improve media literacy through awareness campaigns and information packs to actively inform citizens about the need for media literacy in the European digital environment.

