MEDIA LITERACY: A European approach.

Why is media literacy so important? This question could be replied with the words of a great European semiologist and writer such as Umberto Eco: *"A democratic civilisation will save itself only if it makes the language of image into a stimulus for critical reflection, not an invitation to hypnosis"*. However, I think I should start by saying what media literacy is. Media literacy may be defined as the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate media contents and different aspects of the media and to create communications in a variety of contexts. This definition is the result of the work of many different people, institutions, media professionals, teachers, educators and it is built on three main elements: 1) access to media and media content; 2) critical approach, ability to decipher media messages, awareness of how the media works; 3) creativity, communication and production skills. In addition to that media literacy relates to:

1. **All media**, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies. The media are an accessible tool for European citizens to better understand the societies in which they live and participate in the democratic life. In particular, the audiovisual production sector is an essential instrument of expression of our cultural and political values. It is a vector for European citizenship and culture and plays a primary role in building a European identity.

2. **Citizenship**: media literacy is an extremely important factor for active citizenship in today's information society, a real key pre-requisite just as literacy was at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a fundamental skill not only for young generations but also for adults and elderly people, parents, teachers and media professionals. As a result of the evolution of media technologies and the presence of the Internet as a distribution channel, an increasing number of Europeans can now create and disseminate images, information and contents. In this context, media literacy is viewed as one of the major tools in the development of citizens' responsibilities.

3. **European audiovisual heritage and cultural identity**: media-literate people will be able to exercise more informed choices also as regards to the audiovisual content market. Citizens would therefore hold a higher degree of freedom as they will have the instruments to choose what they want to see and will be able to better evaluate the implications of their choices.

4. **Protection and empowerment**: media literate people will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful, offensive or undesired content. Media literacy refers also to the skills, knowledge and understanding to enable citizens to use media effectively. It should empower them through critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them informed consumers and producers of information

I think it is now clear why media literacy is important for all citizens.

The European Commission strategy – State of play

1. **Media Literacy projects** have received European financial support in 2002 and 2003 under the eLearning Initiative 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.

Financial support came to an end in 2005. Analysis and evaluation of the projects, which was carried out by the Grenoble School of Management proves that these projects had a positive impact in particular as regards to innovation, development and reinforcement of European collaboration in media literacy. UNESCO co-ordinated projects MENTOR and MENTA among selected ones.

2. Implementation of **MEDIA 2007** objectives related to media literacy (the education and creation of an audience for European cinematography). The MEDIA 2007 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). New guidelines were approved by the MEDIA Committee on 27/04/07.

3. The **SAFER INTERNET PLUS** programme aims at empowering parents and teachers with internet safety tools. It also covers other media, such as videos, and explicitly addresses the fight against racism, and

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"spam". It focuses more closely on end users: parents, educators and children.

4. The recently approved text of the **AVMS Directive** contains a recital referring to media literacy1. Article 26 of the Directive provides that "The Commission shall report....on levels of media literacy in all the Member States".

5. A "**Media Literacy Expert Group**" composed of a number of European personalities, with a mix of different competences and from various backgrounds, has been set-up by the Commission with the aim to analyze and define media literacy objectives and trends, to highlight and promote good practices at European level and propose actions in the field. The group met three times in 2006 and is pursuing its work in 2007.

6. In the last quarter of 2006, the Commission launched a public consultation in order to nurture reflection on media literacy and gain from the experience of all those concerned with this issue. The response to the consultation was extremely satisfactory both in quantitative terms and in the quality and variety of the respondents (replies received included media organisations and industry, formal and non-formal education institutions, content providers and producers, research and cultural institutions, regulators and citizens' and consumers' associations). A report on the results of the public consultation on media literacy has been drafted and will be available soon on our website.

7. A **study** on "Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe" has been commissioned recently to UAB (Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona). The objective is to map current practices in implementing media literacy in Europe. The study will cover the 27 Member States of the European Union, the EEA Member States (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). The end result is to provide a concise evaluation of the emerging trends in the field of media literacy as it already exists throughout Europe. It should also further provide recommendations on measures to be implemented at Community level to help foster and increase the level of this new form of citizen awareness. Finally, it should briefly outline the possible economic and social impact of an EU intervention in this field. The final report of the study will be ready by mid September.

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1   recital 25a: Media literacy refers to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow consumers to use media effectively and safely. Media-literate people will be able to exercise informed choices, understand the nature of content and services and take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They will be better able to protect themselves and their families from harmful or offensive material. Therefore development of media literacy in all sections of society should be promoted and monitored.

The European Commission strategy: whts's next?

In the last quarter of 2007, the Commission intends to adopt a **Communication** on media literacy which will add a further building block to European audiovisual policy. It will include a stocktaking exercise on the development of Media Literacy in Europe and will analyze and define media literacy objectives and trends. Its main objective will be to highlight and promote good practices in media literacy at European level and propose possible actions in the field.

By its very nature, media literacy issues that can be addressed in different ways at different levels. It is the firm intention of the Commission to respect the **subsidiarity principle**. It is of course the authorities in Member States who bear the primary responsibility for discussing and possibly supporting the inclusion of media literacy in school curricula at all levels. The role played by local authorities is also very important since they are closer to the citizens and support initiatives in the non-formal education sector. On the other hand European action in this field could help to strengthen a European identity and foster awareness and exchange of experience. Our main objective will be to highlight and promote good practices in media literacy at European level. Our policy will build on the results of the work of the Media Literacy Expert Group (and on the findings of the public consultation). Also, a higher degree of media literacy can significantly contribute to reaching the objectives set for the European Union at the Lisbon European Council in 2000 in particular as regards a more competitive knowledge economy, while contributing to a more inclusive knowledge society. Finally, media literacy is clearly linked with Commission's initiatives and activities such as MEDIA 2007, Safer Internet and of course the AVMS Directive.

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1

**MEDIA LITERACY:
a European approach**

Aviva SILVER – DG Information Society and Media
Unit A2 MEDIA programmme and media literacy

Paris 21–22 June 2007

2

The EU today
27 countries – 490 million people

3

WHY MEDIA LITERACY?

*A demoratic civilisation will
save itself only if it makes the
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4

Media Literacy may be defined as …

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5

MEDIA LITERACY relates to …

- All media

- Citizenship, freedom, rights and democracy

- Audiovisual heritage and cultural identity

- Empowerment of citizens

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**The European Commission strataegy
State of play**

- 30 Projects funded from 2002 up to 2005

- New funding opportunities in MEDIA 2007

- SAFER INTERNET PLUS Programme

- AVMS Directive

- Expert Group – Public Consultation – Study

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7

The European Commission strategy
State of play

- 30 Projects funded from 2002 up to 2005

- New funding opportunities in MEDIA 2007

- SAFER INTERNET PLUS Programme

- AVMS Directive

- Expert Group – Public Consultation – Study

8

The European Commission strategy:
what's next?

Communication on Media Literacy
(last quarter of 2007)

- Respect of subsidiarity

- First policy document on media literacy at European level

- Completing EU AV policy under ¡2010

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Websites

- www.europa.eu

- http://ec.europa.eu/media

- http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy /index en.htm

- http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy /media literacy/index en.thm

- http://ec.europa.eu/information so ciety/activities/sip/index en.htm

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Auszug aus der Veröffentlichung des BMUKK (http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/interkult_dialog_2008.xml). zum

Europäisches Jahr des interkulturellen Dialogs 2008

Angesichts der zunehmend multikulturell geprägten europäischen Gesellschaften bemüht sich die Europäische Union seit Jahren den interkulturellen Dialog der Mitgliedstaaten untereinander und mit Drittländern gezielt zu fördern. Um eine vertiefende Auseinandersetzung mit diesem Thema zu forcieren, wurde 2008 zum **„Europäischen Jahr des interkulturellen Dialogs"** erklärt.

Zu den vielfältigen **Zielen und Prioritäten** zählt u. a. die
  ➢ **Hervorhebung der Rolle von Bildung und Medien als Instrument zur Vermittlung von gegenseitigem Verständnis und Wissen über europäische Kulturen;**

Ergänzend zum Schwerpunktjahr 2008 wurde die Förderung des interkulturellen Dialogs im neuen **EU-Programm „Kultur" (2007–2013)** als Priorität verankert. Diesbezügliche Beratung und Information bietet der Cultural Contact Point der **Abteilung IV/8** des Bundesministeriums für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur an.

Weitere Informationen zum **Europäischen Jahr des interkulturellen Dialogs 2008:**
http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/dialogue/dialogue_en.html