

Short review

EBLIDA: Manifesto on international trade agreements

The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) is an independent, non-governmental and non-commercial umbrella association of national library, information, documentation and archive associations and organisations in Europe. EBLIDA concentrates on the subjects of copyright, culture, telematics, Central and Eastern Europe, matters related to the information society, and information technology (IT).

EBLIDA's major objectives are:

- to serve and promote the interests of the library and information science profession at a European level, ranging from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the Council of Ministers and the Council of Europe;
- to give its members up-to-date information on all relevant developments in the European Union;
- to strengthen co-operation between the members.

EBLIDA recognises that trade between peoples is generally accompanied by advances in culture and civilisation. International trade agreements, when properly drafted, will often bring improvements to the economic wellbeing of the countries concerned.

However, EBLIDA believes that trade agreements may have adverse effects on education and on the information society. Adverse effects are likely to arise if library services, or educational institutions,

- become subject to competition from outside countries, and/or
- risk losing their support from public funds in the country in which they operate, and/or
- are run largely, within one country, as commercial operations.

EBLIDA's misgivings arise from:

- the increased focus on services in trade agreements, especially the General Agreement in Trade in Services and the proposed European Directive on Services in the Internal Market;
- the lively give-and-take of international negotiations, in which services are offered for foreign competition;
- the remoteness of some negotiating delegations from the services they are discussing;
- a lack of understanding by many policy-makers of the activities and potential contribution of libraries and educational institutions in the modern world;
- a belief that a robust public service is the best delivery mechanism for library, public information and educational services, on the grounds of the accountability it offers for the information it provides;

- the imperative (as EBLIDA sees it), as part of the information society, of a flourishing service for the supply of impartial information to all citizens, whether or not they are currently in the formal education system.

EBLIDA believes that local libraries, schools and other institutions may easily be affected by apparently remote trade negotiations. As the voice of users of information, we believe that awareness of this issue must be increased.

Members of EBLIDA undertake to work, within our respective countries, with libraries and educational institutions, with information workers, teachers and researchers of all kinds, and health service employees, to alert them to the possibility that the political accountability and local control of such services are potentially at risk. We hope that local people will apply appropriate pressure on national governments.

EBLIDA will work on this issue with our allies in IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) and LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche).

This statement was agreed in principle at EBLIDA's seminar on trade agreements and libraries, which was held in Cambridge on 2–3 March 2005.

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