



ΕΒΡΟΠΕΪΣΚΙ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΟ ΕΥΡΟΠΕΟ ΕΥΡΩΠΣΚΥ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΟΠΑ-ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΕΤ  
ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΣΧΕΣ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΩΟΡΑ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΟ ΚΟΙΝΟΒΟΥΛΙΟ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
PARLEMENT EUROPEËN PARLAIMINT NA HEORPA PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EIROPAS PARLAMENTS  
EUROPOS PARLAMENTAS EURÓPAI PARLAMENT IL-PARLAMENT EWROPEW EUROPEES PARLEMENT  
PARLAMENT EUROPEJSKI PARLAMENTO EUROPEU PARLAMENTUL EUROPEAN  
EURÓPSKY PARLAMENT EVROPSKI PARLAMENT EUROOPAN PARLAMENTTI EUROOPAPARLAMENTET

NOTE

## Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies

# AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIA LITERACY

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

April 2008

EN





ΕΒΡΟΠΕΪΣΚΙ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΟ ΕΥΡΟΠΕΟ ΕΥΡΟΠΣΚΪ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΟΠΑ-ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤΕΤ  
ΕΥΡΟΠΆΙΣΧΕΣ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΟΟΡΑ ΠΑΡΛΑΜΕΝΤ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΟ ΚΟΙΝΟΒΟΥΛΙΟ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
PARLEMENT EUROPEEN PARLAIMINT NA HEORPA PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EIROPAS PARLAMENTS  
EUROPOS PARLAMENTAS EURÓPAI PARLAMENT IL-PARLAMENT EWROPEW EUROPEES PARLEMENT  
PARLAMENT EUROPEJSKI PARLAMENTO EUROPEU PARLAMENTUL EUROPEAN  
EURÓPSKY PARLAMENT EVROPSKI PARLAMENT EUROOPAN PARLAMENTTI EUROPAPARLAMENTET

**Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union**

**Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies**

**Culture and Education**

**AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIA LITERACY**

**Note**

**Content:**

This note serves as an introduction to the concept of "media literacy", exploring its various meanings and why its political profile has become increasingly high in recent years. It summarises some general trends in media literacy in the EU over recent decades, as well as recent EU policy initiatives, including the Communication on "A European approach to media literacy" published by the European Commission in December 2007.

**IP/B/CULT/NT/2008\_02**

**08/04/2008**

**PE 397.254**

**EN**



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Background to this Note	1
1.2. The Structure of this Note	1
1.3. What is Media Literacy?	1
1.4. The European Charter of Media Literacy	1
1.5. Different Elements Present in the Concept of Media Literacy	2
1.6. Why Media Education is Becoming More Important	3
<b>2. Overall Trends in the European Union</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Growing Recognition of the Importance of Media Literacy	5
2.2. Growing Role of Actors outside the Education Sector	5
2.3. Problems and Areas of Divergence	6
<b>3. Media Education in European Union (EU) Activities</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1. Recommendation on Film heritage and Competitiveness of 16th November 2005	7
3.2. Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity (2006)	7
3.3. The "Media 2007" Programme	7
3.4. The "Audiovisual Media Services Directive"	7
3.5. The Communication on a European Approach to Media Literacy	8
3.6. What Comes Next?	8



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background to this Note

On November 19th 2007, the Coordinators of the Culture Committee requested a study on the situation of media literacy in the Member States of the European Union (EU). The subject was topical, given that at that time the European Commission was about to publish a Communication on the same subject, which took place on 20th December, under the title "A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment"<sup>1</sup>.

Given that the Commission, in preparing its Communication, published in late 2007 an in-depth study of media literacy in the EU, the Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies opted, with the agreement of the Coordinators, to draw up a note which briefly summarises the findings of the Commission's "Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe" study<sup>2</sup> and describes the general legal and political context. This note is based on the findings of that study, which will be simply referred to as "the Commission study" in the text, as well as a variety of other sources.

## 1.2. The Structure of this Note

This note begins by examining the various meanings of "media literacy" and attempts to identify why it has become more prominent as a political issue in recent years. Secondly, it also sets out some general trends in media literacy in the EU over recent decades. Thirdly, it summarises EU policies to promote media literacy, briefly analyzing the recent Communication and suggesting a small number of priorities for the Union in this field.

## 1.3. What is Media Literacy?

The discussion of "media literacy" is unfortunately confused by the lack of an agreed meaning for the term. There is plenty of academic debate on what "media literacy", "digital literacy", "information literacy", "media education" and other similar terms mean exactly. The purpose of this note is not to enter that conceptual debate. Nevertheless, it is worth stating from the outset that there are a variety of definitions of "media literacy" in circulation. That is probably not an accident: "media literacy" involves various elements, and, as we shall see below, different groups attach a different importance to each of these elements. The lack of an agreed definition is clearly a problem for politicians, academics and others involved in this debate.

## 1.4. The European Charter of Media Literacy

A group of institutions and individuals from different EU countries, led by the Film Council of the United Kingdom (UK), has published a Charter which provides a definition of "media literacy"<sup>3</sup>. This initiative is specifically aimed at overcoming the terminological problem and it invites organizations to sign a Charter and adhere to a common definition. The definition states the following:

---

<sup>1</sup> COM(2007) 833 final, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/ec\\_com/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/ec_com/index_en.htm).

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/studies/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/studies/index_en.htm).

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/index.php>.

"...We believe that media literate people should be able to:

Use media technologies effectively to access, store, retrieve and share content to meet their individual and community needs and interests;

Gain access to, and make informed choices about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources;

Understand how and why media content is produced;

Analyse critically the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey;

Use media creatively to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions;

Identify, and avoid or challenge, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful;

Make effective use of media in the exercise of their democratic rights and civic responsibilities."

This definition is rather long, but has the merit of including all the possible elements of media literacy.

### **1.5. Different Elements Present in the Concept of Media Literacy**

Before discussing definitions, it is worth pointing out that there are two dimensions to promoting media literacy. The first is more practical and related to the needs of the labour market. This dimension stresses that an advanced economy requires people with adequate technological skills, in the spirit of the EU's Lisbon objectives.

Another dimension places more emphasis on the importance of these skills for exercising citizenship. It is argued that persons with no access to or practical knowledge of technology, and lacking the ability to analyse media messages, will be increasingly prevented from being active citizens.

These two dimensions are not inherently contradictory. But, certain groups stress one approach to the detriment of another. Teachers, for example, are often more sensitive to the citizenship dimension, whilst the private sector is naturally more attracted to the economic dimension.

The definition championed by the European Charter of Media Literacy (above) illustrates that media literacy involves various elements and that these can be divided up and combined to produce different outcomes. These basic elements are:

1. Learning how to use information and communications technology (ICT). This is also sometimes called "computer literacy" or "digital literacy". In simplified terms, it involves learning how to make effective use of computers or similar devices.
2. Learning how to analyze and "read" media messages, whether in words, images or sound, or a combination of these. This involves, for example, understanding that a sequence of images

contains a "language". Analyzing the structure of words, images or sounds is a precondition for being able to think critically about the content of messages.

3. Learning about the media themselves, including their organization, working practices and interests (often combined, in practice, with element 2 above).
4. Learning creative skills, i.e. how to create and present messages, using technology. This could involve, for example, a class exercise of making a short film.

It should be noted that at the EU level, as we shall see later, the "cultural aspect" of media literacy is sometimes also stressed. A person with all the skills described above will be in a better position to fully participate in cultural life.

Whilst many definitions of media literacy are possible, they all contain or refer to at least one of the above elements.

It is worth pointing out that "media education" is the process of teaching these skills; "media literacy" is the final result of the process, the outcome.

## **1.6. Why Media Education is Becoming More Important**

It could be argued that the importance of literacy - the ability to read, write and understand - is centuries old; similarly, the mass media have existed since the nineteenth century (radio and the press) or the middle of the twentieth century (television). Educational policies aimed at teaching critical perspectives on the mass media, in some countries, have existed for decades. So why is the concept of "media education" particularly new or relevant?

The European Commission study provides some answers to these questions. In short, it argues that the convergence that has taken place since the 1990s between the worlds of "electronic" media (television, radio, the telephone) and "digital" media (the Internet) makes media education even more important than before. This means that educational practices must be adjusted, because digital media or "multimedia" are very different from mass media.

In mass media, like traditional analogue television for example, the user does not participate. In "multimedia", a degree of interaction is often possible or even required. A reader of an online newspaper, for example, can criticise an article by publishing his or her opinion, which may provoke reactions from other readers, sparking off an online debate which goes far beyond the text of the original article. Not only is the Internet interactive, it is becoming more so, with the advent of so-called "Web 2.0" and the proliferation of "user-generated content" in blogs, wikis etc.

Another clear distinction between electronic media and digital media, already hinted at above, is that content used to be produced by professional journalists for the consumption of the public. In "multimedia", such distinctions between professionals and non-professionals break down. The population at large is able to produce and diffuse contents, using words, images and sounds.

In the light of these changes, the European Commission study argues that skills are needed that **unite previous forms of literacy with those of the new media environment**. "Traditional" literacy is still needed, both because print media will not disappear and because it is still a highly relevant component of the group of skills that makes up media literacy. The same is true for critical skills related to mass media: nobody expects television to disappear, even though viewing habits could change radically. Therefore the study convincingly argues that "media literacy" is needed as a result of media convergence, which has significant implications for education systems and society as a whole.

Others argue that the media literacy approach is increasingly needed as education is now more about handling information than its accumulation. That realisation is far from new, but it is becoming truer with time.

Another argument in favour of intensified media education is that self-regulation is increasingly used for the sector, as governments recognise that they can no longer control emerging digital media in the same way as in the past<sup>4</sup>. Making self-regulation a success depends on having a well-informed audience.

Professor David Buckingham argues convincingly **that media education should not be about condemning or endorsing the undoubted power of the media**; their impact has to be accepted. It should be about helping citizens make better use of the media for their personal development and participation in society<sup>5</sup>.

In conclusion, this introduction should demonstrate that, in the words of one author, **media education is more about education than about media**<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> Carter, Meg. *Media Literacy: Learn how to read between the digits*. See: [http://www.rts.org.uk/magazine\\_det.asp?id=21126&sec\\_id=895](http://www.rts.org.uk/magazine_det.asp?id=21126&sec_id=895).

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Buckingham.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Tyner, Kathleen *Literacy in a Digital World*, (p.19, Mahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum (1998).

## 2. Overall Trends in the European Union

This section identifies some broad trends in media education in EU countries in recent years, mainly based on the Commission study.

### 2.1. Growing Recognition of the Importance of Media Literacy

The authors conclude that **"there is a high level of consensus about the need for public policy to give special attention to the promotion of media literacy"**<sup>7</sup>. The evidence for this conclusion lies in the efforts by EU countries in recent years to introduce ICT skills into the education system. Moreover, all of the 11 countries studied in more detail<sup>8</sup> have appointed a specific government department to promote skills related to ICT amongst citizens, and "have launched campaigns and initiatives aimed at promoting media literacy. Previously, priority was given to the development of skills for merely using ICT".

In Finland, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom school curricula were recently modified to include digital and media skills.

However, the study also points out that only in a minority of countries are ICT skills taught alongside mass media and general communication skills, i.e. in a comprehensive "media education" approach. In the EU, **"it is still the norm to separate skills related to media education and digital skills"**<sup>9</sup>.

### 2.2. Growing Role of Actors outside the Education Sector

Since the 1970s, the education sector has gradually lost its monopoly of media education. Responsibilities have been extended to reach parents and families, the media, other public institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This shift also means that the "civic" vocation of media education has gained in importance. In part this transformation is related to the movement in favour of lifelong learning, retraining etc.

Another factor is the increasing sensitivity of citizens to the effects of advertising. Advertising has become more sophisticated and, in some cases, more aggressive. This has provoked a counter-reaction and the growth of NGOs active in this domain.

At the same time, the media and the private sector as a whole have themselves started to play an important role in media education. An example cited frequently by the European Commission is "Media Smart"<sup>10</sup>, a website which aims to help children to understand and interpret advertising, which is funded by the advertising industry.

Nevertheless, the study concludes that **formal education is still, at present, dominant in media education**. As a matter of common sense, it underlines that formal education cannot by itself create a media literate population, since it deals predominantly with the young.

---

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p.37.

<sup>8</sup> The countries studied were: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p.33.

<sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.mediasmart.org.uk/>.

The Commission study therefore concludes that:

- a consensus already exists on the need to intensify media education, and that this may require important changes to education curricula;
- a consensus also exists on the need to promote media education initiatives outside school, involving a variety of actors.

### 2.3. Problems and Areas of Divergence

The study points out that although consensus exists on the "diagnosis", there is no such level of agreement on the "cure", i.e. on the changes that are required to education systems or to government civic communication as a result of technological convergence.

As already mentioned above, countries deal with ICT and media literacy skills differently in their curricula. There are various possibilities open to them: (1) teaching these skills as a specialist subject; (2) teaching them integrated in another subject (for example the maternal language) or (3) a combination of the first two.

A common problem for all countries is **media education in the home**. Recent studies indicate that parents tend to ignore their children's media consumption, intervening little in their selection of programmes<sup>11</sup>. Media consumption habits in the home are important in forging children's attitudes, and media education in schools will be ineffective if it is not compatible with the home environment.

Another problem which affects all countries is the lack of **media literacy indicators**. There seem to be no agreed criteria for assessing media literacy. The report drawn up by the European Commission after its online consultation<sup>12</sup> stresses that 44% of respondents stated that no criteria for measuring media literacy were currently available, while 48% either did not know or ignored the question.

A large international comparative study on media education identified another issue of concern in many countries - **the training of teachers in media education**. The authors concluded that as the gap between the school culture and the media environment widens, the majority of teachers felt that they did not have enough training and that the technological equipment available to them was insufficient<sup>13</sup>.

Some authors take a more relaxed view of the inherent problems educators have in keeping up with technological developments. The French academic Geneviève Jacquinot-Delaunay, for example, argues that media education does not need to focus on the latest technological developments, because its mission, today and in the past, is to define [and impart] the skills and knowledge required to become an educated citizen<sup>14</sup>. Even if the technological obstacles are dismissed, the question of how to train and retrain teachers in these ever-evolving skills remains.

---

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., p.60.

<sup>12</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/docs/report\\_on\\_ml\\_2007.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/report_on_ml_2007.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Hart [et al.] *Media education in 12 European countries: a comparative study of teaching media in mother tongue education in secondary schools*. Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/GenevieveJacquinotDelaunay.pdf>.

### 3. Media Education in European Union (EU) Activities

Article 149 of the EC Treaty, as is well-known, lays down that the Community will contribute to the development of quality education, whilst "while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems...". All initiatives in the media education field are therefore of the "soft law" type, as for education in general.

A summary of all EU activities that affect media literacy is already available<sup>15</sup>. This section will therefore be brief.

#### 3.1. Recommendation on Film heritage and Competitiveness of 16th November 2005

The Recommendation on film heritage<sup>16</sup> urges Member States to promote the use of film heritage in education and to foster visual education, film studies and media literacy in education and in professional training and European programmes.

#### 3.2. Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity (2006)

Article 2 of the Recommendation on the protection of minors and human decency of 20th December 2006 explicitly mentions media education<sup>17</sup>. It does so in the more "protective" sense, asking Member States to take the necessary measures to enable minors to make responsible use of audiovisual/online services, notably by improving awareness among parents and teachers of their potential dangers, "in particular through media literacy or media education programmes".

#### 3.3. The "Media 2007" Programme

The Decision creating the "Media 2007" Programme<sup>18</sup> confers on the Commission an explicit responsibility to develop educational initiatives in film. It specifies that one of the "operational objectives" of the programme is to "encourage and support initiatives for image education organised by festivals for young people, in particular in close cooperation with schools and other institutions".

#### 3.4. The "Audiovisual Media Services Directive"

The "Audiovisual Media Services Directive"<sup>19</sup> (AVMS) provides the Commission with the specific mission of reporting back on the evolution of media literacy in the Member States.

Article 26 obliges the Commission to submit a report on the application of the Directive by December 2011, "and, if necessary, make further proposals to adapt it to developments in the

<sup>15</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/docs/studies/country/europe.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/studies/country/europe.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> See: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l\\_323/l\\_32320051209en00570061.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_323/l_32320051209en00570061.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:378:0072:0077:EN:PDF>.

<sup>18</sup> See: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_327/l\\_32720061124en00120029.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_327/l_32720061124en00120029.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:332:0027:0045:EN:PDF>.

field of audiovisual media services, in particular in the light of recent technological developments, the competitiveness of the sector and levels of media literacy in all Member States". Media literacy is here integrated in the evaluation process, even though the Directive's objectives are of course considerably broader.

### 3.5. The Communication on a European Approach to Media Literacy

The Communication published on December 12th 2007<sup>20</sup>, on which the Culture Committee is currently drawing up an own-initiative report, is significant in the sense that it attempts to define a common EU approach to media literacy, as its name implies<sup>21</sup>. The Commission makes clear that it is replying to the EP's various requests to take action on this issue. It also confirms that the EU has a double objective in promoting media literacy: focusing both on the economic and citizenship-orientated requirements.

In the document, the Commission proposes its own definition of media literacy, which is "the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contents".

In its longer description of what media literacy should include, the Commission underlines some aspects that are not often mentioned in the wider debate on media literacy, for example the need to educate consumers to be aware of copyright issues, essentially to foster "a culture of legality" on the Internet. It also refers to the need to explain the difference between pluralism and media ownership.

As might be expected, the Commission describes the steps that it has taken so far in this field, which are well-known: the setting up of a **Media Literacy Expert Group** in 2006; the online consultation which was closed in December of the same year<sup>22</sup> and the carrying out of the "Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe" study.

### 3.6. What Comes Next?

The Communication lays out a calendar for coming months. The Commission seems to have concluded that one area where common action is urgent is **the definition of indicators for assessing media literacy across the EU**. It has therefore requested an independent study putting forward and testing some indicators, whose results are expected in 2009. Soon after that, the Commission expects to publish a communication on indicators. The study will also be used for the reporting exercise foreseen in the AVMS Directive, described above.

The Communication focuses on three specific areas where more work is needed on "good practice": commercial communication (advertising); media literacy for audiovisual works and media literacy for the online environment. Depending on the reactions to the Communication, the Commission leaves open the possibility of developing these good practices and publishing a Recommendation on them in the near future.

<sup>20</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> The full name is "A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment".

<sup>22</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media\\_literacy/consultation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/consultation/index_en.htm).

The Communication is specific about the priorities for EU action, which is commendable. It does not say very much, however, **on the educational and training side of media literacy**, where the EU could perhaps focus more attention, both in its general policy statements and in specific programmes. The latter seem to focus mainly on the protection of children, for example the "Safer Internet Plus" programme.

Professor David Buckingham, in the presentation already mentioned<sup>23</sup>, summarised the four areas where action is most needed on media literacy:

- (1) authoritative definitions [of media literacy]
- (2) in-depth training
- (3) good quality teaching resources tested with students
- (4) research and evaluation of real practice

The Communication deals explicitly with areas (1) and (4), especially in providing a clear definition of media literacy, but is less specific on (2) and (3).

Given the responsibility of Member States for curricula, promising areas of common EU activity would seem to be creating and testing classroom materials, both in informal and formal education, and, more generally providing training possibilities under existing programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning 2007-13, especially for teachers.

It is important to do justice to the fact that organizations such as Unesco and the Council of Europe have already done considerable work in this field, notably in creating classroom materials and raising awareness. These activities have not been mentioned due to the limited scope of this note.

---

<sup>23</sup> See: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Buckingham.pdf>.