DRAFT REPORT

on the future of the European book sector
(2023/2053(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Tomasz Frankowski
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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the future of the European book sector
(2023/2053(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
– having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 13 December 2006,
– having regard to the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled of 27 June 2013,
– having regard to Directive 2001/84/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2001 on the resale right for the benefit of the author of an original work of art²,
– having regard to Directive 2006/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on rental right and lending right and on certain rights related to copyright in the field of intellectual property³,
– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2017/1563 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2017 on the cross-border exchange between the Union and third countries of accessible format copies of certain works and other subject matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled⁵,
– having regard to Directive (EU) 2017/1564 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2017 on certain permitted uses of certain works and other subject matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled and amending

Directive 2001/29/EC on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society\(^6\),

– having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services\(^7\),

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2017/1128 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2017 on cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market\(^8\),


– having regard to its resolution of 19 May 2021 on artificial intelligence in education, culture and the audiovisual sector\(^14\),

– having regard to its resolution of 5 May 2010 on ‘Europeana – the next steps’\(^15\),

– having regard to its resolution of 27 September 2007 on i2010: towards a European digital library\(^16\),

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

\(^7\) OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 70.
\(^11\) OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 34.
\(^12\) OJ L 265, 12.10.2022, p. 1.
\(^14\) OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 28.
\(^15\) OJ C 81 E, 15.3.2011, p. 16.
having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0000/2023),

A. whereas books play an essential role in our societies, as an invaluable source of knowledge, education, culture, information and entertainment and a vital means of preserving and disseminating the EU’s values, cultural and linguistic diversity and cultural heritage;

B. whereas books improve vocabulary and language skills, helping people to understand and express complex ideas, as well as fostering critical thinking, curiosity, analytical skills, democratic participation and social inclusion;

C. whereas books also play a particularly important role in a person’s life from a very young age, by contributing to children’s cognitive, emotional and social development;

D. whereas the European book sector is rich and diverse, with around 600,000 titles published annually, and is estimated to employ more than half a million people in the EU;

E. whereas the entire book sector value chain relies on the balance between the various actors, such as authors, publishers, translators, booksellers and libraries;

F. whereas the ability of the European book sector to provide the public with a wide range of books relies on an effective copyright framework that allows each part of the value chain to remunerate creation and invest in new books;

G. whereas the book sector plays an essential role in fostering freedom of expression, which can only be exercised by ensuring freedom, independence, diversity and editorial responsibility within the publishing industry;

H. whereas printed books, e-books and audiobooks complement each other on the market;

I. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the rise in costs for the sector, inflation and the paper crisis have posed significant challenges to the book sector and substantially hindered its competitiveness;

J. whereas many books published in the EU are not available to European readers, as a result of the linguistic and geographical fragmentation of the EU market and, in particular, the lack of translations from languages other than English;

K. whereas only a very small proportion of books are produced in formats that are accessible to persons with disabilities;

The societal importance of access to books

1. Calls on the Member States to recognise books as essential goods and take measures at national level to further promote reading from an early age;

2. Stresses the value of books as tools for the inclusion of groups at risk of marginalisation, in particular people lacking digital skills and persons with disabilities;
3. Calls on the Member States, in this regard, to implement the European Accessibility Act\(^\text{17}\) as soon as possible and take measures to ensure that books are available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, in the interests of cultural, social and professional inclusion;

4. Calls on the Member States to provide adequate financial and structural support to the sector, in particular to SMEs, while financing research and innovation dedicated to accessibility;

**Supporting and promoting better circulation of European books**

5. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase the budget for the Creative Europe programme for 2028-2034, in particular by dedicating more funds to the book sector, and to expand support for the sector through the Horizon Europe programme for 2028-2034;

6. Urges the Member States to foster cultural diversity by increasing the acquisition budget of libraries, so that they can further expand the range of books that they offer, and supporting local bookshops;

7. Stresses the need to support the translation of European books, in particular by enhancing public funding at both national and European levels so as to improve the circulation, visibility and diversity of translated books;

8. Stresses the need to support the translation of European non-fiction books, particularly via Creative Europe, which does not currently allow for this;

9. Emphasises the importance of the EU Prize for Literature, which highlights the creativity and diversity of contemporary EU fiction, promotes the circulation of EU literary works and encourages greater interest in EU non-national literary works;

**Towards an inclusive reading culture**

10. Calls for more initiatives to promote reading in the Member States, such as the introduction of ‘cultural vouchers’ that could facilitate the purchase of books;

11. Calls for more support for certain literary genres and for children’s books, in particular, to be promoted by establishing a ‘first book programme’ or similar initiatives to encourage reading at national level;

12. Welcomes the Commission’s launch of the Day of European Authors to encourage book reading among the younger generations and supports the continuation of this initiative in the coming years;

13. Calls on the Member States to establish a network of ‘reading ambassadors’, consisting of respected and influential role models who would share their passion and enthusiasm in order to promote reading among citizens;

14. Highlights the important role played by Europeana, Europe’s digital cultural heritage platform; calls, in this regard, for greater efforts to further develop, fund and promote the platform;

15. Calls on the Commission to create a label for independent bookshops in the EU in order to boost the visibility of local bookshops and promote the diversity of European books;

16. Welcomes the various initiatives to support Ukraine since the beginning of the war, and particularly those to ensure that children have access to books and to facilitate the integration of refugees and the protection of Ukrainian culture;

**Challenges for the future growth of the book sector**

17. Calls on the Member States to support the sector in its green transition, and especially SMEs, in particular through direct funding and by promoting research into more environmentally friendly and sustainable methods of producing printed books;

18. Welcomes the sector’s efforts to produce printed books in a greener and more sustainable manner through the widespread use of certified and recycled paper, as well as various related initiatives, such as CO₂ calculators and green labels;

19. Acknowledges the potential benefits for the sector of the use of artificial intelligence (AI), such as automated text analysis, metadata tagging, online discoverability and professional translation automation tools; underlines certain challenges for the sector in this regard, such as the lack of transparency in relation to AI training;

20. Calls on the Commission to support national initiatives on data sharing and standardisation, and to collect data on the European book sector as a whole, so as to further optimise production, distribution and sustainability efforts;

21. Calls for books to be zero-rated for VAT in the Member States, irrespective of their format or how they are accessed, in order to support the knowledge economy, as well as to encourage reading and promote its lifelong benefits;

22. Stresses the need for fair competition in the book market in order to guarantee consumer choice and cultural diversity; underlines the unfair practices by certain dominant online players that abuse their position to the detriment of other actors in the value chain;

23. Calls for the interoperability of e-books across devices, as consumers should be able to acquire their e-books from any supplier, regardless of their e-reading device, and to access, read, store and transfer any e-book in any format;

24. Urges the Commission to include the interoperability of e-book formats and devices within the scope of the Digital Markets Act;

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25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I. Overview

‘You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.’

Ray Bradbury’s quote from Fahrenheit 451 is important to society in many ways. If people stop reading books, then the acquisition of knowledge also stops. Knowledge is power. It is a cautionary tale that warns against censorship and the dangers of a society without knowledge and independent thought. One of the first things aggressors always order in times of war, like in Ukraine, is to burn all books that oppose their ideology. Only an educated society is thus able to use its voice to protect its culture. Getting people to stop reading is the fastest way to lose everything that helps us to move forward as a society.

In that context, books are invaluable as they are the foundation for learning and knowledge. When children learn to read, they don’t simply decipher words, their minds are opened up to a world of limitless ideas. They develop the ability to think critically, enabling them to become active, informed citizens who can participate fully in the democratic process. Books are also a great source of entertainment and let us travel without moving our feet. They stimulate our imagination and creativity and enable us to better understand the world we live in.

The European book sector is one of the largest cultural and creative industries in the EU, employing more than half a million people and publishing around 600,000 titles annually. It reflects and cultivates the cultural and linguistic diversity of the EU. While mostly composed of SMEs, the sector is also a world champion, with most of the top publishers being Europeans.

In the last decades, the sector has experienced major changes, notably due to digital technologies and the rise of dominant online market players. It is also facing numerous challenges, such as the drive for greater environmental sustainability and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). When the European Parliament adopted its resolution on i2010 digital libraries, the emergence of e-books was a matter of high concern. As their popularity grew steadily over the years, it was assumed that printed books would become marginalised. However, despite the rise of the internet and society’s shift to digital lifestyles, the attachment to the look, smell, and feel of a printed book remains dominant. Nevertheless, the sector faces other challenges such as rising production costs and paper supply chain issues.

Moreover, the power and the value of books in people’s lives was demonstrated emphatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people turned to books as a way to find solace and to cope with the lockdowns and their consequences. Meanwhile parents purchased more educational books for their children to compensate for school closures. The pandemic provided a significant test for the book sector with the temporary closure of libraries and bookshops and the cancellation of events, fairs and the postponement of new releases.

However, the sector proved robust and adaptable in finding new ways to promote books, while e-books and audiobooks sales significantly increased. It equally fulfilled its societal responsibility by finding exceptional solutions to ensure that children and students could still have access to the content necessary for their education.
II. Main recommendations of the Rapporteur

The Rapporteur therefore welcomes the opportunity to address the various issues affecting the European book sector, which have not been dealt with by the European Parliament for many years.

In that context, the Rapporteur would like to make a series of recommendations in specific areas to support the competitiveness of the European book sector, while reinforcing as a priority, the role of books in society. The Rapporteur presents possible actions across four thematic areas detailed below.

a. The societal importance of access to books

Books are indispensable goods, and from their creation to the moment they reach the reader’s hands, they will have undergone a long process involving many actors in the value chain of the book sector. While writers are the most visible actors of this value chain, they could hardly reach all of their potential audience on their own. Only mutually beneficial cooperation between writers, publishers, booksellers, translators, libraries and the other intermediaries along the value chain, each with their specific role, can enable books to reach their full potential and, ultimately, benefit society as a whole.

Some of these actors, like booksellers and libraries, also play a social role, particularly in rural or less developed regions, by becoming places where citizens can meet with authors, exchange views or simply have access to culture and education.

Measures must be taken to extend this access to culture, information and leisure to people with disabilities allowing them to fully participate in society. In particular, improving the accessibility of books for disabled, blind and visually impaired people must be a priority for the European book sector. Blind and partially sighted readers face a very limited choice of book titles, as only a very small proportion of books are available in suitable formats. As part of the review of Creative Europe and Horizon Europe, the Rapporteur suggests exploring ways to support funding and research for books in accessible formats.

Moreover, the European Accessibility Act (EAA), adopted in 2019, provides a legislative framework harmonising the rules regarding the accessibility of a number of products, services and infrastructures for those affected by a disability, in particular e-books. However, some Member States have not yet transposed the EEA. The Rapporteur therefore urges the Member States concerned to transpose the EEA as soon as possible.

b. Supporting and promoting better circulation of European books

Many European books are not available to all Europeans, because of the linguistic and geographical fragmentation of the markets, market dynamics and the domination of books written in English.

Public institutions at national and European levels have already put in place funding mechanisms to promote diversity and increase the number of literary works that cross borders, such as Creative Europe. Yet, the availability of translated books in the EU remains quite low. The literature of many European countries is rarely translated into other languages, notably due to lack of translators or funding. The Rapporteur would thus like to stress that translation plays a strategic role for the promotion of the EU’s cultural and linguistic diversity, by
enabling people across the EU and beyond to discover non-national European literary works.

The Rapporteur would also like to highlight the role of libraries and local bookshops in supporting cultural diversity. In that regard, he would urge the Member States to increase the budget allocated to libraries to buy books, while also supporting local bookshops.

As a main priority for the next MFF period, the Rapporteur is calling for an increase in the budget of Creative Europe for 2028-2034, in order to provide more dedicated funds to the book sector, including support for translating non-fiction books. In that context, Horizon Europe should also be extended to the book sector.

The Rapporteur also welcomes initiatives taken at EU level, such as the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), supported by Creative Europe, which should be further developed and promoted.

**c. Towards an inclusive reading culture**

The Rapporteur would like to encourage the Member States to recognise the essential role books play in society, from a cultural, social, economic and intellectual point of view, and take measures to promote further reading.

With screen time increasing dramatically in particular for the younger generations, the promotion of reading from an early age is becoming even more crucial. The ‘first book programme’ that exists in some countries provides a first book and a library card to children. This would be an excellent pilot project to undertake at EU level to encourage parents to engage with libraries in their neighbourhood.

Moreover, the Rapporteur would like to call on the Member States to launch more initiatives to promote reading and the visibility of and access to European literary works, including setting up cultural vouchers to facilitate the purchase of and access to books. The passion and enthusiasm for reading among EU citizens can also be inspired by ‘reading ambassadors’.

The Rapporteur welcomes the various existing initiatives, which aim in particular to promote reading in the younger generations, and would like to support in that regard the launch on 27 March 2023 by the Commission of the first edition of the Day of European Authors.

Moreover, he would also call on the Commission to create a label showcasing independent bookshops in the EU, which promote European books and give them visibility. This would help levelling the playing field against certain dominant market players that abuse their position to the detriment of the other actors in the value chain.

The Rapporteur would also like to stress the importance of the various initiatives to support reading in Ukraine, such as the Tales of EUkraine which ensures children access to books and supports the protection of Ukrainian culture.

Finally, the Rapporteur would like to stress the importance of the digital cultural heritage platform Europeana, which should be further developed, in particular with financial and promotional support in order to give it more visibility at EU level.

**d. Challenges for the future growth of the book sector**
Firstly, the Rapporteur welcomes the many initiatives of the sector to reduce the environmental impact of producing books, such as emission calculators and green labels. He would also like to stress that efforts made with regard to paper itself are showing results: for instance, 98% of the paper used to print books in France is certified or recycled. Many challenges remain, however, to further improve the sustainability of book production and distribution.

While there is no doubt that being able to store hundreds of books on a single device is exceedingly convenient and efficient, it does not necessarily mean that e-books on a dedicated reading device are more eco-friendly than a personal library of paper books, in particular for occasional readers. In that context, supporting the European book sector as a whole in its green transformation is essential and requires adequate support, research and funding.

Moreover, the European book sector, like other sectors, is being impacted by technological developments and is undergoing a significant transformation due to AI. The Rapporteur considers that AI can have positive effects on the sector, but it also presents risks. Notably, this applies in particular to a lack of transparency about what has been included in an AI training dataset and where it has been collected. The Rapporteur therefore stresses the need to support research and innovation projects regarding the use of AI in the sector and for transparency on how AI is trained.

It is also important to collect data on the European book market as a whole and to support national initiatives for data sharing and standardisation within the value chain. This would help to further optimise production, distribution and sustainability efforts.

One other crucial issue is lack of interoperability. Some e-book formats and e-reading devices are not interoperable today, due to the existence of voluntarily non-interoperable models. These products have been developed by a few dominant market players to trap consumers in their ecosystem and services, causing them confusion and frustration. The Rapporteur believes this practice is equally harmful for fair competition and therefore calls for the interoperability of e-books and reading devices and its inclusion in the scope of the Digital Markets Act (DMA) as soon as possible.

Finally, the Rapporteur emphasises the importance of a zero-rate VAT for books in Member States, irrespective of their format or how they are accessed, in order to make books, as essential goods, more affordable and accessible to the public.

To conclude, the Rapporteur believes that these recommendations will provide the vital support to the European book sector, which is needed to meet many new challenges and ensure that our society continues to benefit from a diverse selection of European literature.