



*His Excellency Rumen Radev,
President of the Republic of Bulgaria,*

*His Excellency Boyko Borissov,
Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria,*

*Her Excellency Ekaterina Zakhariyeva,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria,*

*Her Excellency Liliانا Pavlova,
Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council,*

10 January 2018

An Open Letter from Organisations Representing Europe's Libraries

Your Excellencies,

We are writing to wish you both a Happy New Year, and a successful presidency of the European Union (EU). Your slogan – United We Stand Strong – is one that resonates strongly with our community. Bulgaria's first turn as President is a great opportunity to spread the word about the work that Bulgarian libraries – and others across the Union – are doing to create a stronger, richer, more cohesive Europe.

Libraries Build Social Cohesion

As you will doubtless be aware, libraries are key in ensuring that no-one is left behind. For the young, for minority groups, for parents, for students and for society at large, they are essential in delivering the right to participate in cultural, scientific and public life. If we are to build a Europe of creativity, a Europe of innovation, and a Europe of empowerment, we need a Europe of strong libraries.

This should be reflected in the planning for the next Multi-Year Financial Framework, any steps taken further to the Commission's Communication on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture of 17 November, as well as in ongoing programmes on culture, education, employment and skills, to name just some areas where libraries are contributing, and can contribute further.

Libraries Realise the Potential of Digital

Even as we move towards universal mobile Internet coverage, public demand for Internet access in libraries remains strong. Our institutions continue to be essential for those who do not



have their own computer, need support or guidance, or simply feel more at ease there. We encourage the EU to ensure that the WiFi4EU programme helps every library provide this vital service to users.

Compared to other means of accessing the Internet, libraries have a number of unique strong points. They are trusted, seen as places where citizens can obtain reliable information. They are experienced in training users to take a critical attitude to information. They are helping develop digital skills, allowing people to do everything from use governments services to code. A truly democratic, public interest digital skills strategy must have libraries at its heart.

Libraries Promote Culture for All

Our institutions are the guardians of the heritage that makes Europe what it is today. But they are also a network, collaborating in order to strengthen preservation efforts, and maximise access for all. The European Year of Cultural Heritage offers a great opportunity to celebrate this work. Moreover, by promoting e-reading, libraries are supporting a medium that has seen a flourishing of new ideas and writing, outside of traditional publishing channels. This is an activity worth supporting, and libraries are ready to do so. Culture should not be a luxury; it is by maximising possibilities to enjoy – and build on – Europe’s heritage that we best promote future creativity.

We look forward to meaningful steps to enhance this potential in the context of the draft Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market. We also urge the European Union to take a constructive approach to the global discussions on copyright exceptions and limitations taking place at WIPO, where its position has held back concrete efforts to support libraries around the world.

Just as the Bulgarian people trust the European Union to bring progress and prosperity, we trust in the Bulgarian Presidency to help libraries deliver on their potential. We stand ready to work with you in achieving this.

Yours sincerely,

Gerald Leitner

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Jukka Relander

President, European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations

Ilona Kish

Director, Public Libraries 2020