Working Session: Government Information and Libraries

12 May 2014

Dear Secretary General,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be here at this conference and to have a debate about governmental Information. EBLIDA as an NGO non-governmental-organisation - but which seems to be a only word contradiction - has one essential and core demand, the basis for any library regardless of size or type: access that means promoting a strong and functioning right of access to information in Europe as a tool for defending civil liberties and human rights, for facilitating public participation in decision-making.

Citizens and civil society need access to accurate and timely information in order to be able to participate in the decision-making process.

As all libraries have changed in the last decade so the task of government information management did. The widespread use of the Internet to provide government information and services has altered the landscape dramatically for those who organise, store and provide access to governmental content. Technical challenges include digital preservation, authentification, security and accessibility for a diverse user base. Management challenges include changes to costs, workflow, staff skills and resources, and of course user expectations. Public policies based on distributed paper collections must also change to address issues that are inherent to digital, networked public content; such issues include the maintenance of personal privacy, re-use of government information, and the digital divide.

I have to confess, When I looked at the EU-Website resp. a portal for EU-documents I wondered if this huge collection of official documents, statistics, directives, treaties, case law, legislation in force, from 1958 till present, can anyone overlook this without professional help?

Information that is shared needs to be managed.

As I see, you will come later in the programme to the question of open government data. Open government is a hot topic right now. What should government be doing in the areas of transparency participation and accountability to, lets say, qualify as open governments. Can new communication Technologies help and advance openness.

From my point of view governmental information has to be open and transparent, it has to be recognizable who is responsible for this information.

On the other side I am a little worried about the non-openness, when it comes to treaty negotiations which are made behind strictly closed doors.

Nevertheless the European Union has recognized that there is a fundamental human right of access to EU documents. This is enshrined in both the EUcharter of fundamental rights and in the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, EU Regulation 1049/2001 regarding Public access to European Parliament, Council and commission documents, the freedom of information Law. This regulation translates this right into an obligation which applies to all institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the EU.

Because of this role as supranational body it is increasingly important that standards of transparency, participation and accountability are valid and practiced.

Quotation: "any Citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a members state, has a right of access to documents of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union, whatever their medium."

In a 21st century democracy it is vital that citizens be guaranteed the right to know how and who decisions are being taken in their name and what policies are being promoted on their behalf. So librarians and libraries play a vital role in this democratizing access to information.

Klaus-Peter Böttger

EBLIDA Chair