DELOS meeting on 5/6 December 2005, Nice - A roadmap towards a European Digital Library

Summary of the presentation given by Horst Forster, Director of Directorate E (Content) of the IST program.

When can European digital library become a reality?
- By 2006 there will be a full EU-wide collaboration between national libraries.
- By 2008 we shall have multilingual access to their collections. They must be searchable and usable
- By 2010 collections need to have expanded to include archives, museums and other libraries

It is a joint effort by Member States and the European Commission, requiring:
- Digitisation of content
- Online accessibility of this content
- Digital preservation – making sure that the digital information will also be accessible for future generations

Which items will it consist of?
The European digital library contains all types of material: books, audiovisual materials, photographs, documents in archives etc. The number of collections and items that will be accessible to the public will depend on the digitisation efforts by the Member States. The Commission will help to accelerate and coordinate efforts by Member States.

What will it cost for "ordinary" people to use?
It will be free as far as public domain material is concerned. Copyrighted material may not be available free of charge.

Will it be a central or a decentrally run library?
It will be a virtual library, that is a network of libraries whose catalogues and content are accessible through a single access point (portal). Such a portal already exists. With the help of the European Commission, the portal "The European Library" was set up in 2005 by the national libraries in Europe.

What are the research issues to be addressed?
The European Commission invested in the past 4 years more than 100 Meuro in research funding in areas related to digital libraries. A substantial increase is foreseen for the years to come. We shall address:
- More sophisticated treatment of digitised materials, automated indexing of texts, sound and image
- Improved multilingual search engines
- Services supporting annotations, collaborative working
- Improve the process of digitisation
- Provide systems and services that guarantee digital content will be accessible in the long term – preservation of digital content requires urgently viable solutions.