



## **EU information: past, present and future**

*Edited text of a presentation made by Eric Davies to a meeting of Polish EDC Librarians, Cracow University of Economics, June 2000*

### **Introduction: The significance of EU information**

I was fortunate to become involved with European information in 1989, a few years before the Single European Market officially opened. At that time, the Commission was expending much energy not only in trying to put the legislative framework of the Single Market in place, but also to encourage businesses throughout the European Community (which then had 12 Member States) to participate in the Single Market.

I worked in a Euro Info Centre, dealing with enquiries not only from business people, but also - because of our physical location and specialised resources - with enquiries from local authority staff, college students, workers from voluntary organisations and school children. Many of the enquiries I received were along the lines of 'how will the Single Market affect my business - or region - or customers - or village'. In between answering enquiries, I tried to organise a rapidly growing collection of official documentation - most of which seemed largely irrelevant to the questions I was trying to answer.

On joining the Euro Info Centre, however, I was immediately struck by the fact that the issues I was dealing with were constantly reported on TV and radio and - of course - in the newspapers. Europe was certainly newsworthy. The excitement surrounding the Single Market programme has now diminished, but interest in the European Union hasn't. Europe is still very much in the news. Whether in relation to the single currency, aid to developing countries, trade disputes with the United States, concern over the safety of children's toys, or the definition of 'chocolate' - Europe still makes headlines.

Most librarians seem to think that Europe is a very specialised, narrow area of information work. In one sense, of course, they are right - it is very specialised. To provide anything more than a superficial information service requires knowledge not only of the relevant documentation, but also of the processes and bodies which produce it. But, in another sense, they are wrong: Europe is not a narrow sphere of interest - it is huge. And it is growing.

Imagine being one of the early EDC librarians, some 40 years ago, when the first of the Communities - the European Coal and Steel Community - was founded. The interests of the Coal and Steel Community were very limited, and its documentation reflected those interests, being mostly confined to legislative material such as the Official Journal.

Since 1951, successive Treaties have expanded the interests, and changed the structure, of what we now call the European Union. The most significant and best known of the Treaties - the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community - expanded the competence of the Community beyond the narrow confines of the coal and steel industries into areas such as agriculture, transport, competition and economics, and introduced a fledgling Common Market.

The 1960s and 1970s saw changes to the structure of the three Communities (the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community). New Treaties introduced a single Council and Commission, and created the European Court of Auditors.

For information providers, the advent of the Single European Act in July 1987 has been one of the most significant developments to date. The Act extended competence to cover the environment; increased political cooperation on foreign affairs; enhanced cooperation in science and technology - and in economic and monetary policy. More significantly, however, the Single European Act introduced the Single European Market. It identified nearly 300 legislative measures intended to promote inter-Community trade by ensuring the free movement of people, goods, services and capital.

Why was that significant for us? Because, to help businesses throughout the 12 Member States understand the Single Market and how it might affect them, the European Commission established the Euro Info Centre network. Originally numbering 39 Centres, it quickly expanded to 187 and now numbers some 270 EICs.

The EICs were - and are - a large, unique and innovative network of information providers, cooperating across national boundaries. Although essentially information providers, relatively few EIC staff had traditional library or information backgrounds, being recruited instead from business support agencies, economic development units, marketing companies and other organisations not known for their expertise in providing information. Their impact on other providers of business information (such as public libraries and chambers of commerce) and on EDCs, was profound.

In 1993, the European Union was created by the Treaty on European Union - the Maastricht Treaty - which further extended competence into areas such as public health and education, and introduced the concept of a Common Foreign and Security Policy. Maastricht was also very significant for information policy - though by accident rather than by design. The Treaty of Amsterdam - which came into force in May 1999 - also introduced some important changes concerning access to information.

The world in which an EDC librarian - or, indeed, anyone involved with European information - must now work is clearly very different from that in which our predecessors worked. The EU is far more complex than the original Coal and Steel Community. Its interests do - or will - impinge on virtually every aspect of our lives. The Union's interests are still growing: defence is now high on the agenda, and the French Presidency - which starts in July 2000 - will be discussing possible Treaty amendments to enhance the Union's competence in defence matters. Defence is likely to be included in a new Treaty of Nice, intended to prepare the Union for enlargement.

Not surprisingly, this growing competence is mirrored by an increasing interest in EU affairs. Despite much talk of a 'citizens' Europe' and various initiatives to satisfy the perceived demand for information from ordinary people, I doubt that the 'general public' has much interest in the EU. (indeed, I do not think that the 'general public' really exists). Specific sectors of the community do, however, have an interest - politicians, business people, academics, students, pressure groups, local authorities, government departments, lawyers, journalists - all have some need for European information, and that need is growing. Have no doubt - what we are involved with is of significance.

### **Information policy in the European Union**

How has information policy developed in response to the evolution from Coal and Steel Community to European Union?

The first European Documentation Centres were created in 1963, to promote the study of European integration. Centres were located in the six Member States, with new EDCs being opened elsewhere as other countries joined the Communities. Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, for example, have EDCs dating back to the early 1970s. Similar Centres were also set up in non-Member countries, to promote greater understanding of the Communities. Almost half of EDCs are now located outside the EU, with specialist facilities existing throughout the world: in the Americas and in Australasia, as well as in Europe itself - including, of course, here in Poland.

European Reference Centres (ERCs) - small collections of official materials - were established in educational institutions below university level. A small number of European Depository Libraries were also set up to ensure that comprehensive collections would be available to a wider

audience. For many years, EDCs, ERCs and DEPs were the prime sources of European information (although the national offices of the Commission and Parliament also handled enquiries).

Since the late 1980s, there has been an explosion of EU information networks. In 1995, the European Court of Auditors reported the existence of 54 networks associated with the Commission, and commented that "It is not certain that they are all necessary and that they operate satisfactorily".

By far the largest - and, I believe, the most influential - of the initiatives was the Euro Info Centre network. Established, of course, in response to the Single Market programme, many EICs found themselves providing information to a much wider clientele than the Small and Medium-Sized companies they were intended to serve. They were initially a very public network - heavily promoted in order to attract attention to their existence and to the services they offered, and they inevitably attracted interest from users unable or unwilling to obtain information from other sources.

During the first few years of the 1990s, some of the groups who used the EICs became the target of new networks:

Carrefours were launched in 1990 to serve rural communities, and combined provision of 'general' EU information with advice and assistance to specific parts of the rural community, such as farmers.

The greater freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capital introduced by the Single Market created a new environment for consumers. In 1990, the Euro Citizen Action Service was established to advise citizens' associations, and a year later the first European Consumer Infocentres (Euroguichets) were piloted.

A greater Community commitment to research was included in the Treaty on European Union, and in 1992 the Innovation Relay was established, to encourage enterprises to participate in EU funded research and development programmes.

1992 also saw the EIC network expand to include non-member countries, with the creation of the Euro Info Correspondence Centres - one of which was opened in Poland.

Not all information initiatives were successful: 1992 also witnessed the advent of Symbiosis, a network intended to promote the 'People's Europe' side of the Single Market. But Symbiosis mysteriously disappeared shortly after it was launched...

Each of these later networks targeted a specific sector of the community and were, I believe, established as a pragmatic response to the evolving policies and growing competence of the European Community. However, the Union is essentially a political animal, and developments in information policy are motivated as much by political considerations as by pragmatism.

If the advent of the Single Market was a spur to the development of information networks, then the ratification of the Treaty on European Union was a turning point in EU information policy. The Treaty text adopted by Member States required ratification by national parliaments and - in some cases - by citizens. Some Member States either had to hold a referendum or - even though not required to do so - voluntarily consulted the people. Politicians and policy-makers were apparently shocked when the French very nearly voted against the new Treaty. They were presumably stunned when the Danes did vote against it. Ratification had been assumed to be a mere formality. Of course, a second referendum in Denmark produced a "yes" vote, and the Treaty was eventually ratified by all 12 Member States. However, politicians and civil servants were clearly worried by citizens' concerns. President Mitterand is quoted as saying "we forgot to talk to the people".

Public criticism of the incomprehensible nature, not only of the Treaty text, but also of the structure, processes and policies of the Union, provided the impetus for a new information and communication policy, based on transparency and openness. Information was suddenly seen not

only as something of interest to businesses and students, but to citizens generally. The accession of Sweden and Finland in 1995 - along with Austria - was a further spur to the development of a more open style of policy making and greater access to documents.

In 1996, Colette Flesch, Director-General for Information, Communication and Audio-visual matters in the Commission said: "If we learned one clear message from the Maastricht ratification programme, it was that the European Union must never again ignore public perceptions and opinion, or adopt an elitist approach to policy formation. That is why the entire thrust of our new information strategy is to engage the hearts and minds of our citizens by ensuring as far as possible that they are kept abreast of developments that will affect their daily lives."

Neville Keery - recently retired Head of the Commission's Library Service - wrote in 1994 that "It is worth noting that the new approach stresses the terms information and communication ... This deliberate emphasis on communication arises from the Commission's analysis that the weakness of consensus between the Community's leaders and its citizens has been due not so much to a lack of information ... as to a failure to ensure that available information communicates with the citizen."

Clearly, the pressure was on to ensure not only that appropriate information was produced, but that it was made accessible to people. The concept of 'subsidiarity', revived by the ratification debate in 1992-93, was used to justify the introduction of a more decentralised system of information provision, based on networks of national, regional and local information providers. (This approach is probably best illustrated by the UK experience of providing European information. Perhaps surprisingly - given the widely-held view that the British are anti-Europe - librarians in the UK have been in the forefront of developing and promoting EU information services).

Political considerations have inspired a number of developments in information policy. We have witnessed the creation of even more centres and networks, including the flagship 'Information Centres on Europe' in Lisbon and Paris; and 'Citizens First' a 1996 joint Commission / Parliament initiative to promote citizens' freedoms and rights. More recently, we have seen the expansion of the 'Europe Direct' service, aimed at the general public.

The Maastricht debate has resulted in numerous developments concerning documentation: the Commission now publishes an annual work programme; there is greater use of Green and White papers; previously internal documents are now issued as COMdocs; there is now an Interinstitutional Directory; the Council has made a Public Register of Documents available on the web. The Maastricht Treaty also established the post of European Ombudsman. The important contribution of the Ombudsman in promoting access to EU documents was recognised by the European Information Association, when the EIA's Award for Achievement in European Information was made to Jacob Söderman in 1996.

It is worth reminding ourselves that information policy is not the preserve of the Commission alone. The other Institutions and bodies of the EU also have an interest in information provision. For example, the Conclusions of the Vienna European Council, which met in December 1998, stated that "The Council emphasises the need to bring Europe closer to its citizens, inter alia by stepping up information activities on European Union issues". It also noted the responsibility of the Member States for providing EU information.

I mentioned earlier that the Treaty of Amsterdam - agreed in June 1997 - has some significance for those of us concerned with information. This is because the Treaty explicitly states that 'decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen'.

The Treaty also states that "any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, shall have a right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents ..."

The theory is better than the practice, of course, and it is still not possible to obtain all documents. Indeed, in January this year, the Commission issued a draft Regulation setting out the limitations it thinks should be placed on public access to documents. The proposal has been severely

criticised by some parties, including the European Ombudsman. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the last few years have seen a significant shift in EU information policy - and the situation is still evolving. As part of the re-organisation of the Commission, Vice-Commissioner Neil Kinnock is looking at openness and transparency, and has invited Ian Thomson - President of the European Information Association - to submit a paper on access to information.

### **Some problems of EU information**

#### *The volume of documentation.*

If information policy has developed both pragmatically and in response to political drivers, it has also responded to technological innovations. The Union, desperate to provide information post-Maastricht, has grasped the opportunities provided by the internet or, more precisely, by the world wide web. The Commission's Europa server was first launched at the G7 meeting in February 1995, primarily to demonstrate the potential of the internet for information provision. After a brief hiatus, it was relaunched in 1996 as a public service. It now contains more than a million documents and claims to be the busiest website in the world.

Europa is wonderful - but it highlights one of the main problems facing EU information providers - the sheer volume of information available. We are faced with a plethora of materials - legislation, policy documents, newsletters, press releases, annual reports, court cases, statistics, maps, invitations to tender... All of this material is available on the web. Which is wonderful. But also confusing - because some documents are only available on the web. Some are not available on the web. And some are available on the web and in other forms - typically on paper, but sometimes on CD.

Although there is a wealth of official documentation available, finding something suitable for a particular user is not always easy. Users often require background information, explanatory material or summaries. They may equally want something written at a particular level - in the form of a general introduction, or written for school children, or a summary for business people.

Just because so much material is available, it is a mistake to assume that what we want actually exists. It can also be dangerous to assume that - if it does exist - we will be able to find it.

Not only is there a huge amount of documentation available from official EU sources, there is also even more material available from non-EU sources. Government departments, local authorities, trade associations, universities, non-governmental organisations, Euro-sceptic groups - all can be useful sources of material giving alternative views on European issues.

There are also numerous commercial publishers supplying EU information. Many of them have concentrated on making the Celex and SCAD databases more accessible, via CD and - more recently - on the web. Their innovative approaches have undoubtedly been instrumental in persuading the Commission to improve the quality of its own products. For many, the focus is now the web, and there has been a rash of web-based products launched over the past few months.

Whilst these unofficial sources clearly extend choice, they also increase the overall volume of material available, and arguably add to the complexity and confusion surrounding EU information.

#### *Bibliographic control*

EU information has a well-deserved reputation for poor bibliographic control. Official catalogues and indexes have traditionally been very poor. Documents listed in official sources are invariably only part of what is available. The biggest problem is that much material is produced by individual Commission DGs, and is never officially published. As EUR-OP have admitted, if they do not know that something exists, they cannot include it in their catalogues.

For many years, the best bibliographic source has been European Access - a UK publication which includes references to official and non-official material. Published since 1989, Access has recently become available on the web. There is no doubt that the web has made an impact in this area. Probably the most significant development has been the ability - and willingness - of DGs to make the texts of documents available on the web.

### *Information or propaganda?*

The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines 'propaganda' as "Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicise a particular political cause or point of view".

Propaganda became an issue for me when I was at the Euro Info Centre. I was responsible for persuading local businesses that the Single Market really would affect them. I was also responsible for helping students find material critical of the Single Market programme. It became apparent that official material was intended more to promote a cause than to provide information, with much of it dwelling too much on the supposedly positive aspects of the Single Market.

We are all aware that governments and organisations issue material to promote their interests. I was concerned that I was expected to present publications as though they were fact, when their contents often seemed more like fiction. Many of the glossy booklets issued in the Europe on the move and other series still seem to paint overly positive images of EU policies and their impact. There is little evidence of self-criticism or even of critical analysis in much official documentation. Press releases are another case in point. We should not forget that press releases - a very useful source of both current and retrospective information - are issued to give a certain message or to promote a particular viewpoint. The new Partnership Agreement between the EU and the ACP states, for example, produced press releases which are very different in tone, according to who issued them. The Commission reported another excellent agreement. The ACP Secretariat lamented the fact that little had changed from the previous Lomé Convention and that the new aid arrangement is actually less generous than its predecessor.

My views on propaganda are not necessarily shared by colleagues. Indeed, I am sad to say that many of my peers seem so grateful to receive free publications that their critical faculties are apparently suspended or entirely eliminated. It seems to me that they are either unwilling or unable to critically assess the materials they encounter. Bearing in mind that we are dealing with a political entity - the European Union - I suggest that this amounts to professional negligence.

Whenever I showed new students around the European Documentation Centre in Hull, I felt bound to alert them to the fact that the collection comprised official EU documentation and that they would not find any critical material there. I had, instead, to point them in the direction of journals located elsewhere in the library.

In my experience, librarians do not like to make a fuss. Particularly when free material is on offer. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, I have felt very much alone on the issue of propaganda. Imagine, therefore, my surprise and joy at discovering that Commissioner Reding recently admitted to the European Parliament that the Commission has in the past produced "too much propaganda". Can we now look forward to a new series of booklets which will offer a more considered view of issues such as agriculture and development policy?

(In passing, I should say that it is not essential for providers of EU information to be Europhiles. I'm sure that the Commission thinks - indeed, expects - that we are all supporters of EU integration. However, I believe there is much to be said for maintaining a healthy scepticism - as with all political issues. I know of one former colleague - a well known EDC Librarian - who admitted that he was more pro-Europe before he got to know how the EU works!).

### *The EU itself*

As if it is not difficult enough navigating our way through a huge volume of material to find something appropriate for our users, as information providers we must also become familiar with the Union's structure, processes and terminology. When I joined the Wales Euro Info Centre, at the end of 1989, I was essentially a newcomer to European information. Although I had encountered some EU documents during my work as a reference librarian, I had not been required to fit them into a structure or process.

Consequently, my first few months at the EIC were nightmarish - nothing seemed to make sense, and my ignorance resulted in me giving misleading information to at least one enquirer. I think it

took about two years for me to gain sufficient knowledge and confidence to lose the shiver down my spine every time someone asked me a question about Europe.

There is no substitute for experience, but time invested in familiarising ourselves with the structure and processes of the EU and learning where the different types of documentation fit into the system is time well spent. I am not suggesting that we should necessarily seek to acquaint ourselves with every stage of the Co-decision Procedure, or with the intricacies of Parliamentary committees. But we should be aware that a Directive is intrinsically different from a Regulation, and that the Union's Second and Third Pillars operate differently from the First.

### *Terminology*

Of course, all our efforts will be in vain if we do not understand the jargon of Europe. We can run through every letter of the alphabet: ACP, BRAIN, Cecchini Report, Daphne, ELO, Factortame, GSP ... Acronyms, abbreviations and soubriquets abound, to the consternation and confusion of information providers and users alike. (We should not forget that information providers are also, inevitably, information users). Again, experience is our best guide, but we should all know where to find explanations of EU terminology. The recent reorganisation of the Commission has presented us with a whole new set of abbreviations, as DG numbers have given way to 'user friendly' names - which are then invariably truncated to produce terms such as ECFIN, SANCO and TAXUD.

Numerous sources can be used to trace acronyms etc. Some official publications have general - but often superficial - coverage. Others are very specialised, focusing, for example, on research and development - an area which generates more than its fair share of jargon. This is another area where non-official publications can be of use. It is worth emphasising, however, that no single source offers comprehensive coverage. By far the best source is the Commission's Eurodicautom database - now available on the web - although it is better for acronyms and abbreviations rather than soubriquets.

### **Implications for training and development**

Training is available in many forms: the Commission has provided training courses for EDC librarians; the European Information Association runs courses; commercial organisations offer them; and some EDCs put together in-house courses. But what sort of training and development opportunities should we be looking for? I would suggest that anyone responsible for providing an EU information service should ensure that they and their staff are familiar with the following:

#### *What the EU is and how it works*

An understanding of how the Union has developed provides useful background, particularly when working in an academic environment, where many enquirers may be seeking historical information. Being able to distinguish between the Treaty establishing a Single Council and Single Commission of the European Communities and the Single European Act can be really useful. Equally, an understanding of the roles of the various EU institutions and bodies and how they relate to each other is essential for anyone handling EU documentation. What, for example, are the relative values of a Committee of the Regions Opinion and a Council Common Position?

#### *Different types of documentation and where to find them*

An understanding of the decision-making process should ideally encompass an appreciation of the documentation it produces. A course I recently presented for the European Information Association included a case study on orphan medicinal products (drugs used to treat rare diseases), which identified the various documents produced and showed where to find them - from an initial press release through to adoption of a Regulation.

Such an approach has four distinct benefits:

- it illustrates the decision-making process
- it identifies the types of material produced
- it shows where to find it (which in many cases will now be on the web) and
- it emphasises the significance of sources or publications that might otherwise be overlooked or considered irrelevant

### *Current issues*

It pays to keep ourselves informed of current developments in the European Union. Students and academics may require historical material, but they're just as likely to want information on the current intergovernmental conference; the debate over Austria; concerns about food safety; openness and transparency; or - of course - enlargement of the Union.

Keeping up to date is not something we should depend on training courses for. Rather we should try to ensure that we find time to keep abreast of developments ourselves - by checking press releases and by reading publications such as European Report or European Voice.

### *Using the web*

It is an inescapable reality that - for current EDC librarians and others working with EU information - the web is an essential tool. Even five years ago the web seemed irrelevant - a trendy, fashionable, but ephemeral resource, lacking in substance. Now, for many of us, it is the medium of choice. Europa is invaluable. "Yes", it is enormous, and "yes" it can be difficult to navigate, but it contains real information - some, but not all, of which is available in print. Make no mistake - Europa will become more important. Some documents previously available in print are now available only on the web. Not on the web and in print - but only on the web.

Two factors are driving the Commission to make more use of the web:

One - the Union's desire to promote the Information Society and knowledge economy as a means of creating employment. The 'dot.com' summit held in Lisbon earlier this year set out the Union's aims in this area. In this context, and in the context of its reorganisation, the Commission has decided to adopt the internet as its primary medium for communicating with the outside world.

Two - the Commission's need to save money. It is far cheaper to disseminate documentation via the web than by post. Common sense tells us that the Commission cannot afford to keep supplying EDCs and other networks with increasing amounts of material, free of charge.

(Note, however, that the web switches the costs from supplier to user: the Commission saves money, but there are implications for the resources expended by ourselves - or our users - in finding and printing documents).

The web is already a significant source of European information. In future it is likely to become *the* source. It will be essential, therefore, that we can use the web effectively - remembering, of course, that there are many useful sources beyond Europa.

### **Networks and co-operation**

Training is not the only way to improve the service we offer. All of us potentially possess knowledge and expertise from which others can benefit. By co-operating with colleagues in other EDCs - and in other networks - we can benefit from their knowledge and they can benefit from ours. Co-operation can take many forms: from comparing classification schemes, through providing missing pages from a COMdoc, to suggesting possible sources of information for answering an enquiry.

None of us will ever have access to all the information we need. There will always be some enquiries we cannot answer from our own knowledge and resources. Rather than wait until we're absolutely desperate, we should invest some time now in developing relations with people who may be of use to us in future. We should find out what other networks exist in our city, region and country - a university department, a Euro Info Correspondence Centre, a Commission Delegation and so on.

Contact does not have to be face-to-face. We should also remember that colleagues in other countries can be of use to us. The EDC e-mail discussion group 'eurodoc' is free to join and gives us immediate access to the expertise and resources scattered amongst EDC librarians - and others - throughout the world.

The European Information Association's discussion group 'eurotalk' offers a similar facility, but covers a wider range of interests, because EIA Members work not only in EDCs, but also in EICs, government departments, local authorities, public libraries, law firms and so on.

The EIA also has a role in lobbying, and has recently contacted the Commission to express concern over the threat to continued publication of the printed version of EUR-OP News and also to highlight the difficulties caused to EDCs and other networks by the peremptory withdrawal of free access to the paper version of the Official Journal (a difficult situation, which has been exacerbated by the fact that delivery of the free CD version of the OJ has been delayed).

Not all of the networks mentioned earlier exist in all countries or regions. Expertise and resources are not evenly distributed, so it can be worth extending our range of contacts to include colleagues in other parts of the world.

I mentioned earlier that EICs have been the most influential of the new networks. Their most significant feature has been their co-operative nature. From the start, EICs met together, got to know each other, and co-operated. Their e-mail discussion group - which allowed them to share information and to get answers to enquiries - was a model which persuaded Richard Caddel of Durham University EDC to establish the 'eurodoc' discussion group.

The EICs annual conference-cum-training event was, I believe, the model which inspired Isabel Loffe to organise similar meetings for EDC staff.

Thanks to Isabel Loffe, an additional opportunity open to EDC staff over the past few years has been the possibility to participate in exchange schemes. Managed on behalf of the Commission by the European Information Association, the exchanges have proved invaluable in helping EDCs establish the camaraderie which is so essential to successful cooperation. In information work - as in so many other aspects of life - it is not what you know, but who you know that is so often important.

## **Conclusions**

I have discussed the development of EU information provision and policy, arguing that the growth of information networks has largely been a pragmatic response to the expanding interests of the Union, but also pointing out that information has become a significant item on the political agenda.

I have highlighted some of the problems currently facing people who work with EU information - related primarily to the nature of the European Union and to the large amount of material it produces.

I have also suggested some issues which may need to be addressed through training and development, so that we can provide an effective service to our users.

What of the future? The EU continues to develop, and there is nothing to suggest that interest in it will diminish. Indeed, based on experience to date, it seems likely that those of us involved in EU information can look forward to an interesting and busy future.

In that future, there is no doubt that technology will play an important part. Internet technology continues to develop at a surprising pace, with the new generation of mobile communications offering further opportunities to both providers and users of information.

Speaking as an information professional who already spends too much time at the keyboard, I must admit to regretting the passing of the paper-based library, and the current emphasis on electronic sources. However, I constantly bear in mind the fact that I could not work from my home in beautiful North Wales if it wasn't for web technology and the EU's willingness to use it.