

THE EU DIGITAL LIBRARY OPENS ... AND CLOSES



The European Union has started an amazing project on-line, the European digital library, museum and archive "**Europeana**". This project is supposed to enable all people around the world to learn about the European cultural heritage. Visitors of the Europeana.eu web page have the possibility to browse through more than two million books, paintings, videos and other digitalized documents. The items accessible on the web page have been collected from some 1,000 museums, national libraries, galleries and archives and most of them are available free of charge. Majority of the items has been collected from France, the Netherlands and Britain.

The Europeana idea first emerged in 2005 and the project itself started in July 2007. Europeana was launched on 20 November 2008 by Viviane Reding, the European Commissioner for Information Society and Media. Since then the project has brought huge attention. There have been some 10 million visits per hour shortly after the launch. This traffic has significantly slowed down the service and not even doubling of server capacity helped to solve the problem. Europeana had to be temporarily shut down. The huge interest is a big motivation for experts and they hope to bring the site back on-line in the mid of December. For now there is at least a demo version of Europeana available at <http://dev.europeana.eu> .

According to Martin Selmayr, the spokesman for Commissioner Viviane Reding, Europeana will expand enormously in the years to come. Officials want Europeana to include at least 10 million items by 2010. There is a lot of work to do in this respect because only a small fragment of historic works, documents and cultural artifacts across Europe has so far been digitized.

Europeana is often compared to the Google Book Search project. However, it is different because Google provides only scanned books whereas Europeana has much broader offer ranging from newspapers to music.

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