

EU launches digital library at Frankfurt Book Fair

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People are seen visiting the International Book Fair in the central German city of Frankfurt. The European Union used the world's biggest book fair to launch the EU Bookshop's digital library, making more than 50 years of documents in about 50 languages available for free on the Internet.

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Individuals, companies and isolated libraries from Australia to Zambia can download files dating back to 1952 when six countries created what is now the 27-member EU.

"With the digital library, we have total transparency" of EU legislative and cultural publications, Commissioner for Multilingualism Leonard

Orban told AFP on Sunday.

The project also underpins "the commitment of the European Union to preserve and encourage the history of the union in its linguistic diversity," he added.

The library's oldest document is a speech by Jean Monnet to inaugurate the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community, the EU's precursor.

From four official languages at its start, the union now counts 23, but some publications are also available in Chinese, Russian and around 20 other languages.

Orban voiced hope that the digital library would be "an additional tool for combating prejudices."

On a practical level he added: "No one can complain now of problems consulting legislative texts and associated documents."

Roughly 110,000 publications or 12 million pages -- the equivalent of four kilometres (2.5 miles) of bookshelves -- were scanned from EU archives from February 2008 at a cost of about 2.5 million euros (3.75 million dollars).

The library counts around 140,000 publications today, and 1,500 "born digital" ones are added each year. More pre-digital documents will also be scanned into the system.

Topics covered by EU institutions, agencies and other bodies include education, the environment, health and transport, an EU statement released at the Frankfurt Book Fair said.

Official statistics from 1953 to the present are also available.

The library's contents will also be a part of Europeana, a project of prominent national European libraries and archives that Claudia Lux, president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions called the largest [digital library](#) worldwide.

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