

5th of February 2010

*„Librarians should learn how to promote their services and be proud of their profession“*

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, **Hunor Kelemen** and **Ms. Deborah Jacobs**, Director of Global Libraries Initiative, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, hosted a panel discussion on the *New Face of Romanian Public Libraries – the Role of Libraries in Community Development*. The debate was facilitated by the well-known TV and radio anchor **Marian Voicu**. Biblionet Program Director **Paul-Andre Baran**, **Doina Popa**, Chairperson of the National Association of Romanian Public Libraries and Librarians (ANBPR), **Stefania Popp**, Executive Director of Junior Achievement and **Emilia Tomoaica**, Commercial Manager, Intuitext also answered questions and provided their insight on the matter at hand.

Panelists and guests discussed about the evolution of public libraries throughout the world, features and services defining modern libraries, solutions provided by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage to issues related to a modern library system in Romania, the need for public libraries to become access centers for online services, as well as potential partnerships between public libraries, NGOs and private businesses with a view to community development. Librarians, community development NGOs, representatives of other ministries interested in passing down information through libraries and journalists expressed opinions and commented on the subject.

*“In order for public libraries to be ground zero in a community, librarians should learn how to promote their services and be proud of their profession”*, urged **Ms. Deborah Jacobs** during the panel discussion.

Minister **Kelemen** stated publicly that his ministry will support libraries by initiating and implementing policies and strategies meant to revive the Romanian public library system: *“These policies aim at repositioning public libraries in the life of local communities and in villages, communes and small towns, especially where there are no higher education establishments”* – minister Kelemen continued, thanking the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and IREX for the implementation of the Biblionet Program in Romania. *“This program shows what can be done for Romania with a significant amount of money, but also with good ideas coming to life. It is our duty for the following years to add content to this national program”* – the minister concluded.

In turn, **Deborah Jacobs** highlighted the fact that libraries must reinvent themselves and the impact of technology and need for information have made libraries even more relevant than before all over the world, be it in the United States, Romania or as far away as Vietnam.

Panel discussants reminded the audience about the sore spots of the Romanian library system, especially in rural areas: lack of appropriate space, insecurity of the librarians, outdated collections and lack of funds for book acquisitions. *“Lack of space for public libraries is the most difficult issue at the moment!”* said Mr. **Sergiu Gabureac**, senior librarian at the Bucharest Metropolitan Library.

In this context, *“Equipment donation and training courses funded through the Biblionet program can show local authorities that the public library is an important place for citizens and can pave the way toward its becoming a true information, education and socialization center in each community”* said Biblionet Director **Paul-Andre Baran**, representing International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).