

++ New petition calls for open standards in the European Parliament

Brussels – 6 March 2008.

At a time when the EU Commission investigates the anti-competitive behaviour of a market-dominant player, the European Parliament (EP) still imposes that same specific software choice on both the European Union's citizens and its own MEPs. OpenForum Europe, The European Software Market Association, and the Free Software Foundation Europe today launched a petition to call on the EP to use open standards so that all citizens can participate in the democratic process.

Graham Taylor, Chief Executive of OpenForum Europe says: "The benefits of the Internet were achieved from open standards, freedom of access, participation for all, innovation where it really mattered. Not proprietary lock-in and monopoly. Government and Parliament need to show leadership in ensuring full participation for all its citizens.

Pieter Hintjens, General Secretary of Esoma explains, "Small businesses are moving to modern open standards like Open Document Format, yet to write to their MEPs they have to switch back to old proprietary formats? The EP should lead the way in open government, starting with open standards for documents and recordings."

Ciaran O'Riordan, FSFE adds, "If our elected representatives don't like a software package or its terms of use, they should be able to choose another software package. This issue and the promotion of open standards must be tackled together to get past a chicken and egg problem: Not being able to choose your software often means you're stuck with one vendor's proprietary format, and using that proprietary format means you, and everyone you communicate with, is shoe-horned into using the same vendor's software. For FSFE, it is important that MEPs be able to choose Free Software."

The signatories are encouraging citizens and other stakeholder groups to publicly support the objectives of the petition by signing up on www.openparliament.eu

++ Background

It is the right of all citizens to be able to freely communicate with their elected representatives, and have full and free access to the proceedings of Parliament. In today's electronic world of the internet, email and video streaming, citizens rightly have high expectations on the European Parliament to ensure full participation without technical restriction.

Yet it is a fact that the domination of current suppliers, unless challenged, does impose unnecessary restriction, forcing citizens to purchase specific software, maintaining lock-in to that supplier and limiting competition and choice.

Openness is all about the freedom to innovate, integrate and participate. For example there are already internationally approved standards for document exchange, supported by a multitude of competitive main stream products - yet these standards are unsupported by the European Parliament, which instead only supports products based on proprietary protocols. Not only does this potentially increase cost, restrict access and impact social inclusion, but it restricts the opportunity to take advantage of new innovation offered by tomorrow's technology.

The co-signatories of this Petition call on the European Parliament to open up their IT systems, maximising the use of open standards and ensure full democracy for its citizens.

ENDS

Issued by Open Forum Europe through Chelgate Ltd.

Notes to editors:

- **OpenForum Europe (OFE), is not-for-profit, independent of any organisation and was launched in March 2002 to accelerate, broaden and strengthen the use of Open Source Software in business and government. OFE pursues the vision of an open, competitive European IT market by 2010 in line with the European Commission i2010 Strategy, with the mission of facilitating open competitive choice for IT users. OFE is supported by major IT suppliers and works closely with the market, both direct and via national associates and partners. www.openforumeurope.org**
- **The European Software Market Association (Esoma) is the voice of the independent IT firms, professionals, and consumers. Founded in January 2007 by the FFII, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the removal of barriers to competition in IT and largely responsible for the rejection of the EU software patent directive in July 2005, Esoma promotes healthy practices on the software market. Esoma fills the gap for a European trade association speaking specifically for SME IT firms. As a not-for-profit organisation, it is mostly funded from membership fees and donations. www.esoma.org**
- **The Free Software Foundation Europe (FSFE) is a non-profit non-governmental organisation active in many European countries and involved in many global activities. Access to software determines participation in a digital society. To secure equal participation in the information age, as well as freedom of competition, the Free Software Foundation Europe (FSFE) pursues and is dedicated to the furthering of Free Software, defined by the freedoms to use, study, modify and copy. Founded in 2001, creating awareness for these issues, securing Free Software politically and legally, and giving people Freedom by supporting development of Free Software are central issues of the FSFE.**

For further information please contact: Graham Taylor, Chief Executive of OFE, +44(0)1372 815168; Pieter Hintjens, General Secretary of ESOMA, +32 (0)475 235 984; Ciaran O’Riordan, FSFE, +32(0)477 364 419