

OpenForum Europe Press Release

London, 19th April 2010 - Response to Grenada Ministerial Declaration on the European Digital Agenda

OFE Congratulates EU Ministers on Progressive Plan for Digital Agenda, Calls for Further Endorsement of Open Public Procurements

The Ministerial Declaration today on the European Digital Agenda is to be strongly welcomed, recognising as it does the need for Europe to maximise the effective use of ICT as a driver at the start of Europe's recovery phase from economic downturn. It recognises that specific actions need to be taken now if Europe is to move onto a 'fast track to growth'. Europe is right to be both positive on the opportunity yet cautious that in a global market it can easily be overtaken in competitiveness and innovation.

As an organisation focussed on supporting an open, competitive choice for the IT user, OpenForum Europe (OFE) endorses the emphasis in the Declaration on 'openness'. "Europe will be best served if it spends less time looking backwards on preserving the status quo and current business practice, and more time on encouraging new opportunity and innovation", stated Graham Taylor, OFE's CEO.

The Declaration identifies a number of areas where strong leadership will be required. The need to protect a strong internet, with open access for all, will be fundamental to Europe's progress, as will embracement of new opportunities such as cloud computing. Equally the need for Europe to actively participate in standards setting within international fora, is strongly supported.

Open Standards as the basis for full interoperability has been endorsed as fundamental to success in eGovernment – the action to "Embed innovation and cost effectiveness into eGovernment through the systematic promotion of open standards and interoperable systems....." should send a clear message across all member states. For OFE there is no more important an agenda item if Europe really means business about openness.

To date unfortunately the Commission has been sending out mixed messages on the degree in which Open Standards are to be supported. In her parliamentary hearing Vice-President Kroes made powerful statements in support of Open Standards and we hope that these intentions and those in the Ministerial Declaration will be endorsed in her formal declaration on the Digital Agenda programme. Yet elsewhere the Commission seem intent on backtracking on progress already made. The latest leaked version of the European Interoperability Framework for eGovernment appears to sideline all attempts at a practical cohesive forward looking strategy for openness, to which member states can conform. "Compared to the original Consultation Document, which was well received, the resulting document seems to be developed with both eyes looking backward at past practice" said Taylor. "The leaked revision to the EIF shows the dangers when you do not 'practice what you promote' within procurement guidelines".

With the Ministerial Declaration recognising ICT 'as the most important driver of growth and jobs in the EU economy', and Governments themselves being the largest purchaser of IT there seems an immediate and obvious direct conclusion for governments to fully adopt open standards in public procurements.

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Notes to editors:

OpenForum Europe (OFE) is not-for-profit, independent of any organisation. and was originally launched in March 2002 to accelerate, broaden and strengthen the use of Open Source Software in business and government. OFE's role has now expanded and is a strong supporter of Open Standards and Openness and pursues the vision of facilitating open competitive choice for IT users. OFE is supported by major IT suppliers, user organisations and national partners.

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