

OpenForum Europe Press Release - Brussels, 19th May 2010

Openforum Europe (OFE) welcomes the European Commission's Digital Agenda, and commends Vice President Neelie Kroes for her determined effort to build an open, competitive and innovative ICT market for the benefit of citizens and businesses in Europe.

The Digital Agenda rightly focuses significant effort on fostering interoperability and openness, and on the development of the standardisation process.

"The Commission is right to see the reform of information and communication technology (ICT) standardisation as an essential and urgent requirement," said OFE Chief Executive, Graham Taylor.

Consumers, as well as the ICT industry will benefit from the plan to allow a wider range of organisations, including industry fora and consortia to decide what innovative technologies should be recognised as industry standards.

OFE applauds Commissioner Kroes for setting concrete targets by which to judge the success of the Digital Agenda, in particular her commitment to get half of all E.U. citizens communicating with their local and national governments by 2015.

This is fully in line with the views of national IT and telecoms ministers from the 27 member states of the E.U., who earlier this month signed a declaration at a meeting in Granada calling for "more effective and efficient interoperable public services that emphasise open and transparent government and active participation."

"Citizens shouldn't have to lock themselves in with one or other proprietary software vendor in order to communicate with their governments," Taylor said.

But Taylor expressed caution: "Some elements within the Commission remain wedded to the traditional lock-in approach to technology and seem to be resisting efforts championed by Commissioner Kroes to make the ICT market more open and interoperable."

If different parts of the Commission are allowed to take conflicting approaches to the question of open versus closed technologies this will result in confusion and ultimately, an inability to take decisive action.

OFE calls on all departments of the Commission to follow the enlightened approach that Mrs Kroes has laid out in the Digital Agenda.

OFE also welcomes the Digital Agenda's approach to the issue of net neutrality.

"Commissioner Kroes recognises the importance of new market developments such as cloud computing, and she understands that it is vital to maintain the openness of the internet in order to allow such technology advances to benefit citizens' lives," Taylor said.

She is wise not to jump to any policy conclusions regarding the evolving issue of net neutrality. However, the OFE urges Commissioner Kroes to be vigilant that the new business models in the fields of Net traffic management that will emerge over the next five years don't restrict the Net's openness.

"Openness is the basis of the Net. It would be entirely wrong to allow that openness to break down now. Some telecoms companies will undoubtedly entertain the idea of developing a gatekeeper role over internet applications and services," Taylor said.

To quote from Commissioner Kroes' statement at her hearing in the European Parliament earlier this year we must "practice what we promote". There can be no better way to ensure delivery of the Digital Agenda than as proposed by the action on aligning her strategy with public procurement practice. "It will be success here that determines the success of the Digital Agenda" concluded Taylor.

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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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