

EU Presidency 1, European Commission 0

OFE questions EC leadership on interoperability

Brussels, 9th November 2009 – OFE has reacted strongly against a leaked draft of the revision to the European Interoperability Framework (EIF), expressing deep disappointment with the new wording and serious doubts about the transparency of the process that led to it. Letters have been sent to the responsible Commissioner Kallas and Director General Garcia-Moran, and to the CIOs of all Member States calling for a withdrawal of the document. It has also contrasted it to the statement made by the Swedish Presidency last week.

Since it was published in 2004, the EIF has aided national governments in establishing strategies for achieving interoperability in eGovernment services. The value and necessity of Open Standards to avoid lock-in to proprietary solutions have been generally accepted. The strategy of openness has been promoted on a regular basis by Commissioners from several DGs. Speaking at an OFE briefing in 2008, Commissioner Neelie Kroes put it plainly: *"The European Commission should not rely on one software vendor and must not accept closed standards"*¹

In 2008, the Commission published a draft consultation revision to the EIF, branded as EIF v2. OFE largely welcomed that draft and provided detailed feedback through the public consultation that followed. The new draft that was leaked this week abandons the commitment to Open Standards and is in other important ways a major step back from EIF v1 and the first draft of EIF v2. The changes are of such magnitude that they cannot be attributed to the comments published on the Commission website.

"The EU is at risk to lose its global leadership position on openness and interoperability. The Commission's reputation will be seriously damaged if EIF 2.0 is released in the way it is currently worded." Said Graham Taylor, CEO of OpenForum Europe. *"The drastic changes from the consultation document of 2008 to this document cannot be seen as resulting from the comments submitted through the public consultation, forcing us to conclude either that the Commission has been unduly influenced by pressures outside of the democratic and transparent process or that it is desperate to defend its own legacy procurement choices".*

National governments throughout Europe and globally have already moved on and declared their support for both Open Standards and Open Source. Just last Thursday, by coincidence, Mats Odell, the Swedish Minister for Local Government and Financial Markets, speaking in Maastricht, on behalf of the current EU Presidency:

"Another important development to increase efficiency, promote interoperability and improve the performance in public sector delivery is the move towards the use of open standards and open source alternatives in new procurements. It is my belief that we need a clear definition of openness in the European Interoperability Framework and that the definition of open standards and open source software as defined by the European Interoperability Framework version one has served us well so far. The use of open standards and open source solutions decreases the public sector's reliance on specific vendors and platforms and it increases European competitiveness as well as the transparency and ability to interact with third party

developers of services built on public data ".²

The leaked draft abandons the generally accepted principle that Open Standards are key to ensuring interoperability and a healthy competition in the IT market and appears to suggest that openness and use of Open Standards in a government interoperability framework can be negotiated as if they were mere levels of optional functionality.

"The notion expounded in this leaked document that interoperability can be achieved through everybody using the same software is absurd; it implies precisely the sort of lock-in situation that the EIF is supposed to prevent," Taylor added. "The draft rightly concludes that "Public administrations should not impose any specific technological solutions on citizens, businesses.....when establishing European Public services", yet this approach does precisely that."

Note:

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.

OpenForum Europe acknowledges all the input received from its members and partners in the compilation of this document. However, OpenForum Europe does not seek to represent any specific community nor present its opinions as being unanimously supported by its full membership. References given are fully attributed and every effort made to ensure they have been taken in true context.

Contact Graham Taylor +44 1372815168

graham@openforumeurope.org

www.openforumeurope.org

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