

OFE Press Release

Statement by OpenForum Europe in Response to Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment Malmo 19th November 2009

The Malmo Conference and Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment represents a further step in progress towards pan European collaboration.

The declaration rightly supports an emphasis on empowering the citizen and business, and focuses on delivery of user services, making it easier and more effective for cross border working. The need for increased availability of public sector information for reuse is also welcomed. Re-use, not just of information, but of common service delivery should be one way in which Europe can collaborate, not just for reasons of effectiveness but to foster innovation.

Elsewhere the declaration recognises the use of '*open specifications*' in order to deliver services in the most effective manner. "*Open specifications*", most commonly known as 'Open standards' globally are rightly recognised as part of national interoperability frameworks, which in turn need to be aligned with European frameworks. The potential use of Open Source is also rightly recognised.

OpenForum Europe (OFE) broadly welcomes the Ministerial Declaration for its implicit support for openness but believes Member States and the European Commission have missed a trick by not going further in two ways:

- Firstly by not demanding that the European Commission shows greater leadership in setting definitive strategies for Interoperability frameworks.
- Secondly by recognising the current gap between strategy and implementation by strengthening the adoption of procurement policies.

Commissioners within the EC, notably Commissioner Kroes and Commissioner Reding, have shown an exceptional level of understanding and commitment in their support of an open, competitive ICT market. Missing from the Declaration, for example, is the need for a fully open internet. this can no longer be assumed, and Open standards will not be enough. Empowerment of citizens and businesses in a web enabled world, increasingly within cloud based government services, will be put at risk without judicial monitoring at national and European level.

The reaction to the recently leaked draft of EIF v2.0 (European Interoperability Framework) has again emphasised the need for leadership in definition and implementation of interoperability frameworks – pan european and national. the draft has been roundly condemned for its only passive acknowledgement of open standards and seemingly endorsement of lock-in to the proprietary solutions and the status quo. OFE believes there can be no place in forward looking strategies which are meant to encourage innovation, cost improvement and efficiency, for such retrograde thinking. we trust the next draft of EIF v2.0 will illustrate greater leadership.

Such frameworks rely not just on clear strategies but solid implementation. Government procurement practice needs stronger focus – both at national and European level. to quote Commissioner Kroes - *“we must walk the talk”*.

In conclusion OFE warmly supports the positive steps which have been expressed but suggest additional steps will be necessary if openness is to be secured and the citizens and businesses are really to be empowered.

OFE and its members and partners offer their support over the coming months.