

European Parliament Petitions Committee Hearing 6th November 2008 – Summary of Presentation by Graham Taylor

Note: actual presentation varied from script!

- Good afternoon, thank you for the opportunity to present our petition
- Firstly introduce myself. I am Graham Taylor the Chief Executive of OpenForum Europe, a not-for-profit member based organisation, independent of any company or organisation. We draw our membership from across the industry and include as members market leading names such as Google, IBM, Oracle, SUN etc
- What draws us together is our mission of enabling open, competitive choice in the IT market.
- This slide shows that in being open the emphasis is on freedom
- – freedom to innovate, being able to introduce new services without being restricted to past practice
- freedom to integrate, selecting the best systems to achieve the best result, not just those from one supplier
- freedom to participate, particularly relevant in this discussion, maximising inclusivity by removing unnecessary blockers to accessibility
- and finally freedom to leave, choosing the best without being locked-in to the past
- We believe the market now demands such an open approach by all suppliers, a level playing field for differing business models now available, and an end to restrictive practices leading to lock-in to any supplier.
- OFE is non evangelical, business focussed and we like to think level headed.
- I believe we also enjoy respect and credibility. Last year the Commission and Portuguese presidency invited OFE to represent the European open community in responding to the ministerial declaration at the eGovernment conference in Lisbon. Some 25 other organisations from across Europe aligned themselves to the statement made by OFE.
- In this petition we are joined as co-signatories by two of the leading European open community organisations – FSFE and ESOMA. In addition close to 10,000 individuals have signed the petition website we established in support of this petition.
- So what is the petition about?
- (PETITION WORDING)
- At its core we call upon parliament to stop using proprietary formats for communication of documents and video access between parliament and citizens. By doing so you are forcing the use of a single suppliers software on citizens and challenging democracy and accessibility and inclusion across the EU.
- You are also limiting competition and choice in the market. But you are also restricting the potential to take advantage of future innovation as well as achieving cost savings today.
- At a briefing in June hosted by OFE the Competition Commissioner made a number of key points which together we suggest support this petition. The first of these....
- *“...no citizen or company should be forced or encouraged to choose a closed technology over an open one, through a government having made that choice first.”*
- What we are not asking is for you to give preference to any particular application. Equally not to make any preference to proprietary or free/open source software. This is not a question either of industry rivalries and are we not attacking any particular supplier, however dominant they might be.
- It is about allowing citizens to freely make their choice of software application, and for you to independently make yours. It also draws attention to the importance of your purchasing decisions if you are to avoid the lock-in to proprietary solutions.
- Again a quote from Commissioner Kroes,
- *“As purchasers, we need to be smart when we buy technology. We need to be aware of the long term costs of lock-in; you are often locked-in to subsequent generations of that*

technology. There can also be spill-over effects where you get locked in to other products and services provided by that supplier”..... “ That is just bad purchasing”

- It is unfortunately only too clear that this message is not clearly understood. We very recently published a study of public procurement of software over a 3 month period. Frankly we were stunned that 25% of those contract notices seemed to illegally name specific trade marks. Not only is this specifically forbidden under EU directives, but it leads to a continuation of the lock-in that we are trying to avoid.
- So how do we believe public sector procurement should be focussed?
- Open standards are now globally recognised as the essential step to ensuring interoperability.
- We all understand the need for standards, and have them all around us – the phone, electricity supply, print sizes... etc . In IT this openness has allowed innovation and competition to operate where it matters, and not where one supplier can protect its position. A great exemplar is of course the internet itself. Both Tim Berners-Lee and Vint Cerf, the two founders have made statements confirming the internet simply wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been based on open standards.
- *“The Internet is fundamentally based on the existence of open, non-proprietary standards”*
- Support for open standards has now been endorsed in the IT strategies of organisations, parliaments and governments worldwide – from South America, Africa, Far East, Australasia as well as here across the whole of Europe. Many countries have even moved to mandating them. In Europe, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark are probably best known as leaders in this, but others are not far behind.
- Last year the Commission gave a strong commitment to standards in its internal future purchasing decisions and this summer the Commission published a consultation paper in advance of publication of version 2 of its European Interoperability Framework. The support for the use of open standards and specifications could not be clearer....
- *“...the overwhelming desire of Public administrations in Europe is for a clear migration towards openness”*
- Here in the European Parliament you have that opportunity now to migrate. We believe there needs to be a single statement of full support for the adoption and facilitation of open standards, accompanied by an implementation strategy which incorporates immediately measures to advance support in the two areas we have identified. The first of these is specifically referenced in the EIF consultation
- *“Public administrations should consider support for open data formats as a prerequisite at the procurement stage.”*
- And is covered by the adoption of the open document ISO standard ODF, which is already available in a large number of office applications, and for which Microsoft have now confirmed support in a version of their own products planned in 2009. ODF support is also available via a plug in for current versions also. Not ideal, but a realistic tool in a migration strategy.
- Secondly in the expansion of support for access to EP video proceedings.
- At the time of this petition only a single proprietary player was available – one only available from one supplier, running on just one operating system, a situation few would accept as reasonable. We now give recognition that at least some progress has been made with eParl TV now also supporting Flash. Still not based on an open standard, but certainly the supplier has taken steps to increase its availability and support. But for many in the community more progress is still required. The leading open source video players are not supported.
- In both cases we have offered our advice and support in discussing with the community and industry the best way forward. Our suggestion is that all government organisations have a responsibility to provide leadership – both in determining strategy and by the purchasing decisions they make.
- A final quote from Neelie Kroes....
- *“I know a smart business decision when I see one - choosing open standards is a very smart*

business decision indeed”

- I would now like to introduce two expert witnesses in support of this petition and to specifically respond on two key points we see as being needed to answer. The first of this is the importance of open standards and the actions taken by governments in their procurement decisions.
- The first speaker is Rishab Ghosh, who is a senior researcher and heads the Collaborative Creativity Group at the United Nations University MERIT in Maarstricht. Rishab is recognised globally as an expert on the use of open source and open standards by public administrations. He is speaker at countless conferences, author of numerous papers, and consults for governments worldwide. He is the author of the European Commission's draft report 'Guidelines on public procurement and Open Source Software' published last month.
- He will review the market approach to open standards and the actions taken by governments in their procurement decisions.
- Our second speaker is Peter Strickx, who is Chief Technology Officer at FEDICT, the Federal Public Service for Information & Communication Technology within the Belgian Federal Government. Peter has been responsible for Belgium taking the exact steps to those we are proposing here in the EP.
- He will respond to concerns on practical implementation issues and costs that might be faced by the EP if it were to accept our recommendations.
- So in conclusion from myself we believe the actions requested in the petition are absolute realistic, they are also long overdue.