

# **Neelie Kroes Vice President European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda**

## **Opening up Europe: from Common Standards to Open Data**

### **OpenForum Europe Summit 2011**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am glad to be speaking here again; I'm on my way to becoming a regular at your Summits!

Last year, at the 2010 Summit, I shared with you my ideas on interoperability and standards, and listed some key actions to put in place. I said I wanted more and better standards recognised and created in Europe, better use made of those standards and to improve interoperability, even where there are no standards. And I promised that I would keep coming back and speaking to you until we achieve everything.

Well, we have achieved a lot, but we haven't achieved everything: so here I am!

Of course I am eager to tell you today what we've done since last year and so I will start with that. But after that I also want to talk about what we're doing in the area of the other big topic of this event: the openness of governments and data.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In all sectors, standards and standardisation drive competitiveness, promote innovation, and benefit consumers through competition. Standards are indispensable for openness, freedom and choice.

Likewise in the ICT sector, having the right standard-setting procedures and interoperability rules creates the level playing field needed for all parts of the machine to fit together: devices, applications, data repositories, services and networks.

Remember that the ICT revolution would not be what it is without the standards and protocols which underpin the Internet. In principle every node on the Internet can communicate with every other, using the same language; and without that, the Internet wouldn't much resemble the phenomenal engine of innovation that it is. We need to bear that in mind when thinking about the many new possibilities out there – public services from e-government to e-identification, applications from health to transport, innovations from the Internet of Things to cloud computing. Because if we are to unlock the power of any of these new developments, then we need to ensure that these technologies too are built on the philosophy of shared standards, so that within these new systems there is co-operation and interaction, just as there is between nodes on the Internet.

And we in Europe are now one huge step closer to better standards. In June the Commission proposed a new legal framework for European Standardisation.

The proposal underlines that, given the pace of change of ICT, standard setting in this field needs to be faster and more flexible. We also need to stop wasting time and resources reinventing the wheel. In reality many useful standards do not come from European

Standardisation Organisations, but from other bodies around the world. So, where it makes sense, let's be pragmatic and re-use others' good results! Indeed our proposal sets out a process to do just that. The result will be a level playing field between standards from different sources, and a boon for interoperability. If all goes well we will have begun to implement the first element of this process, the creation of an ICT multi-stakeholder platform, by the end of 2011. This new group will assist the Commission in assessing ICT standards.

In the coming years we will be working with the Council and the European Parliament to make sure the new Standardisation Framework becomes law as soon as possible.

We have also taken steps to improve the quality of standards: in the area of competition law, we have revised our Guidelines on the assessment of horizontal cooperation agreements. The new "Horizontal Guidelines", adopted last December, include an expanded section on standardisation agreements. They should further enhance the efficiency of standardisation processes through clearer "ex ante" rules on the disclosure of both IPR and licensing conditions.

Moving from standardisation to interoperability policies, it is worth recalling that we have also managed, at the end of last year, to put behind us a controversy that took more than two years to resolve. The result is a document with the unassuming title of the "European Interoperability Framework 2.0". What was all that fuss about, in the end, you'd be forgiven for asking. I am not sure I can fully answer it myself. But I know that – amid huge controversy mainly about one small section – we have created a pretty decent overall result and certainly the best solution for now. We have a solution that will help us bring more and better interoperability to, at the least, cross-border public services in Europe. And we will continue to work with Member States to make sure these good principles are put into practice.

That's what we've done. But there's much still to do.

Before the end of the year, we will be looking further into the guidelines on making best use of ICT standards in public procurement, to enhance efficiency and reduce the risk of dependency on a single provider. And we will consult on measures to make it easier to have interoperability even in the absence of formal standards – whether it's through exception obligations, or some other kind of incentive to grant licences to "de facto" standards – always striking the right balance between the needs of all our stakeholders.

So that's the agenda on interoperability. But this conference is about an open vision for Europe. And that's about much more than just standards and protocols: it's also about promoting and sharing knowledge to empower individuals, boost businesses, and spread the results of scientific research.

We are going to take action: we are going to open up Europe's public sector.

I am convinced that the potential to re-use public data is significantly untapped. Such data is a resource, a new and valuable raw material. If we became able to mine it, that would be an investment which would pay off with benefits for all of us.

Benefits for the citizen and for society, because making good use of public data can make your life better. Whether it's route planning using public geo-information or public transport data; a local community crowd-sourcing its maintenance priorities; decision-making built on statistics of all shapes and sizes; or data journalism that helps explain our world.

Second, benefits for the economy, as business opportunities to use such data increase. Especially if we spread data as wide as possible to give every idea a chance rather than locking it up in exclusive licensing arrangements. I want to see many companies turning their ideas into revenues and many citizens benefitting.

Third, benefits for science. Because research in genomics, pharmacology or the fight against cancer increasingly depends on the availability and sophisticated analysis of large data sets. Sharing such data means researchers can collaborate, compare, and creatively explore whole new realms. We cannot afford for access to scientific knowledge to become a luxury, and the results of publicly funded research in particular should be spread as widely as possible.

Fourth, of course there is some self-interest in this as well: there are benefits for the public sector itself. Think of the potential efficiency gains. Many that thought they knew it all will be inspired – and humbled – by what others will make of “their” data. Others will simply be learning by example how to better analyse and use it.

And, perhaps most importantly, benefits for democracy because it enhances transparency, accessibility and accountability. After all, what could be more natural than public authorities who have collected information on behalf of citizens using their tax money giving it back to those same citizens. New professionals such as data journalists are our allies in explaining what we do.

Since 2003 the Directive on the re-use of public sector information has regulated this field establishing the principle that public authorities should make data available and let individuals and businesses make use of it.

Our consultation on the review of that Directive got a wide response. The consensus was that the principles of the Directive are valid, namely, the importance of public sector information as a raw material and the economic and social value in its re-use.

But we need to clarify how those principles are put into practice. And maybe get rid of a few exceptions or loopholes.

And so at the end of November, I will be proposing to my fellow Commissioners that we adopt our next steps on the re-use of public sector information, and a proposal for an improved Directive. I want requirements to be more encompassing, and specifications improved. In particular, we’ll be looking at the way data is disclosed -the formats and the way data licenses operate to make re-use straightforward in practice. We’ll also be looking at charging regimes because expensive data isn’t “open data”. In short, getting out the data under reasonable conditions should be a routine part of the business of public administrations.

Before you ask me, let me confirm: of course the Commission should practice what it preaches. So we will also be updating the rules for the re-use of our own data and I hope these rules will find champions in other European Institutions too.

We are planning two data portals to give simple and systematic access to public data at European level. First we should have, by next spring, a portal to the Commission’s own data resources. And second, for 2013, I am working on a wider, pan-European data portal, eventually giving access to re-usable public sector information from across the EU, federating and developing existing national and regional data portals.

“Will she really be able to pull off all that?” you may wonder again. And again let me tell you that I am as determined as ever to bring about the change. So just as I promised last year, I promise to keep coming back – if my digital agenda permits it – until we achieve it all. But I hope that in between my actions will speak for themselves.