

26 March 2014

Giancarlo Vilella  
Director General, DG ITEC  
European Parliament

Re : Use of document and video formats in the EU Institutions

Dear Mr Vilella,

As you may know we are celebrating today Document Freedom Day. The goal of this annual event is to raise public awareness on information accessibility and the use of open standards. We thought this would be a good opportunity share with you, in your capacity as the Chair of the Inter-Institutional Committee for Informatics, some reflections on the use of document formats in the EU Institutions.

We believe that the EU Institutions have a key role to play in setting an example for public administrations throughout Europe, and should embrace the opportunity to spread good practices through enlightened leadership.

On the issue of video standards, we regret that the infrastructure for video-streaming of the European Parliament and the Council is still based on proprietary formats (Windows Media Player and Silverlight respectively). This is a problem for EU citizens and stakeholder groups wishing to participate in the legislative process without being forced to use the products of a single company. We have been raising this issue since 2008<sup>1</sup>, when we were told that the Parliament was working on a new system for streaming that would be built on open standards and accessible to all<sup>2</sup>. We would be interested to know if this project is still in development.

We are appreciative of the recent efforts of the Institutions to support open standards in document exchange<sup>3</sup> and the acknowledgement by the European Commission of “effective captivity” to a single provider for its office automation<sup>4</sup>, although we would be interested to see the data which has led the Commission to claim that “the lack of choice is almost total as regards... productivity tools”. We are also conscious of the complexity of managing the infrastructure of a large user base with diverse needs and some of the specific challenges encountered in the context of a multilingual environment. Important decisions such as the choice of a document format should be based on user needs and a sound (long term) cost-benefit analysis, before any other considerations.

With regards to the current situation, we regret that the decision made by the Inter-Institutional

---

1 <http://openparliament.eu/petition>

2 <http://www.openforum europe.org/library/open-parliament/openforum-europe-response-to-open-parliament-petition-hearing-held-on-6-11-2008/>

3 <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/community/osor/news/ec-recommends-supporting-open-document-format>

4 [https://ameliaandersdotter.eu/sites/default/files/andersdotter\\_annex.pdf](https://ameliaandersdotter.eu/sites/default/files/andersdotter_annex.pdf)

Committee for Informatics in 2010<sup>5</sup> remains to be fully enforced. Indeed, to our knowledge the chosen format for the exchange of editable documents among the Institutions (OOXML) is not fully implemented in any of the applications that are currently used. We are also concerned that the stated external support for ODF appears to be inconsistent<sup>6</sup>.

Throughout Europe, public administrations are increasingly adopting open standards. This gives them the power to choose the applications that are right for them and the citizens who use their services, by ensuring real innovation and competition between providers. Just a few weeks ago, the UK government published a recommendation<sup>7</sup> on the formats in which editable government information should be shared and requested.

In a recent meeting<sup>8</sup>, the Inter-institutional Committee for Informatics expressed the view that document formats were “not a secondary issue” and decided to “explore the possibility of harmonizing the format of the documents”. We hope that these reflections will be followed up with action, and we remain at your entire disposal to provide help and guidance when and where appropriate.

Sincerely,

Graham Taylor  
*Chief Executive*  
*OpenForum Europe*

Karsten Gerloff  
*President*  
*Free Software Foundation Europe*

cc Stephen Quest, European Commission  
Maroš Šefčovič, European Commission  
Catherine Day, European Commission  
Neelie Kroes, European Commission  
Dirk Schilders, Council of the EU

---

5 [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/informatics/oss\\_tech/pdf/2011-07-25\\_ares.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/informatics/oss_tech/pdf/2011-07-25_ares.pdf)

6 <https://twitter.com/RyanHeathEU/status/439036889937752064>

7 <http://standards.data.gov.uk/proposal/sharing-collaborating-government-documents>

8 <http://ep-technology.tumblr.com/post/77057711660/cii-meeting-how-the-ict-supports-the-european>