Eight Principles for an EU Catalogue of Standards for ICT Procurement

Input on the discussion and public consultation of an EU Catalogue

August 17, 2016

Openforum europe
open, competitive choice for IT users

Eight Principles for an EU Catalogue of Standards for ICT Procurement:
Input on the discussion and public consultation of an EU Catalogue

Brussels, 17th of August, 2016

Introduction

In the context of the public consultation on a European Catalogue of Standards for ICT Procurement, OpenForum Europe (OFE) would like to contribute the thoughts and considerations set out below as input for further discussion of the topic.

For many years, OFE has been a strong supporter of improving interoperability and providing the grounds for fair competition (and the avoidance of vendor lock-in) through the use of open standards in public procurement. In particular, open standards are critical in the area of software interoperability, as they allow implementation in open source, and thus provide for fair competition between proprietary and open source technologies on an equal footing without giving preference to either.

Therefore, OFE has been a strong promoter of the European Interoperability Framework and of the EU Guide for ICT procurement, and has actively supported the various workshops organised by the Commission on ICT procurement. Moreover, for many years OFE has monitored public procurement practices throughout Europe and analysed the extent to which standards are referenced, and any references made are in conflict with the Procurement Directives and open procurement policy.

OFE welcomes the open approach which the Commission and the study team led by Trilateral Research are taking on the EU Catalogue; the future success of any such initial catalogue will certainly depend on a solid stock-taking, as well as on a broad and open assessment of needs, risks and opportunities.

In OFE's opinion, it is important that any EU Catalogue should promote an open and competitive market in ICT and so allow for innovations to be speedily adopted in Europe. In order to achieve these objectives, OFE would like to propose that any EU Catalogue be based on the following *Eight Principles for an EU Catalogue of Standards for ICT Procurement.*

Principle 1: Provide guidance on how best to use standardisation deliverables

Public authorities increasingly face the challenge of procuring not just single ICT products or technologies, but also complex technology infrastructures and solutions. It is important that such technologies are based on open standards, in order to avoid lock-in and to promote interoperability and scalability.

Use Cases, Reference Architectures, infrastructures and "platforms as a service" – as well as several other standardisation deliverables - are available via European and global standardisation in order to provide support for the adoption of new technologies and for the transformation of processes towards digitalisation.

The EU Catalogue should outline the usefulness of such standardisation deliverables and support their use in public policy-making and public procurement; it should also provide guidance for policy makers and procurers about: how to find such standardisation deliverables, how to assess them properly, how to maximise their use, etc.

Principle 2: Be informative, not prescriptive

Whilst the EU Catalogue should inform about the availability of open standards and standardisation deliverables, it should neither prescribe nor impose the use of any specific standards on public authorities. In other words, the EU Catalogue should not regulate, it should be sensitive (i.e., not go in the direction of de-facto regulation), and should limit itself to providing options from which to choose; it may also share best practices, yet again without being prescriptive.

The main objective of the EU Catalogue should, therefore, be to support policy makers and procurers in taking informed decisions about what is available for their respective purposes.

At a local level, based on those respective purposes, it may well be that a more definitive approach is taken, avoiding overlap or unnecessarily competing standards.

Principle 3: Rely on work done in open standards developing organisations

The work done in European and global ICT standards developing organisations provides the best, most open and transparent basis. Reference Architectures, Use Cases, and Standardisation Profiles are developed in global standards developing organisations, following open and transparent processes, and involving a critical mass of stakeholders.

Public authorities should rely on this work and these open and transparent processes. Indeed, they should get themselves involved in such work, to make sure that their requirements are fully met; and if desired work results are not available already, public authorities should commission standards developing organisations to initiate appropriate projects, including collaboration amongst relevant standards developing organisations. Governments themselves should not undertake the respective developments; rather, they should rely on public work.

Principle 4: Allow for the full scope of available and newly emerging technologies

The EU Catalogue should be an inclusive, not a selective, one: what matters is interoperability, not uniformity. Therefore, parallel standards-based solutions or different Reference Architectures should be actively promoted via such a Catalogue, as long as they are open standards-based and do not hamper interoperability.

Similarly, attention should be given to emerging innovative solutions - these should be within the scope of the Catalogue and the recommended techniques for assessing possible options.

Principle 5: Give primacy to global solutions

The EU Catalogue should not only put strong emphasis on global solutions, but also give primacy to global solutions over regional ones. Public procurement strongly mirrors industrial policy; global solutions support global competitiveness, allowing for the broadest possible range of options from which to choose.

Principle 6: Make Openness a fundamental characteristic

Openness is a natural core characteristic behind the choice in any open standard, and has already been adopted by a number of Member States as the core of their selection of open standards and methodologies.

For a definitive discussion of the underlying principles of Openness, see the OFE Openness Principles, which reflect the objectives of *user centricity, competition, flexibility, sustainability* and *community*. In the area of Open Standards, OFE supports the UK Government's work, notably its Open Standards Principles and Definition.

Principle 7: Build on well-established assessment methods

As well as providing guidance and information about available and suitable standards and standardisation deliverables, the EU Catalogue needs to provide users with the tools and methodology needed to evaluate and to assess the various technologies. In this context, CAMSS ('Common Assessment Method for Standards and Specifications') is well established with public authorities, and should be made an integral part of the Catalogue as the methodology for policymakers and procurers to work with in assessing and selecting standards and standardisation deliverables.

Principle 8: Consult expert advice

Both the conceptualisation and the further development of the EU Catalogue should be underpinned by broad expert advice. This includes, of course, experts from the Member States with whom close collaboration is in any event critical; it should also include advice from technical experts. The Multi-Stakeholder Platform would be a well-suited expert advisory group to include advice on matters around the Catalogue regarding not only the availability of global ICT standards and standardisation deliverables, and their use, but also the specific EU policy needs and objectives to be brought into global standardisation.

OFE believes that the eight principles stated above would contribute significantly to the successful development and implementation of the EU Catalogue, by promoting the use of standards and standardisation deliverables and providing policymakers and procurers with the information, guidance and methods required for successful choice of standards and standards-based solutions.

OFE is available at any time for further discussion of these eight principles, to provide clarifications, or to engage in follow-on suggestions.

OpenForum Europe (OFE) is a not-for-profit, independent European based think tank which focuses on openness within the IT sector. We draw our support not only from some of the most influential global industry players, but most importantly from across European SMEs and consumer organisations and the open community.

OFE also hosts a global network of OpenForum Academy Fellows, each contributing significant innovative thought leadership on core topics. Views expressed by OFE do not necessarily reflect those held by all its supporters.