PRESS RELEASE

OFE welcomes EU agreement on recognizing standards from industry fora and consortia

Openforum Europe welcomes the agreement reached between European lawmakers to recognize ICT standards approved by industry fora and consortia without undue red tape. The agreement reached between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers last week is a very good one, which will boost innovation primarily, but not only, in the public sector.

The agreement on fora and consortia is part of an overall political agreement on the shape of a new wide-ranging regulation designed to modernize the standards system in Europe. The regulation will be formally adopted by the European Parliament and national governments in the coming months and will enter into force in the 27 countries of the European Union on January 1st.

Government agencies and ministries are heavy users of ICT. Yet in Europe until now government bodies can't reference standards agreed by industry fora and consortia such as the W3C – a consortium that approves standards for the World Wide Web. They can only reference standards agreed by formal standards bodies.

The new regulation will for the first time permit government ministries and agencies in Europe to reference the full range of standards available to the private sector.

“Governments can benefit from huge efficiencies if they apply technologies that are spurring on the private sector so dramatically,” said Graham Taylor, chief executive of Openforum Europe, adding: “In return, they can inspire European ICT firms, large and small, to compete with the best in the world.”

“With this excellent outcome of the legislative process the way is now open for Europe to make use of innovative IT technologies standardised in global fora and consortia,” said Jochen Friedrich, chairman of OFE’s standards task force.

Standards are vital if future innovators are to avoid having to re-invent the digital wheel all the time. Nowhere is this more true than in the information and communication technology (ICT) domain, where innovation happens at breakneck speed.

Referencing standards helps organizations avoid being locked-in to one or another technology and ensures fair competition which in turn increases choice and quality and boosts innovation. It is therefore vital that public authorities can reference the full set of globally available standards and specifications used in the private sector – not just the ones that are formally recognised.
Because the public sector is such a huge user of ICTs it has the ability to drive change in the industry. If European governments demand cutting edge technologies then European suppliers will have a big incentive to supply them, and in the long term this would encourage the emergence of world class European ICT firms.

The IMCO committee of the European Parliament has published details of the compromise agreement that was reached during trilogue negotiations between the European Council, the European Parliament and the Commission. A vote on the agreement is on the schedule of the European Parliament Plenary in September. The Danish government, holder of the six-month rotating EU Presidency, has published a press release on the agreement reached.

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