PRESS RELEASE : Time for the European Institutions to show their support for open standards

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Throughout the world today, individuals and organisations are celebrating Document Freedom Day. The goal of this annual event is to raise public awareness on information accessibility and the use of open standards.

We believe that public administrations have a key role to play in this regard, in at least two important ways. First by ensuring that every citizen and stakeholder group can interact with its public administration using the software of its choice, without having to worry about compatibility or portability across different platforms. Second, by ensuring efficient use of public money and fostering competition through innovation in the market. Overall, public procurement represents around 19% of the EU GDP. Only by supporting open standards can public administrations avoid vendor lock-in which increases prices and reduces competition in the market.

The role of the EU Institutions is particularly key. Indeed, they can set an example for public administrations throughout Europe, and should embrace the opportunity to spread good practices through enlightened leadership. For years now, we have been advocating for the EU institutions to implement open standards internally. In this context, we are sending today an open letter (attached) to Giancarlo Vilela, Chair of the Inter-Institutional Committee for Informatics, responsible for some of the common decisions for the ICT infrastructure of the EU Institutions.

One particularly relevant issue that we raise in this letter is that of editable document formats. As we have recently commented in response to a consultation on this issue in the UK, we strongly believe that any decision on this matter should be focused on user needs, avoid application-specific approaches conductive to vendor lock-in, and if possible avoid competing standards as this tends to interfere with interoperability. We believe that currently only HTML and the Open Document Format (ODF) fulfil these principles. Already we are seeing a paradigm shift in Europe, with countries such as Portugal and possibly soon the UK deciding to support these formats to give themselves the power to choose the applications that are right for them and the citizens who use their services. We now call on the EU Institutions to take the lead and show their support for open standards.

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