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Object:OW2's open letter about EIF2 and open standards

Paris, 23rd November 2009

Dear Commissioner Kallas, Mr Garcia-Moran,

First of all, on the behalf of the members of OW2 Consortium, I would like to salute all efforts done by IDABC in the past to promote open source and open standards in European administrations. Your contributions have been instrumental in the education of Public Administration. And the definition of open standards in EIF version 1.0 has played a key role for demonstrating the importance of open standards to achieve interoperability between software systems.

OW2 is an international open source community of Industry and Academic players dedicated to developing a code base of open source infrastructure software focusing on middleware and, increasingly, on applications. Established in 2007, OW2 has grown into a global community of 70 companies and academic organizations, 1200 individual members working on over 80 open source projects. OW2 is currently developing its Local Chapters in China, Europe, Brazil and is preparing to set up its North America Local Chapter in 2010.

Actually open source, open standards and interoperability are part of the DNA of OW2's ecosystem. Thanks to open standards, talented entrepreneurs can develop innovative and useful software on top of open platforms or open services. Thanks to open standards, brilliant researchers can develop new paradigms interacting openly with the findings of their peers. And moreover Industry and Academy can develop new projects which will benefit to science, industry and society. Finally thanks to Open Standards, we have been able to develop common projects and to seal fruitful relationships with researchers, public administrations and entrepreneurs from China, Brazil, India and USA.

As lot of other open source projects, today OW2's software is significantly used in Public Administration. Some examples among others: SpagoBI in Italian Ministry of Health, eXo portal at Ministry of Finance in Belgium, Petals in French ACCOSS (Social Security), JOnAS in French Ministry of Interior and State of Geneva, Bonita in Government of the Canary Islands.

This might explain why OW2's members are somewhere frightened by the news concerning the new version of European Interoperability Framework. In our opinion, to be efficient and workable without negative side effects, Interoperability demands a clear definition of open standards and cannot only depend on the good will of IT players. It is also well known that interoperability does not happen by accident. OW2 as a producer of Open Source and as a consortium of Industry and Academy players might be negatively impacted and our common works could be seriously damaged by a vague definition of interoperability not based on Open Standards. So far Europe has been an example in term of openness. Should it change for the future?

The European Commission and IDABC in particular are leading the effort to keep Europe at the driver's seat in eGovernment in the world. A significant factor in this success is their solid adherence to Open Standards, democratic procedures and the support of healthy competition in the market. The change in the definition of openness allegedly present in version 2 of the EIF seriously damages these factors, paving the way for monopolies and oligopolies with a potentially devastating outcome.

Please be assured that OW2 is not looking for privilege rights for Open Source: Open Source has already demonstrated its potential in term of competition. But when it comes to interoperability, OW2's members need to be confident that the rules are fair and technically efficient. Finally we hope that our efforts, business and research will not be endangered in the future due to non pragmatic and idealistic vision of interoperability.

With this letter, we want to clearly express our concern about the potential change in the definition of Open Standards that may be adopted by version 2 of the EIF. At the same time, we would like to receive an equally clear position of the European Commission on this subject.

Look forward to receiving your answer,

Yours sincerely,

Jean-Pierre Laisné
President, OW2 Consortium