

European perspectives on interoperability and Free Software

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Free Software Foundation Europe



About FSFE

- European NGO (est. 2001)
- active in 11 European countries
 - 13 associate organisations in 10 countries
- part of large international network
 - including Asia, Latin America, USA
- 6 full-time, 2 part-time employees, 2 interns
 - many hundreds of volunteers and Fellows
- Third party in European Commission antitrust on Workgroup Server interoperability
 - counseling EC during investigation
 - supporting EC vs Microsoft in European Court
 - working jointly with/representing the Samba Team



Workgroup Server Interoperability Case

Case experience:

- Microsoft central in SMB/CIFS standardisation
- After adoption, MS stopped participation
- MS locks out competitors by deviation from the standard
- Modifications become valuable because they are secret
- Novell puts connector on client, locked out by MS

Current situation:

- Standard subverted, best competitor 10 years behind
- Microsoft refusing to release interoperability information
- New, office-related antitrust complaint by ECIS:

http://www.e-c-i-s.org/archives/2006/02/brussels_22_feb.html

European Interoperability Framework (EIF)

<http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/document/3761>

Interoperability & Open Standards are central

● EIF Open Standard Definition:

- The standard is adopted and will be maintained by a not-for-profit organisation, and its ongoing development occurs on the basis of an open decision-making procedure available to all interested parties (consensus or majority decision etc.).
- The standard has been published and the standard specification document is available either freely or at a nominal charge. It must be permissible to all to copy, distribute, and use it for no fee or at a nominal fee.
- The intellectual property - i.e. patents possibly present - of (parts of) the standard is made irrevocably available on a royalty-free basis.

● Discussions ongoing:

- Does MS-OOXML meet definition?
- Is the definition solid vis-a-vis all software models?



Impact of Free Software in European Union

- Interoperable Delivery of European eGovernment Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens (IDABC)
 - <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/>
 - Free Software observatory to encourage the spread and use of Best Practices in Europe
- The impact of Free/Libre/Open Source Software on innovation and competitiveness of the European Union
 - <http://www.flossimpact.eu>
 - Free Software key for ICT Competitiveness
 - “Defined broadly, FS-related services could reach a 32% share of all IT services by 2010, and the FS-related share of the economy could reach 4% of European GDP by 2010.”

Implications for ODF/MS-OOXML

- Open Document Format (ODF)
 - multiple implementations from competing vendors
 - product independent, including Free Software
 - several major vendors involved
 - specification still being completed
- MS Office OpenXML
 - only one implementation
 - product-specific specification
 - competing implementation unlikely
 - lack of confidence in sustained fidelity

Request to integrate MS-OOXML into ODF!

Principles for Interoperability

Problems:

- More standards mean less competition
- Proprietary formats cause loss of data control
- Format lock-in causes software lock-in

Solutions:

- Choose only one Open Standard per function
- Mandate use of that Open Standard in government
- Necessity to quantify the lock-in, e.g. Certified Open
 - Certification of interoperability
 - <http://www.certifiedopen.com>

Contact

Thank you for your attention!

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