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Free Software and Open Standards in the European Parliament

Ensuring utmost transparency - Free Software and Open Standards under the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament

Do public bodies in Europe have an obligation to move from closed source and lock-in to vendor independence and free software? In general probably yes, but is it also true for the European Parliament? Definitely! This is the stark conclusion of the study "Ensuring utmost transparency - Free Software and Open Standards under the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament" by Carlo Piana and Ulf Öberg.

It is clear, the study says, that the Parliament has imposed upon itself a commitment to conduct its activities with the utmost transparency. This commitment follows from the legal standing of the Rules of Procedure, and, when analysed by Piana and Öberg, it turns out the European Parliament's standard of openness is higher than that of other EU institutions. This fact has consequences.

The study investigates in depth how the Parliament's own transparency obligations should inform its decisions, policies and procedures with regard to free software and open standards, for example:

- when Parliament implements communication infrastructure like email, the implementation should not impair standards-based access and should not restrict the use of mailing lists and encryption
- when Parliament opens procurement procedures it should promote free software and open standards through proportionate and calibrated specifications as new EU rules allow for the taking into account of environmental and social considerations and innovation in the awarding of public contracts
- when Parliament decides to make a given set of data or information available to the public, this must be done through non-discriminatory, transparent and up-to-date means of communication, and in open formats that support further analyses, uses and releases
- when Parliament adopts free software and open standards it should follow and exceed measurable benchmarks that other public bodies in the EU have already provided
- when Parliament can choose technologies that allow others to work with Parliament's own systems and data, such technologies should be privileged, even if they were to incur some extra costs

The authors conclude that "the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament should whenever possible make **Free Software** and **Open Standards** mandatory for all systems and data used for the work of

Parliament. In our view, that is the most appropriate way for Parliament to meet its own standard of "utmost transparency".

The study has been supervised by Professor Douwe Korff who says it *"links this principle [of "utmost transparency"] with the technical standards and practical steps that can be taken to ensure its full implementation"* and that *"the authors have managed to draw on all these sources to indicate clearly what should be done in practical, technical terms by the officials managing the information and IT systems relating to the work of the European Parliament to truly and fully achieve the legal requirement of "utmost transparency". This report will become a major point of reference for the debates on those steps."*

- [Download the study \(first edition, PDF\)](#)

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