

## **SBS Forum on ICT standardisation: Open standards in ICT procurement**

Draft – Even report –

The European DIGITAL SME Alliance, in the framework of EU-co-funded actions to raise awareness of the benefits of standards among SMEs and in partnership with SBS-Small Business standards, organized the “SBS Forum on ICT standards for SMEs”. The event took place on January 23rd 2019, in Rue du Commerce 123, Brussels.

The “SBS Forum on ICT standards for SMEs” is a European platform for discussion and sharing of information about ongoing ICT standards activities that are relevant to SMEs. The Forum focuses particularly on digitisation of SMEs and it targets SMEs providing ICT services, as well as SME users of such services. The main target of the Forum are SMEs across the EU and EFTA member states, as well as associations representing SME interests.

The event focused on open standards and ICT hubs as tools towards successful procurement procedures. European SMEs are the major contributors to the European economy and a well of innovation potential. Yet, they struggle to compete with larger suppliers in procurement processes.

Open standards have proven important to the creation and development of ICT technologies, as they help preventing vendor lock-in and foster a level playing field between all suppliers for the benefit of SMEs. At the same time, digital innovation hubs, consortia and other forms of collaboration aim to pool individual SMEs’ strengths.

The SBS Forum on ICT Standards for SMEs had a total of 35 registered participants. 18 people attended the event on the day. The event focussed on open standards and SME collaboration in the form of hubs and consortia as tools for SMEs to successfully participate in procurement procedures, both in public and private sectors.

The event was opened by Sebastiano Toffaletti, Secretary General of the European DIGITAL SME Alliance and Christel Davidson, Director of Small Business Standards, who introduced the event and SBS to the audience. Mr Toffaletti noted that SMEs must anticipate an increase in standards concerning ICT procurement and should be prepared for future developments.

The European Commission, represented by Antonio Conte from DG GROW, highlighted the central role standards have and will continue to have in the development of procurement across the European Single Market. One tool the Commission is considering is a European Catalogue of Standards in ICT procurement, of which a prototype was launched in 2017.

Examples of organisations, BrambleHub from the UK, presented by Sachiko Muto, OpenForum Europe, and Kompetenzzentrum IT-Wirtschaft from Germany, presented by Norman Röhner, DIGITAL SME, which facilitate the successful collaboration of SMEs in procurement efforts revealed the need for interoperability standards in order to unlock the innovation potential among European SME ICT providers, to enable the digitisation of European industry, communities and administrations, as well as creating effective solutions for procurers, that at the same time save costs and strengthen local economies.

The benefits of a stronger engagement between public procurers and European ICT SMEs were highlighted by Aleksandra Olejnik of EURO CITIES’ presentation on local and municipal governments efforts to sustainably tackle challenges such as urban mobility, and the energy transition. ICT solutions are key in these efforts, providing outstanding opportunities for innovative digital SMEs.

A case study presented by Paulo Valente of Cable Europe showed how standards facilitate local service providers strengthening local communities, while also maintaining global interconnectivity and limiting fragmentation.

Following from the presentations' input, the participants concluded that the use of standards can have positive effects on SMEs and therefore on economic and social welfare. Special note was taken of not all standards impacting SME the same way, given the nature of different types of standards, such as interoperability protocols, product safety compliance specifications or management system standards, among others. There is a danger of the excessive use of certain certification standards as eligibility requirements can constitute a barrier to SMEs.

There was consensus that, therefore, public procurers would benefit from more articulated and clarified policies on the use of standards in public procurement. In order to achieve this, it is firstly necessary to develop a more accurate analysis on the socio - economic effects of different types of standards used in public procurement, while particularly taking into account the positive and negative effects on SMEs.

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