

## **DIGITALEUROPE COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT DIRECTIVE ON THE ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES' WEBSITES 2012/0340 (COD)**

**BRUSSELS, (June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014)** – DIGITALEUROPE is highly appreciative of the European Commission's proposal on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites.

It is key that Member States offer consistent access based on the requirements (level AA) specified in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0). WCAG is a series of design requirements rather than a traditional technical specification, developed and maintained by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) as part of their wider set of ongoing relevant work. WCAG 2.0 has been transposed into the international standard ISO/IEC 40500.

Website accessibility can be a key enabler in ensuring the accessibility of underlying services. It is critical to avoid the implementation of diverse, specific and eventually inconsistent requirements in the various Member States.

The proposed directive aims at promoting accessible services, aggregating demand for accessible solutions, minimising fragmentation and allowing wider market innovation as well as implementation of consistent solutions. DIGITALEUROPE recommends that the Directive is restructured to ensure it prevents national fragmentation and directly references international standards for compliance. It should explicitly require WCAG 2.0 or ISO/IEC 40500 rather than allow national variations, as evaluated by each nation, that undermine the objective of the directive.

DIGITALEUROPE notes the attention given to this important proposal by the European Parliament and supports the emphasis on training, awareness and effective enforcement but would caution against significant increase in scope, outside the public sector and beyond websites to non – web mobile applications, without sufficient consultation and without allowing due time for training and assessment programmes. In particular we caution against the use of EN301549 as it combines a number of other elements with WCAG 2.0 and is intended for general ICT procurement not ongoing management.

The list of key types of public sector bodies' websites included in the annex to the directive is a clever and convenient approach that allows for future extension to additional public sector services as they mature. This approach also retains scope for innovation and specialisation in new areas of public sector digital provisioning. However, it should be made clear that those listed key services are also covered when provided on behalf of public bodies by private companies.

DIGITALEUROPE encourages rapid progress on passing and implementing this directive subject to the scope remaining exclusively focused on public sector websites and services, including those provided on behalf of public bodies by private companies. In addition, DIGITALEUROPE would like to highlight that, as websites are continuously changing (addition of new data and content, structure changes/improvements, new presentations, etc.), they should be managed in an effective and dynamic way in order to ensure web accessibility is maintained. It is then important that this approach is tested and any lessons learned before further regulation is considered in this area.

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It is absolutely crucial for the ICT industry as well as for persons with disabilities to use the same accessibility rules and success criteria (WCAG2.0, level AA) for all websites offering monopolistic public services whether or not their creation and maintenance is subject to public procurement and whether or not their ownership is public or private. Otherwise fragmentation increases training and compliance timescales, requires differing, inconsistent evaluation and software tooling and increases the difficulty of ensuring interoperability with assistive technology. In this case a truly standardised approach maximises the benefits and minimises the time and cost of compliance.

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## ABOUT DIGITALEUROPE

**DIGITALEUROPE** represents the digital technology industry in Europe. Our members include some of the world's largest IT, telecoms and consumer electronics companies and national associations from every part of Europe. DIGITALEUROPE wants European businesses and citizens to benefit fully from digital technologies and for Europe to grow, attract and sustain the world's best digital technology companies.

**DIGITALEUROPE** ensures industry participation in the development and implementation of EU policies. DIGITALEUROPE's members include 59 corporate members and 36 national trade associations from across Europe. Our website provides further information on our recent news and activities: <http://www.digitaleurope.org>

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