

Public consultation on the Draft of the International public procurement tender

«Procurement & installation of mobile Informatics Laboratories in the 2nd degree of Education»

To: Special Committee for the implementation of educational actions (EYEEΔ),
C/c: To all Officials of the Greek State and in the European Commission, as well as those of other Organizations (Table of recipients at the end)

we write this present letter, in order to express our opinion, as citizens and as supporters of Free Software, aiming to highlight the defective way of implementing the International public tender, as it appears at: <http://tinyurl.com/ceeorsc>. Despite the various positive elements of this tender, with which we fully agree, the tender on the whole has NOT been designed in the most efficient manner and does not have as its basic criterion the school's and the students best interests. It creates the impression that it will mainly benefit the commercial suppliers, at the expenses of the educational process, becoming another isolated attempt, in the absence of a wider, more comprehensive plan.

By the way, we noticed that you reduced the "public" discussion, to an e-mail (eye-ypepth@minedu.gov.gr) and a fax number, with a vague promise that the various opinions will be published, in the future, on www.eye.minedu.gov.gr, abolishing therefore the concept of public discussion! This method does not even adopt the min. and most self-evident principle of open government (<http://www.opengov.gr/en/>), since we will never know what other citizens objected, nor are we to know whatever you may have answered to them, as everything happens "behind closed doors"! We wonder why you did not establish a transparent, honest and bilateral public discussion.

But let us concentrate our discussion on the substantial issues:

The effort committed in 2009, with the 120.000 student netbooks, constitutes the best possible example of the flawed ways with which the entire education sector is treated and, more in particular, the questions of its equipment.

Regarding the educational benefits, we can not even talk about it seriously, as there has never been any concrete, educationally useful and didactically consistent practice, adopting the use of personal computers. Furthermore, there have never been any publications or studies demonstrating the contrary. The example of a few isolated illuminated cases of teachers who cared enough to make good use of some of the thousands of laptops, to the degree they could, together with their students, should

certainly get credited to those same teachers and not to the educational policy of the Ministry of Education about this specific issue, which is, in any case, non-existent. Every teacher and every parent know fully well about the sad outcome of the previous experience, when you distributed thousands of laptops to the 1st Highschool students. These devices are only to be found, now days, either in school closets, or in commercial shops for the most diverse uses, or in students private houses, where they ended up as glorified game-consoles. A rather poor “harvest” for such a generous gesture from the Ministry, if we exclude the induced increase in shopping in the well known computer chains...

Despite we would expect the above experience to be helpful in planning the next moves with a little bit more wisdom, however, the policy you seem to follow again in this public procurement, in the middle of the economic crisis, does not leave any margin for optimism. We believe that this tender requires a series of drastic changes, that can not be implemented within the present context of the public discussion.

1) ***The overall impression is that the occasional referral to Free Software was made in a fake and derogatory manner, with no care in defining the right criteria.*** The authors of this text seem to have in mind that the basic use will be in the Windows environment. So, they included Free Software just to prevent the various “weird people” from whinging, by requiring to have installed “something” called “GNU/Linux”. There are, however, many studies, at a European (and not only) level, highlighting the important financial and the other advantages of FLOSS. ***How is it then possible to consider as acceptable the publication of such deficient requirements that prevent the Public sector from buying the best possible hardware and software?***

2) Whilst for the operational system of Microsoft you define exact technical requirements (Windows 7 pro, at 64bit), **for the GNU/Linux operational system, you remain completely vague and you do not define any technical specifications** (i.e.. 32 or 64bit, eligible distributions and Graphic User Interfaces, etc). It could therefore happen that a supplier will provide something useless (i.e. Linpus), just in order to satisfy the minimum requirements. In doing so, **you devalue the choice of GNU/Linux as a platform, creating future problems for those schools that should eventually opt in favour of FLOSS** (i.e., in the context of an initiative at the local Municipality level), when they will discover that the

devices sold to them are simply incompatible with the GNU/Linux version of that time, because of the use of proprietary products!

- 3) ***There is no documentation in this tender, nor is there any other publicly available documentation to be found anywhere else, to explain the fundamental reason for this procurement*** (surely not of the kind "ITC Is a very good thing"), ***nor do you offer any reasons for your choice to buy laptops***, instead of buying normal desktop PC's. Unfortunately, you did not take care to proceed with the ***necessary publication of the study which was laid in writing prior to this tender***. The only unofficial argument we heard "in favour" of the choice of these laptops is that many schools do not have appropriate classrooms that can be converted in PC Laboratories. It is however clear that ***this "centralized" decision*** to oblige all the schools in the country to equip themselves with mobile Labs, just because some of them do not have adequate classrooms, ***makes injustice*** to those who do have such premises and have them already equipped.

- 4) To the contrary, ***you seem to favour the creation of an oligopoly situation*** by proposing ***letters of guarantee from a bank*** ("they must cover a percentage of 5% of the budget, for each separate section of this tender (Sector 1: 304.225€, Sector 2: 319.275€ , Sector 3: 322.500€ ") and by ***imposing excessively limiting conditions that prevent any alternative technologies*** (see the much cheaper ARM-based netbooks, or the fat-and-thin clients model, or the x86-based multi-seat desktops with FLOSS), focusing at R&D rather than at retail selling. So, if you concede a laptop per student, and you "assign" it to the student at the beginning of the year, for use within the classroom, ***assuming the responsibility to give it back at the end, and be charged for whatever damage he/she may have caused***, it would perhaps make sense. But now, that we are talking about a small number of devices, to be shared by an entire school, ***many logical questions are raised***. We certainly do not suggest that these multi-million tenders should be assigned to small firms without letters of guarantee, but that ***we should re-examine which works need to be labelled as "large" and which ones can be productively divided in a few smaller ones***, widening the competition. ***The right thing would be to prepare, at the same time, 2 different "framework packages"*** (see examples of various developed countries): ***"Procurement of a mobile lab"*** or ***"Procurement of***

desktops". In such a manner, the State could negotiate centrally a good price for the hardware, the software and other services and, afterwards, **every school could choose the most economical/efficient framework package that suits them.**

- 5) ***This public tender, co-financed by the European Commission, at its present shape, does not create the desirable conditions for local development of know-how and stimulation of the local economy.*** In similar tenders in the E.E., they made the choice of Free Software, proceeding with a massive order of PC's, as well as the continuous training of Teachers in using computers and software. For example, in Andalusia (Spain), they started a system involving 220.000 desktop PC's, based in Free Software, which caters for 600.000 students, in 2.000 schools: <http://tinyurl.com/2eh4xwy>
- 6) In section **LAP12**, there is a detailed description about the **anti-virus software** that should be present in Windows. It must be made clear that **this is ONLY necessary for Windows 7.** Furthermore, **every anti-virus programme induces an increase in cost, but it also takes its toll on the entire running of a laptop!** It remains unclear if the phrase «only for Windows 7» applies to the entire LAP 12 section. ***There is no mention about the intrinsic resistance that GNU/ Linux displays against viruses and the obvious advantage that derives for schools.***
- 7) In section **LAP 8.4**, regarding the Web-camera resolution, **a minimal resolution must be mentioned** (ie., min. 1.3MP), whilst in section **LAP 8.1**, regarding the screen resolution, a minimum required resolution must be mentioned (ie., a resolution in the order of 1024x768, is NOT sufficient for a 15.6" screen).
- 8) The tender for this procurement, requires that all performance measurements be carried out with a proprietary benchmark software (Bapco Sysmark 2007 Preview Rating), specialized in Windows, **not taking into consideration the use of an analogous Free Software tool!** (ie., Phoronix test suite). The right thing would be to improve the requirements of this tender, (or even of the following ones), so that we can assure the presence of a minimum quality and efficiency of the GNU/Linux sector, which seems entirely abandoned... It is **indispensable to have correct performance measurements in the GNU/Linux environment,** just in the same way that you require for Windows: This will make sure that the chosen

hardware will have optimal support for GNU/Linux, and not something that will simply “drag itself”, due to the lack of drivers, or because of poor quality drivers. **With this tender, it will be permitted to the suppliers to sell to the State “useless” devices**, as far as GNU/Linux is concerned. This is another ***indication of a “photographic” tender, written with specific proprietary commercial products in mind***

- 9) It is, also, useful to demand from the supplier, as a requisite, to **offer a guarantee of no presence of technical faults in BIOS** (i.e., ACPI), something not unusual in our days, with laptops!
- 10) **You also have to clearly mention the quality characteristics regarding the support for the GNU/Linux distribution to be installed:** the offered distribution must comprise **support and updates for at least 5 years** (ie., Long term Support or something at an enterprise level, etc.), which will not end after a while, leaving our schools with antiquated software. Another very serious quality characteristic that must be integrated in this tender, is the available variety of compatible software in offer. This could be approached by analysing the **possibilities of the package manager and of the online repository/software centre for each proposed distribution**, that should contain “more than [xxx] available applications”. Alternatively, you could look out for an application list that should “at least” be offered in the repositories of the eligible distribution. There have been various lists with acceptable educational FLOSS applications, at a European level, and a Greek list could therefore be based on any of them. The criteria about which application to consider as mature for educational use, are freely available in the various European projects that serve the purpose of “quality observatories”.
- 11) In periods like the one we are going through, **we have the duty to opt for the most economical solution for our kids, with the best possible result for their education**, so that they learn something substantial in the new digital era and NOT just how to become future clients of the corporation A or B. It is not possible in times of crisis, when our schools can not even afford the most basic things, to throw away money in proprietary licenses of use. A **strictly financial approach in this tender represents a mistake**, because the **exclusion of free and open technologies constitutes a gagging of the educational process**. It is also

necessary to keep in mind ***eventual objections***, both from educators and parents, who are obliged to accept a partial, instead of a global education for their kids.

12) LAP 13.2, «The office suite with productivity applications can be common for both operational systems, or a different one». The ideal would be to have ***a COMMON office suite***. Because, in the opposite case, ***the documents will not be compatible with MS Office !*** The amount of money to pay in licence fees is too large for MS Office, and it will consume a great part of the budget. The ***ideal solution combining an efficient running of the desired office function and the saving of money, is the LibreOffice suite***. It has repeatedly been put to the test, both in the public and in the private sector and proved to be excellent, with an easy learning curve, compatible with MS closed document formats and performing equally well (if not even better, depending on the work required).

13) When you state that the office suite must also offer the “ability to manage e-mails”, ***you essentially describe “photographically” the MS Office product*** and you confirm that ***the entire tender is “tailored” in favour of its proprietary products***. We think that we have the right to ask for some answers from you!

14) LAP 16.1, «In the eventuality of a theft, all laptops will be equipped with safety locking and deactivation mechanisms, which can not be overcome by a BIOS update or by deleting and reinstalling the software. These must be described in detail.» This sounds interesting. A lock-out mechanism through the secure boot? Does Secure Boot work though in the case of Windows 7? Or does the tender mean a lock-out through BIOS? But this can only be applied to Windows.

The technical specifications may perhaps include the (nominal) presence of two operational systems, with double-boot, but in essence, ***the entire tender has been set up in a sketchy manner and promoting the “closed source” commercial products***. In order to ensure a fair chance of participation for all the FLOSS solutions, it is ***necessary to write up a new tender notice and new improved technical specifications***, so that European Commission funds are put to the best possible use, but also in order to derive the maximum possible benefits for students, teachers, for the local economy, and the wider society as a whole.

We fully comprehend the Ministry's haste to stimulate the market and make the money

flow again. ***But why does this have to lead us to yet another debacle? Why do the efforts to correctly implement ICT in the teaching process (that the same Ministry finances and supports) must be nullified for yet another time? Why is it mandatory to oblige all Teaching Staff to see themselves, yet again, as a simple spectator of the developments that are “centrally” mandated?***

In total, this procurement will lead in the acquisition of 1.760 Mobile Labs with:

- * 26.400 Laptops
- * 1.760 Docking and transport stations/lockers
- * 1.760 WiFi Access Points

The Greek Prime Minister has recently travelled to Munich, in a city that saved millions of Euros, adopting widely FLOSS solutions. We suspect that nobody cared to inform him about this aspect. ***The adoption of FLOSS in 26400 school laptops, will save a lot of money which can again be paid back, for the creation of support and training networks in favour of those teachers that will be called to make good use of this technology.***

But, ***it is not just about the financial factor.*** The Free Software world is, above all, made out of a ***system of values and principles of free and unrestricted access to knowledge, equal chances of access to knowledge, cooperation and participation on equal terms.*** It is therefore a set of values that inspires to people the respect of their rights and fosters their creativity. It is not just about some weird and picturesque folks, who spend their time with exotic stuff. It's about a large community that highlights the principles and the foundations of our humanity. ***Free Software embodies a framework of values, which must serve as an obstacle to the moral decadence*** and immunize creatively the body of education. It is certain that the Free Software world, ***both the individual users and the Communities, is ready to help out on a voluntary basis, in the phase of the transition effort of education to FLOSS, provided of course that you call for it.*** And this may take place now, immediately! Saving all that money, we can ***pay it in favour of a well organized and efficient training of our Teaching Staff, as well as assigning the technical support of these systems to Greek IT companies, and thus, creating the preconditions for a healthy development of the Greek software industry.***

It is impossible for us to stay unresponsive to these faulty methods. ***We therefore ask you to cancel this tender,*** with the specifications on which we commented above and,

we claim that **it is NOT necessary to make provisions for a double operational system, but we should only offer pure Free Software solutions. We suggest you move on to a decentralized implementation of this procurement,** through the new type of Kallikrates Municipalities, the local School Committees and the local IT firms that will take on the support and the maintenance of the equipment, as well as the flexible implementation of the procurement. **The support of Teaching Staff in using Free Software is of critical importance. This work must therefore incorporate this component of training and support towards Teachers, along its entire time length.**

We nurture the hope about receiving a reasoned and documented (as well as expressed in understandable Greek language) answer to our objections, but we are also looking forward to seeing our entire discussion made publicly available.

[GreekLUG](#)

ASSOCIATION OF GREEK USERS & FRIENDS OF FLOSS

Appendix: Table of recipients

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