Promoting PSI re-use in Cyprus

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The latest developments in PSI re-use in Cyprus. What events are planned for 2016?

Until 2008, "open data" or "PSI re-use" was a term almost unknown in Cyprus. It was in 2008, when the Cyprus PSI team was set up in the Public Administration and Personnel Department (PAPD), which is a department of the Ministry of Finance in Cyprus. The PAPD is the body responsible for the implementation of the PSI Directive and the promotion of PSI re-use in Cyprus. This project is part of the Digital and the e-Government Strategy of Cyprus and is actively supported by the Office of the Under Secretary to the President of Cyprus. Even though the PSI re-use is currently not widespread in Cyprus, the Cyprus PSI team has put a lot of effort so far into trying to overcome all the related barriers. Indeed, we are very happy to see that after the recent activities of PSI team, Cyprus has gained a better position in the   ePSI Scoreboard!

Cyprus developed a National PSI Action Plan in 2013, covering the period from 2014 to 2018. The Action Plan is based on 4 main pillars:

1) Setting Up the necessary implementation mechanisms

2) Transposition of Directive 2013/37/EC and New National Legislation

3) Development of National PSI Portal – Publication of Public Sector Bodies (PSBs) Data on the Portal

4) Implementation of Communication Strategy – Promotion of PSI Re-Use in both Public and Private Sectors)

Also, it contains a series of actions, which aim at encouraging the public sector in Cyprus to embrace the open data initiatives and understand the potential of providing its datasets in a truly open manner. At the very heart of the Action Plan is the introduction of a PSI liaison officer or PSI champion in every Public Sector Body (PSB), who is responsible for the implementation and promotion of the National Action Plan at PSB level.

The revised PSI Directive 2013/37/EC was transposed into national law in December 2015. The legal document for Open Data in Cyprus contains a number of clauses that make it mandatory for public bodies to release their data on the portal. Furthermore, it formally sets up the necessary implementation mechanisms for the re-use of public sector information in Cyprus: the Overviewing / Coordination Mechanism, the Dispute and Complaints Resolution Mechanism, the Costing Mechanism and the Dissemination Mechanism. The aim is to release data free of charge by default and with as fewer exceptions as possible that have to go a priori through the Treasury of the Republic.

The National Open Data Portal was launched in 2014 (www.data.gov.cy). It has been developed by PAPD in association with the Department of Information Technology Services (DITS). It is an one-stop shop in the form of a web portal for the publication and provision of PSI. Through the portal, a user can easily search, download and submit requests for data sets. The relevant metadata is also published on the portal along with information regarding charging and licenses. The portal currently hosts over 400 datasets, while it is envisaged to host more than 1000 datasets by the end of June of 2016.

In order for this to become feasible, there was a need to actively assist a total of 100 government

bodies to identify, evaluate and publish their data online. This was done through the commissioning of Deloitte Ltd to provide technical support to the public bodies in implementing the Directive and in publishing their data, a project fully funded by the European Commission, through the Structural Reform Support Service for Cyprus. Deloitte Ltd has been very supportive, so far, in following up on these activities, through one-to-one meetings with the various departments. The project which started in August 2015 and is expected to be completed by November 2016, also aims at promoting PSI re-use to both the public and the private sector. As a result, an open data communication strategy has been designed, which is being implemented, as part of the project, in order to raise awareness and stimulate PSI re-use in Cyprus. To this end, various actions, including the design and dissemination of logos, brochures, posters and publication of articles have so far been taken.

Furthermore, there is a list of events planned for 2016, the main of which are:

1) Press Conference for the official launch of the project (March 2016)

2) 1st Cyprus PSI Conference (June 2016)

3) 3rd PSBs PSI Workshop (July 2016)

3) 1st Cyprus Open Data Hackathon (September 2016)

Each of the aforementioned events is aiming at certain target audiences/communities. For example, the first two events aim to promote PSI re-use among citizens and businesses, while the third one is a 're-think, evaluate and plan' workshop that engages PSBs as the providers of PSI. Finally, the Open Data Hackathon is aimed to engage the IT communities, new developers and potential entrepreneurs / start -ups.

Obviously, the whole process has not been smooth, as there are a lot of barriers and challenges that need to be overcome in order to enable the publication and further use of PSI in Cyprus. A big challenge is to motivate civil servants to put in the extra work next to their everyday tasks in order to publish data online. Another challenge for the PSI team is to raise awareness about PSI re-use both in private and public sectors, a notion that most have never heard of before. The Cyprus PSI team regards PSI as a potential source for economic growth, new investments and job creation and this is the message promoted through the communication strategy.

To sum up, Cyprus hopefully, in the next months, is going to have a lot of exciting news to share about the development of PSI re-use in Cyprus. Therefore, the Cyprus PSI team will continue working hard, in order to enable open data in Cyprus and to promote transparency and growth!