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Awards

Open Source for a Competitive, Sovereign Europe

European Open Source Policy Summit 2025

Prepared for policymakers and stakeholders in the EU digital ecosystem by OpenForumEurope

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TEAM

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Executive Summary

The **2025 European Open Source Policy Summit** provided a clear and urgent signal: Europe must act swiftly and decisively to **unlock the competitive, economic, and strategic value of open source software**. With a new European Commission team and freshly elected Members of the European Parliament, 2025 has become an urgent time for the European Union to treat open source not merely as a technical tool, but as a pillar of **digital sovereignty and industrial resilience**, not least given the new Commission, the ramp-up in efforts around digital sovereignty, and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations in Summer 2025.

Speakers throughout the Summit emphasised the unique potential of open source to foster **innovation, enable public-private collaboration**, empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and **reduce dependence on monopolistic digital infrastructure providers**. Yet, they also issued a clear warning: the open source industry in Europe is still underpowered, fragmented, and constrained by outdated funding mechanisms and misaligned regulatory structures. The European Open Source Academy (EOSA) emerges in this context as a vital initiative to coordinate efforts, build capacity across sectors, and provide the strategic guidance needed to turn this mandate into action.

To maintain relevance and sovereignty in the global digital arena, Europe must embrace an open source-first approach across policy, procurement, and public infrastructure – not as a slogan, but as a strategic mandate.

This mandate is not just about principles, but about survival and leadership. As emphasised throughout the Summit, open source empowers Europe to pool innovation, lower barriers for SMEs, and build resilient, collaborative ecosystems in areas ranging from AI and cybersecurity to public sector IT. By sharing the burden of innovation, fostering standardisation, and enabling cross-border cooperation, **open source provides the foundation for Europe to compete on a global scale** – not just as consumers of foreign technology, but as sovereign creators of world-class digital solutions.

Europe has the talent, the frameworks, and the community – but now it needs coordinated action. Strategic investment, regulatory alignment, and open procurement policies are needed to transform intent into impact. The time for deliberation is over; the time for execution is now.



Context and Problem Statement

his shift in visibility and political relevance was underscored just one day before the Summit, at the inaugural [European Open Source Awards](#), where the community honored its four founding members – [Daniel Stenberg \(cURL\)](#), [Amandine Le Pape \(matrix.org\)](#), [David Cuartielles \(Arduino\)](#), and [Lydia Pintscher \(Wikimedia Germany\)](#). Their recognition marked more than a celebration; it signaled the beginning of a new era in which open source is acknowledged not only for its economic impact, but also for its political, social, and cultural significance across Europe.

The Summit opened with a powerful acknowledgment: open source is now on the table at the highest levels of European policymaking. [Astor Nummelin Carlberg's \(Executive Director of OpenForum Europe\)](#) opening remarks reflected this shift, highlighting the need for alignment across European institutions. With thanks to key supporters – including [Red Hat](#), the [Linux Foundation](#), [Eclipse Foundation](#), [Mercedes-Benz](#), OS2, and [Mozilla](#) – the event reaffirmed the community's broad and growing base.

Yet behind the momentum lies a sober reality. According to [Frank Karlitschek](#), CEO of [Nextcloud](#), and [Keith Bergelt](#), CEO of the [Open Invention Network](#), Europe continues to face intense competitive pressure from global actors, particularly the United States and China. The EU's digital autonomy is compromised not only by foreign infrastructure dominance, but also by a **cultural reluctance to recognise the full potential of its own innovation ecosystem**. The belief that Europe is lagging behind in tech is false, but persistent. The challenge is not capability, but coordination, awareness, and courage to act.



Policy Landscape

The Summit's panels painted a picture of both promise and paralysis. **Sara Gallian**, of the [Eclipse Foundation](#), emphasised that **open source allows innovation without the impossible pressure to always disrupt**. It enables shared risk, faster development, and higher returns. **Philip Ahmann**, from [Bosch](#) and the [Linux Foundation](#), underlined that many of the digital innovations we take for granted today – **including version control and standardisation – emerged from open source**.

Yet, as the conversation made clear, **systemic barriers remain**. SMEs are often excluded from European consortia due to excessive bureaucracy and lack of visibility. Regulations, while necessary, often fail to account for the structure of open communities. Fragmentation across member states impedes coordination. Public funding is allocated inefficiently – companies spend more time reporting than delivering.

At the same time, open source has never been more important. As **Frank Karlitschek – the CEO of Nextcloud** – stressed, Europe's ability to meet geopolitical challenges hinges on fast, decisive action in the digital realm. And as **Keith Bergelt** from the [Open Innovation Network \(OIN\)](#) noted, the **collaborative nature of open source is not only a technological model – it is a social and economic one**, lifting up communities and creating space for new players to emerge across sectors.

A key development reinforcing this political and societal momentum is the launch of the [European Open Source Academy](#), announced at the [European Open Source Awards](#) on January 30, 2025. Organised by **OpenForum Europe** as part of a large **European Commission-funded consortium**, the Academy's inauguration marks a significant step in **institutionalising open source as a strategic pillar for Europe's digital future**. The ceremony, held in Brussels, gathered open source leaders, policymakers, and innovators in a formal setting that **reflected the growing maturity of the ecosystem**.

The recognition of outstanding contributors – including **Daniel Stenberg, Amandine Le Pape, David Cuartielles, and Lydia Pintscher** – underscored the diversity and depth of talent in Europe. As Felix Reda ([GitHub](#)) noted during the ceremony, [GitHub](#) data now shows that the EU has surpassed the United States in public software code contributions – a powerful testament to Europe's position as a **global leader in open collaboration**.

The Academy's long-term mission, as **articulated by project coordinator Johan Linåker ([Research Institute of Sweden](#))**, is to elevate public recognition, foster skills development, and enhance **Europe's competitiveness and strategic autonomy** through open source and open hardware. Its creation represents both a **symbolic and structural milestone for Europe's open source trajectory**.



Policy Recommendations

📄 Recommendation 1: Break the Chains – Make Open Source the Default in Public Procurement

Europe's current digital trajectory demands **immediate, structural shifts to unleash the full value of open source**. First, the European Union must commit to a decisive shift in public procurement practices. **Jean-Philippe Balança** ([SMILE](#)) issued the call forcefully: if public administrations stop spending millions on proprietary licenses and instead redirect those funds toward European open source solutions, they will not only build local capacity but also **break free from technological dependency**. The existence of strong, viable alternatives – like [Nextcloud](#) – demonstrates that what's missing is not capability, but demand. **Public money should serve public code**.

📄 Recommendation 2: Unlock Europe's Innovation Engine – Fund SMEs, Not Just Paperwork

The European Union must fundamentally rethink how it supports innovation in open source. As voiced across the Summit, the **current funding architecture is misaligned with the needs of SMEs** – the very actors capable of driving agile innovation. The application process is prohibitively complex, and the reporting requirements too burdensome. Many small enterprises spend more time filling out paperwork than building software. As **Sara Gallian** ([Eclipse Foundation](#)) pointed out, promising projects often collapse under this weight. **Introducing microfunding, reducing administrative overhead, and creating accessible entry points would unlock the full potential of Europe's distributed talent base**.

📄 Recommendation 3: End the Myths – Make Open Source Literacy a European Priority

A foundational misunderstanding persists around open source in Europe. **Philip Ahmann** ([Bosch](#)) stressed that many people – including those in influential positions – still **cannot believe open source is a public good**, or that it operates voluntarily at scale. This lack of awareness is a major brake on adoption and policy support. Europe needs to **invest in digital literacy and open source education** – not just in schools and universities, but across government, media, and business leadership. Public understanding is not a soft issue; it is an enabling condition for the entire ecosystem to grow.

📄 Recommendation 4: Rewrite the Rules – Modernise Europe's Approach to Standardisation

Europe's standardisation environment must evolve to keep pace with the software that increasingly underpins its infrastructure and economy. A growing misalignment exists between traditional standardisation bodies and the open, iterative, and decentralised nature of open source development. During the panel on regulated software markets, **Jochen Friedrich** ([IBM](#)), **Tobie Langel** ([Open Source Initiative](#)), and **Christoph Winterhalter** ([German Institute for Norms](#)) urged immediate steps to bridge this gap. They called for **international coordination, streamlined processes, and direct involvement of open source contributors in pre-standardisation**. As **Winterhalter** emphasised, the transition must begin now – delaying further risks locking out innovation entirely.

📄 Recommendation 5: From Code to Champions – Invest in Europe's Open Source Powerhouses

Europe cannot become a global digital leader without its own champions. As **Jean-Philippe Balança** ([SMILE](#)) observed, [Airbus](#) did not succeed by staying small and dependent on grants – it scaled with intention, backed by investment and ambition. **The same approach is needed for open source**. Europe must move beyond pilot projects and one-off research exercises. It must invest in turning successful initiatives into real products, sustainable businesses, and global assets. The European Union should back companies that **not only create code, but also infrastructure and market alternatives** to dominant proprietary players.

📄 A Coordinated Response: The European Open Source Academy Signals the Shift

These recommendations are not just theoretical. The very creation of the **European Open Source Academy (EOSA)** is itself a direct response to the challenges and ambitions outlined above. The Academy represents a strategic commitment to making **open source central to Europe's digital future**. It aims to **amplify public recognition, build skills across society, and facilitate structural reforms that support open source adoption at scale**. By establishing **EOSA**, Europe is beginning to **institutionalise** open source as a force for economic competitiveness, societal resilience, and strategic autonomy. The Academy's founding is not an endpoint – it is a declaration that Europe is ready to lead.

Impacts and Benefits

If these policies are implemented, the benefits will be substantial. Open source **offers a model for sharing costs, accelerating development, and ensuring transparency**. It creates conditions for SMEs to thrive with lower investment, especially in regulated sectors like automotive and public infrastructure. It allows Europe to maintain sovereignty in AI, cloud, and cybersecurity by owning not just products, but the means of production.

Public sector collaboration – as seen in initiatives like the Sovereign Digital Workspace between France, Germany, and the Netherlands – shows how **open governance, political support, and shared investment can drive sustainable digital public goods**. Panelists such as **Rasmus Frey (OS2)**, **Emma Ghariani (Direction interministérielle du numérique, DINUM)**, **Ben Cervený (Foundation for Public Code)**, **Jutta Horstmann (ZenDiS)**, and **Daniel Goldscheider (OpenWallet Foundation)** all emphasised that long-term collaboration must be underpinned by **governance, interoperability, and step-by-step engagement across local and national governments**.

Meanwhile, the open source AI community, represented by **Stefano Maffulli (Open Source Initiative)**, **Alexandra Geese (Member of the European Parliament)**, **Lucie-Aimée Kaffee (Hugging Face)**, **Yann Lechelle (Probabl.ai)**, and **Ciaran O’Riordan (OpenForum Europe)**, is creating models that could anchor European leadership in **responsible, transparent artificial intelligence**. Their interventions underlined that openness in AI – from training data to models – is not just a technical preference but a democratic imperative.

Europe has the expertise, the community, and the infrastructure – what it needs now is a coherent framework and political will.



Conclusion

Throughout the Summit, one message rose above all others: **this is not a time for memos**. As **Jean-Philippe Balança (smile)** stated unequivocally, Europe has five years to build an ecosystem where open source is not an afterthought but a foundation. **The industry is ready. The tools are there. What is missing is coordination, investment, and above all – courage.**

An open source deal – not in rhetoric, but in execution – must now be the central ambition of Europe’s digital agenda. To compete globally, serve citizens effectively, and uphold its values, Europe must turn open source into an industrial strategy, a procurement policy, a funding model, and a cultural shift.

In this context, adopting the outputs and frameworks that the **European Open Source Academy** develops is **crucial for promoting transparency, enhancing accountability, and empowering stakeholders**, ultimately fostering more effective and sustainable policy outcomes. While the Academy currently comprises four members, it is set to expand soon, bringing in a **broader range of expertise across sectors to strengthen its support for EOSA’s mission.**

The next move belongs to Europe’s institutions. The time to act is now.





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