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To: Yassen Todorov, Senior Project Adviser, European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA)

Subject: Proposal for the Adoption of European Open Source Solutions to Strengthen the EU's Digital Sovereignty

On behalf of Open Technologies Alliance (GFOSS), we are writing to address the growing concerns regarding the European Commission's reliance on non-EU, proprietary software for its mission-critical internal systems. We commend your initiative to explore and adopt European-developed Open Source Software (OSS), a strategic move that fully aligns with the European Union's goals for digital sovereignty, data security, and technological independence. This proposal aims to provide a comprehensive roadmap, beginning with the immediate need for a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and a Ticketing System, and expanding to a broader, interoperable ecosystem of European OSS solutions capable of replacing the current proprietary systems.

1. The challenge: Mitigating dependency on Non-EU software

The observation that "the heart of Europe beats with an American rhythm" in its digital infrastructure highlights a fundamental risk. The extensive use of US-based software such as Microsoft Teams, Viva Engage, and ServiceNow for managing confidential information, internal discussions, and critical operations exposes the Commission to significant risks related to data privacy and security. A shift towards European Open Source Solutions is not merely preferable, it is essential to truly safeguard the Commission's data and internal communications.

2. Recommended European open source solutions

We fully support the ongoing efforts to adopt **Zammad**, a German open-source ticketing system. This is an excellent first step. To further this initiative, we present the following recommendations for mature, enterprise-ready European OSS solutions for CRM.

2.1. Ticketing System: Zammad (Germany)

Zammad is a modern, web-based open-source helpdesk and issue-tracking system. Developed in Germany, it offers a robust alternative to proprietary ticketing solutions.

- **Integration with Nextcloud:** Zammad integrates with Nextcloud, a leading European open-source collaboration platform. This integration enhances user workflow by providing a dashboard widget in Nextcloud with an overview of Zammad tickets, unified search capabilities, and notifications on ticket status updates.

.2. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems

Based on our analysis, we propose the following European open-source CRM solutions for consideration. Each presents a unique set of strengths and weaknesses that should be evaluated against the specific needs of the Commission.

A. Odoo (Belgium)

Odoo is a comprehensive suite of open-source business management applications, including a powerful CRM module. Headquartered in Belgium, Odoo is a significant player in the European OSS ecosystem.

- **Strengths:**

- **All-in-One platform:** Offers a wide range of integrated modules (sales, marketing, accounting, etc.), which can be beneficial if the Commission decides to expand its use of the platform beyond CRM.
- **User-friendly interface:** The platform is known for its clean and intuitive interface, which can facilitate user adoption and reduce training time.
- **High degree of customization:** Being open-source, Odoo is highly customizable to fit specific workflows and requirements.
- **Strong community and partner network:** Odoo has a large and active community, as well

as a global network of partners providing support and customization services.

- **Weaknesses:**

- **Complexity in setup and customization:** While highly customizable, tailoring Odoo to specific, complex needs may require significant technical expertise.
- **Potential for higher costs with more modules:** While the core CRM module is open source, adding more applications and users can increase the total cost of ownership.
- **Learning curve for advanced features:** The breadth of its features can present a steep learning curve for users wanting to utilize its more advanced capabilities.

B. SuiteCRM (United Kingdom)

SuiteCRM is an award-winning, open-source CRM application that originated as a fork of SugarCRM. The company behind it, SalesAgility, is based in the UK.

- **Strengths:**

- **Cost-Effective:** The core software is free to use, making it a highly affordable option.
- **Robust core functionality:** Provides a comprehensive set of features for sales, marketing, and customer service automation.
- **Active community support:** It benefits from a large and active open-source community that contributes to its development and provides support.
- **Flexibility and customization:** As an open-source platform, it offers extensive customization possibilities to adapt to specific business processes.

Weaknesses:

- **Outdated user interface:** Some users find the user interface to be less modern compared to other CRM solutions, which could impact user experience.
- **Limited Out-of-the-Box integrations:** Compared to some competitors, SuiteCRM may have fewer ready-made integrations with third-party applications.
- **Performance issues with large datasets:** There have been reports of performance degradation when handling a very large number of users or extensive data.

C. ONLYOFFICE Workspace (Latvia)

ONLYOFFICE, developed by the Latvian company Ascensio System SIA, offers a complete productivity suite called Workspace, which includes CRM and project management tools.

- **Strengths:**
 - **Integrated workspace:** Provides a comprehensive suite of tools, including document editors, project management, email, and CRM, all in one platform. This can streamline workflows and reduce the need for multiple disparate applications.
 - **Strong document collaboration:** It is particularly well-regarded for its powerful real-time document editing and collaboration features, with high compatibility with Microsoft Office formats.
 - **Security-Focused:** Places a strong emphasis on security, offering both cloud-based and on-premise deployment options, giving organizations full control over their data.
- **Weaknesses:**
 - **Less mature CRM module:** While the document collaboration tools are very mature, the CRM module may not be as feature-rich as dedicated CRM platforms like Odoo or SuiteCRM.
 - **Limited Third-Party integrations:** Integrations with other platforms can be limited compared to more established CRM solutions.

Potential for higher cost: While a free community edition is available, the enterprise edition with full features and support can be relatively expensive.

3. A broader strategy: A deep dive into an Interoperable European OSS Ecosystem

Beyond immediate needs, we propose a strategic transition to a fully integrated ecosystem of European OSS tools. The following platforms are not only European in origin or focus but are already widely adopted by governments, public bodies, and educational institutions across the EU, demonstrating their maturity and reliability.

3.1. Nextcloud Hub: The collaboration platform

Overview and Functionality:

Nextcloud Hub is a leading European open-source platform for content collaboration, providing a suite of tools for file sharing, communication (chat/calls), and project management. It integrates essential functionalities: file storage and synchronization, document editing and sharing, email, calendars, video calls (via Nextcloud Talk), collaborative whiteboards, and document processing with ONLYOFFICE/Collabora. Its functionality can be extended significantly through its marketplace of apps.

Key Features:

- File synchronization and sharing with granular permissions.
- Group chat and video calls with end-to-end encryption via Nextcloud Talk.
- Integrated email, contacts, and calendar management (Nextcloud Groupware).
- Task management (Deck & project management), digital signatures (e.g., Documenso).
- Secure data sharing with end-to-end encryption and extensive access control policies.

Use cases and EU deployments:

Nextcloud Hub is widely used by public sector bodies, including the governments of **Germany** and **Serbia**, major organizations like **Deutsche Telekom/MagentaCloud**, and NGOs such as **Amnesty International Spain**. Use cases include secure document collaboration for remote teams, unified intranets with video conferencing, and ensuring GDPR compliance and digital sovereignty via local/private cloud hosting.

Commercial solutions replaced:

- Microsoft 365 (SharePoint, OneDrive, Teams)
- Google Workspace (Docs, Drive, Meet)

- Box, Dropbox, Zoom, Slack (to a certain extent)

Artificial Intelligence in Nextcloud:

Nextcloud integrates a powerful **AI Assistant**, designed to enhance productivity while maintaining strict data control within EU infrastructure. This local AI assistant offers features like automated summary generation, text rephrasing, translation, and speech-to-text, all in full compliance with privacy policies and without data leakage to third parties. For the EU context, this helps accelerate the processing of large volumes of documents and emails, automates routine tasks, and enhances knowledge retrieval securely.

3.2. Element/Matrix & Jitsi: Secure communication and conferencing

Overview, Origin, and Functionality:

- **Element** is an open-source application for instant messaging, file sharing, and voice/video calls. It implements the **Matrix** protocol, which supports decentralization (federation) and end-to-end encryption. The developer company, Element, is headquartered in the UK and France, with a primary focus on Europe.
- **Jitsi** consists of open-source tools for real-time video conferencing and multimedia communication. It began as a student project at the University of Strasbourg (France) and is now supported by European non-profits and private entities with strong ties to academia.

Use Cases and EU Deployments:

- **France (Tchap):** The official internal communication tool for all French civil servants is based on Element and Matrix.
- **Germany (Bundeswehr):** The German Ministry of Defence uses Matrix and Element for secure and confidential communication.
- **France-Spain (Jitsi):** Jitsi Meet was used for governmental video conferences during the pandemic by both the French (DINUM) and Spanish governments.
- **International Bodies:** NATO, the United Nations, and the UK-Ukraine Ministries of Defence use Element-Matrix for secure real-time communication.

Commercial Solutions Replaced:

- Microsoft Teams (for chat & video conferencing)
- Slack
- Zoom and Google Meet

3.3. BigBlueButton: The virtual classroom & online training platform

Overview, Origin, and Functionality:

BigBlueButton is an open-source software designed specifically for online education and virtual classrooms. While it originated in Canada, its development has been heavily supported by European educational and research communities, and it has received EU funding to adapt it to European needs.

Key Features:

- Interactive whiteboard, live polling, and breakout rooms.
- Screen and file sharing, session recording and playback.
- Built-in support for live captions/CC (A11y).
- Deep integration with major Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle via LTI.

Use Cases and EU Deployments:

- **French Ministry of Education:** Deployed as the official e-learning platform for over 12 million students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Universities and Schools in Germany, Austria, and Italy:** Widely adopted due to its full GDPR compliance and self-hosting capabilities (on-premise or in local EU datacenters).

- **European Research Networks (GÉANT, CyberSec4Europe):** Used for secure virtual meetings, workshops, and lectures.

Commercial Solutions Replaced:

- Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Google Meet (for education/training)
- Adobe Connect and other commercial virtual classroom tools.

3.4. Moodle: The Learning Management System (LMS)

Overview, Origin, and Functionality:

Moodle, though originating in Australia (2002), is now developed internationally with a strong European presence, including its HQ in Ireland and the European Moodle Partners network. This ensures a high level of adaptation to the needs of the European market and public sector. The platform offers built-in features and plugins for full GDPR compliance, accessibility (WCAG 2.1 AA), and granular privacy controls.

Key features:

- Course creation and management (role assignment, access restrictions, learning paths).
- Automated assessment tools, a full-featured gradebook, certifications, and badges.
- Integrated collaboration tools: forums, chat, wikis, and group discussions.
- Over 2,000 plugins, including LTI compatibility for seamless integration with Nextcloud, BigBlueButton, and Element/Matrix.

Use Cases and EU Deployments:

- **European Commission and Agencies:** The official learning platform (learning.europa.eu, Customs & Taxation Learning Portal) uses Moodle 4.5 for employee training, with Single Sign-On (SSO) capabilities.
- **European Universities and Schools:** ECIU uses Moodle to coordinate cross-border micro-learning modules and Erasmus programs.
- **Ministries of Education and Public Administration:** Deployed at a national level in dozens of European countries (e.g., France, Spain, Norway, Greece).

Commercial Solutions Replaced:

- Blackboard, Canvas, D2L/Brightspace (LMS)
- Google Classroom
- Microsoft Learning Pathways and Teams for education.

4. The power of interoperability: A unified ecosystem for the EU

The true strength of this proposal lies in the native and mature interoperability between these platforms, creating a seamless, integrated ecosystem for collaboration, communication, and education.

- **Nextcloud & BigBlueButton:** Nextcloud supports a plugin to embed BigBlueButton virtual classrooms directly within its interface. Users can create, join, and manage BBB meetings without leaving Nextcloud. Files stored in Nextcloud can be shared within BBB sessions, enhancing collaborative workflows.
- **Moodle & BigBlueButton:** Moodle has built-in BigBlueButton integration enabling live virtual classrooms within courses. This integration supports session management, attendance tracking, recording, and analytics, improving remote teaching effectiveness. Over 20,000 Moodle sites worldwide use this integration actively.
- **Element-Matrix & BigBlueButton:** An ongoing partnership integrates BigBlueButton with the Element Matrix client, enabling users to launch virtual classrooms from inside Matrix chat rooms. This reduces friction between chat-based communications and video conferencing.

- **Nextcloud & Element-Matrix:** Nextcloud can be integrated with Matrix via Element for secure, real-time chat and VoIP communications inside the collaboration platform, bridging file sharing, video calls, and messaging in a unified interface.

This ecosystem ensures **Digital Sovereignty**, a **Unified User Experience**, and is inherently **Extensible & Flexible** to meet the specific needs of any EU institution.

Benefits of this Interoperable ecosystem for the EU

- **Digital Sovereignty:** Everything can be hosted on EU infrastructure with open source software, ensuring data privacy, GDPR compliance, and avoidance of dependence on US-based commercial cloud services.
- **Unified User Experience:** Seamless workflow from file collaboration (Nextcloud) to communication (Element-Matrix) and synchronous learning (BigBlueButton inside Moodle or Nextcloud) reduces context switching and enhances productivity.
- **Extensible & Flexible:** Open APIs and plugins allow each organization or agency to customize the ecosystem to their workflow, security policies, and scaling needs.
- **Education & Collaboration at Scale:** Supports educational institutions, government bodies, and enterprises with integrated digital tools designed for remote work, learning, and service delivery.

5. Recommendations and Next Steps

To move forward, we recommend a phased approach:

1. **Pilot program with Zammad:** Continue with the planned adoption of Zammad for internal ticketing. This will provide valuable experience in deploying and managing a European OSS solution for a critical service.
2. **In-depth evaluation of CRM candidates:** We propose the formation of a working group to conduct a detailed evaluation of Odoo, SuiteCRM, and ONLYOFFICE Workspace. This evaluation should include:
 - **Proof-of-Concept deployments:** Setting up trial instances of each platform to assess their functionality against the Commission's specific CRM requirements.
 - **User feedback sessions:** Engaging with a representative group of future users to gather feedback on usability and workflow compatibility.
 - **Total cost of ownership (TCO) analysis:** A comprehensive analysis of the long-term costs associated with each solution, including support, maintenance, and potential customization.
1. **Integration analysis with Nextcloud:** As a central collaboration platform, the integration capabilities of the chosen CRM with Nextcloud are crucial. A deeper technical analysis of the existing integrations and the feasibility of extending them should be part of the evaluation process.
2. **Develop a Long-Term strategy:** Begin planning for the gradual replacement of other proprietary systems with the proposed European OSS equivalents (e.g., Element/Jitsi for MS Teams).

6. Support and expertise within the European Union

Belgium and the broader European Union have a vibrant ecosystem of companies specializing in CRM implementations, OSS support, and digital transformation services, emphasizing GDPR compliance and digital sovereignty.

Belgium-Based Companies:

- **Odoo SA (Brabant Wallon):** A leading open source business application suite offering CRM, ERP, and strong commercial support.
- **Dockflow (Antwerp):** An innovative company focusing on open source workflow and

- automation solutions.
- **Kangaroot.net (Antwerp):** Specializes in open source technologies and offers consulting and development services for OSS platforms like CRM.
 - **EezIT and ACS One (Brabant Wallon):** Provide IT consulting, custom software development, and open source solutions supporting data sovereignty.
 - **DigitalBase and Anova (Vlaams-Brabant):** Focus on open source software development with expertise in integration and support for business systems.

These companies, along with large European consulting firms like Deloitte, Accenture, and Capgemini, represent a broad and capable service network to support the European Union's OSS adoption, maintenance, and digital sovereignty goals.

Conclusion

By strategically shifting to European open-source solutions, the European Commission can set a powerful example for public administrations across the Union, fostering a more secure, transparent, and sovereign digital environment. We at GFOSS – Open Technologies Alliance are prepared to offer our technical expertise and support throughout this transition.

Appendix: Official Websites for Software and Companies

Software:

- **Zammad:** <https://zammad.com/en>
- **Odoo:** <https://www.odoo.com/>
- **SuiteCRM:** <https://suitecrm.com/>
- **ONLYOFFICE Workspace:** <https://www.onlyoffice.com/workspace.aspx>
- **Nextcloud:** <https://nextcloud.com/>
- **Element:** <https://element.io/>
- **Matrix:** <https://matrix.org/>
- **Jitsi:** <https://jitsi.org/>
- **BigBlueButton:** <https://bigbluebutton.org/>
- **Moodle:** <https://moodle.org/>

Support Companies (Examples):

- **Dockflow:** <https://www.dockflow.com/>
- **Kangaroot.net:** <https://www.kangaroot.net/>
- **EezIT:** <https://eezit.be/>
- **ACS One:**
- **DigitalBase:** <https://digitalbase.be/>
- **Anova IT Consulting:** <https://anova.es/>

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Sincerely,



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