

Report from the European Cloud Partnership Steering Board meeting on 19th November 2012

1. Background

On 27 September 2012 the Commission adopted the European Cloud Strategy in the form of a Communication entitled "Unleashing the Potential of Cloud Computing in Europe", in which it announced the intention to set up a European Cloud Partnership (ECP).

Under the guidance of the Steering Board, the ECP brings together public authorities and industry consortia to advance the objectives of the Strategy towards a digital single market for cloud computing.

2. Meeting report

The Steering Board of the European Cloud Partnership had its first meeting on 19th November 2012. Vice-President Kroes stressed the Commission's commitment to the goals of the Cloud Strategy, reminding the benefits of cloud services on the citizens and economy of the EU.

Under the chairmanship of the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the Board welcomed the European Cloud Strategy Communication and agreed with its objectives. The participants agreed that cloud computing creates major opportunities for companies as well as for public administrations in terms of growth and development (cloud as "an engine for growth"). The Board saw a need to create a coherent framework and devise case studies, especially in the area of cooperation between the governments and private sector.

The Members also stressed the importance of a common European regulatory framework, as the current fragmentation is a major hindrance towards the development of a digital single market for cloud computing. This concerns mainly data location, digital content and data protection laws that span across many jurisdictions. Unsuitable laws and incomplete Single Market, as well as cultural differences among Member States were also considered to slow down the adoption of cloud computing and the emergence of pan European cloud providers.

Data security

While positive about the value of cloud computing, members of the Board agreed that data security can be the most important issue in the up-take of cloud computing. Digital data is considered to be extremely valuable not only by public administrations, but also by private companies, therefore there are big potential benefits for cyber criminals to steal the data.

The Steering Board agreed that a top-down approach would be best in this regard. The members expressed a need for a balanced approach between the need to protect the data and flexibility that is necessary for innovation to thrive.

Sharing of best practice

Finding enablers for cloud computing was considered, along data security, as one of the major elements having a strong impact on the adoption, especially among public administrations. It was suggested to find best examples of successful services that have been implemented or are being implemented that can deliver a strong value in a short period of time. SAP gave as an example its e-learning platform which aims to train 100k unemployed people in ICT. Estonia and Norway offered to present their best practice examples at future meetings.

Standardisation

Data portability, interoperability and the need to avoid vendor lock-in were among the issues discussed by the Board. Estonia expressed its positive experience with open software, and underlined the need for broad standardisation efforts.

ETSI clarified that there are numerous standards, however it is not completely clear which ones actually apply to cloud computing. The Cloud Standards Coordination Group was set up following the adoption of the European Cloud Strategy with the aim to map standards for cloud by the end of 2013. ETSI also clarified its role as a coordinator of the process. A workshop organised by ETSI and the Commission taking place on 4-5th December in Cannes was also announced.

3. Operational conclusions

The Board agreed that in order to act fast, there is a need to select a set of services that have a high value (for the society, economy, etc) and can be delivered in a short amount of time to show the value of cloud computing and drive adoption in selected areas. For this reason, the Board decided on the following priorities under two axes: harmonisation and acceleration:

1. Harmonisation measures: the Commission is to draft a matrix of challenges to the take-up of cloud computing that would be shared with the group to prioritise attention the work;
2. Acceleration measures:
 - the Steering Board will reinforce a vision for its work and some key performance targets against which it can measure its success;
 - the members of the Board, basing themselves on their area of expertise, are to make concrete lighthouse proposals that show how cloud computing can help to solve major problems where at least 3 members would join forces to make real progress. The focus should be on major and visible issues, such as social affairs, growth & jobs, SMEs etc;
 - each SB member should aim at submitting one case study based on existing cooperation between the government and the industry based on issues and/or solutions that have come up.

The next meeting of the Steering Board is currently scheduled to take place on 2 and 3 of July 2013. The Chair offered to host it in Estonia, as well as to share Estonia's experience on implementing the IT services. In the meantime, the participants agreed to explore ways to further discuss the developments.