



# Free Software Foundation Europe

## Interview: Ciarán O’Riordan

Teksti: Ciarán O’Riordan

Ciarán O’Riordan  
Fellow  
Free Software  
Foundation Europe  
(kuvassa keskellä).

### 1. What is Free Software Foundation and how do you work in Europe?

Free Software Foundation Europe (FSFE) is an official sister organisation of Free Software Foundation (FSF). We share a philosophy, but our finances and personnel are independent. FSFE was launched in 2001.

Our work is done by a core team of 30 people[0] spread across Europe, a volunteer network mostly coordinated by our public mailing lists, and the members of our Fellowship[1].

FSFE also currently has 5 full-time staff, 2 part-time staff, and 2 interns.

[0]<http://fsfeurope.org/about/team.en.html>

[1]<http://fsfe.org>

### 3. What about the support for Open Standards - the fight between Open Document Format and OpenXML seem to be heating up in EU?

Defeating vendor lock-in and product lock-in is becoming a priority for the Free Software community. Today, we have software that often equals or betters proprietary software. This means that software users can have freedom and still do the same jobs they’re currently doing.

Now we have to help make the migration easier for people who choose freedom. Open standards are an important way to reduce lock-in and make that migration easier.

There is consensus in political circles that open standards are good, but we need to ensure that politicians and decision makers understand what it means for a standard to be open.

Some proprietary software companies are trying to twist the definition of “open standard” to include standards that require a per-copy implementation fee. We don’t call those standards “open”, we call them “uniform fee only” standards - UFOs.

These completely exclude Free Software from being able to use that standard. Charging for Free Software is acceptable, but mandatory royalties

are not. Everyone is free to distribute Free Software for any price, including zero. FSFE is working to make sure that proponents of open standards avoid such pitfalls.

We prefer the term “free standards”, but many organisations have already made a commitment to using “open standards”, so we often focus on making that commitment meaningful. One initiative we’re involved in is CertifiedOpen, which focusses on open standards and also interoperability.

I should say though, while it is important to work on making migration easier, our primary goal is still to explain to people what software freedom is and why it is important.

Free Software is software that users can run, study, copy, modify, and redistribute in modified or unmodified forms. These freedoms allow people to help themselves, and thus really control their computer, and it allows each member of the user community to co-operate with each other member. The ability to co-operate with others is crucial because computers contain so much software that many people have to work together in order to ensure the whole system does what the users want it to do.

We have to make migration easy, but we also have to tell people the reason so that they will migrate, and so that they won’t migrate back to non-free software later.

### 4. The most popular Free Software license, General Public License is currently being updated. What is the situation with the process right now and what will be the most important changes to the license?

The third discussion draft was published on Wednesday March 28th and the final version is expected in June.

When GPLv3 is finalised, very little will change. For the vast majority of users, developers, and distributors the benefits will come without requiring them to change their practices in any way.

Version 2 of the GPL was written in 1991 by Richard Stallman with some legal counsel and the consultation of some of the GNU project software developers, almost all of whom lived in the USA. Today we can draw on a far larger pool of legal and technical expertise.

Today, we also have more people looking for ways to profit from abusing the GPL. Still no major flaws have been found, but some activities, such as those of Tivo and those of Novell and Microsoft, display problems that could spread and could become real problems. GPLv3 will defuse such problems before they spread.

V3 will also win some increased protection for users, developers, and distributors against software patents, and with input from lawyers from around the World, it will be more certain to work the same across country borders.

***5. The deal between Microsoft and Novell has sparked a big controversy between the companies and the community.***

***What is FSF's take on the deal and are you going to somehow address the "loophole" in GPL v.3?***

GPLv3 will ensure that no other companies can be coerced into such deals.

The Novell-Microsoft deal raises two problems. One is that if Microsoft can do this to Novell, they can do it to other Free Software distributors, and if Microsoft can do it, other patent holders can do it. So this is a problem that could spread, but GPLv3 will extinguish it before it can.

The second problem is that it dissolves the solidarity that Free Software relies on. By giving one company protection from Microsoft's patents, that company loses the motivation to help the Free Software community as a whole to combat the problem of those software patents. Worse, that company now has an incentive to maximise the fear within the Free Software community of Microsoft's patents as this would drive people toward becoming a customer of that company.

But it also has to be emphasised that this is just one problem of software patents and we can't solve the whole problem with our licences. Lobbying has to continue across Europe for patent governance which clearly excludes software features from patentability.

***6. FSF Europe launched recently a "Freedom Task Force". What is it's mission? IS it somehow related to FSF Compliance Lab?***

FSFE's Freedom Task Force (FTF) shares some goals with FSF's Compliance Lab. Like them, we are working on enforcing the GNU GPL. In addition,

FTF will also provide fiduciary services for projects - including those using licences other than the GNU GPL. Another organisation we're working closely with on this is [gpl-violations.org](http://gpl-violations.org).

***7. If a Finnish company wants some help understanding General Public License, what should it do?***

Contacting the FTF would be the right start. FSFE has a full-time employee, Shane Coughlan, coordinating the FTF. Among the FTF's tasks are to provide information about how to use Free Software licences, and to put people in contact with lawyers when one is needed.

FTF is less than a year old but is it already quite well contacted.

***8. ..and finally: Linus Torvalds and Richard Stallman does not seem to get along too well. Does FSF hate us Finns?***

Not at all :-). I'm looking forward to coming to Finland quite soon to talk about GPLv3.

Linus has made some pretty negative comments, but he's well-known for being open to changing his mind when he hears good arguments to do so. He and the other kernel hackers might like the finished version when the official GPLv3 is published, or they might like to observe how it works in the real world for a year or two before considering it.

Stallman has a different philosophy to Linus. Stallman believes that all users of software deserve the freedom to help themselves and to cooperate with other when they choose. Linus doesn't share this philosophy, but both of them were able to work together with GPLv2, so it's not impossible that both will be able to work together on another licence such as GPLv3.

In FSF and FSFE, all we can do is try to make the best licence possible and let free software developers choose. In particular, FSFE has been working to document the public events and debates as they happen. This increases transparency and makes the discussion more accessible.[3]

[3] <http://fsfeurope.org/projects/gplv3/>

In the final stage of the GPLv3 process, we'd ask everyone to take a look at draft 3 and submit a comment if you like.

Finally, FSFE is a community-funded organisation. If you'd like to support FSFE's work on GPLv3, on GPL enforcement, on lobbying for legislative changes at global, European, and national levels, you can do so by making a donation, by joining FSFE's Fellowship program, and by spreading the word for others to do so.

# *Mikä mahtaa olla...*



## IN

*Standardit*

*MP3*

*WII*

*Kevätsiivous*

*Mustelma*

## OUT



*Lock-in*

*Kopiosuojaukset*

*"Pleikkari"*

*Katupöly*

*Punamulta*

