Building an eoSTORE

We were surprised last Friday to see ESA release an ITT to develop an *"e-commerce platform for micro-services"*. We were completely unaware of this project although given the pre-announcement we should have been) and have had no discussions with ESA concerning it.

Two years ago, we studied the changing market for EO services and the idea to establish a Marketplace for EO services (MAEOS). We concluded that EARSC should develop eoMALL as a neutral, promotional platform which would enable European companies to promote their on-line services. We concluded that this platform should stop short of offering any e-commerce as companies wished to maintain their own capability. We came to this conclusion as we shall avoid at all times to compete with our members – the companies offering EO services. We did not wish to compete where companies such as CloudEO, Geocento and others have been working to build this capability.

After due consideration, we came to the conclusion that the best governance for eoMALL was under EARSC. There seemed no point in setting up another structure as long as EARSC is a netural, membership-based organisation. We fully acknowledge ESA support for the MAEOS study and for the subsequent project to develop eoMALL; which is currently in beta version and will make its first release in the next few weeks. This is rather later than we would have hoped but there have been various barriers to surmount along the way. A number of EARSC member companies have worked to help define the marketplace platform and their services will be the first on offer through it.

In the MAEOS study, we considered that each company needed to either offer the back-end, transaction processing themselves or to group together. There would also be the possibility for one (or more) company to set this up to offer a commercial service. Further, the DIAS were just being designed and it would seem evident that each of them will also need to construct, or join, a selling platform.

However, we foresaw that there could be room for several companies to come together (under a DIAS or independently) to develop what we called an eoSTORE which would then offer an e-commerce facility. It makes sense to reduce costs. Such an eoSTORE would integrate closely with eoMALL for the benefit of all the companies wishing to use these platforms and help boost the European industry which is our goal.

Now, all this may be possible with the ESA project, but it creates a winner takes all situation which we have strongly tried to avoid. One possible solution would be to award a series of grants whereby several platforms could have been built. This would avoid the market distortion which a single tender will inevitably create. There are certainly other possible solutions as well. Our goal will be to ensure that the platform should work fully with eoMALL and that it maintains a competitive environment.

I should be very happy to have views from companies on this tender.