

# EARSC and the eoSTORE

Returning to the ESA ITT to develop an e-commerce platform also referred to by us as an eoSTORE. After having talked with many companies about their views, what should EARSC do?

The ITT presents us with a strong dilemma. I hold to a strong principle that we should not compete with members. This principle accompanies our change in business model away from one based on Membership fees to one which is driven by projects. We are still firmly a membership based organisation both according to our statutes and reflected in our actions; any project work we undertake must benefit the collective of members and not one company.

This principle applies equally to the development of an e-commerce platform or more accurately to the operation of the future platform. But in this case, these two principles come into conflict. We wish that the investment benefits the European industry and not a European company. But if even one company is interested to develop and operate such a platform then we run into conflict with our principle of not competing. In cases where this can arise, the EARSC board must take the decision on whether the collective interest outweighs one or two companies own interests.

The only way to avoid any conflict would be to do nothing; and indeed this is one option. However, we set out a strategy 2 years ago in the proposition to develop a Marketplace for EO Services (MAEOS) which we believed was the best one to help European companies address a new market in on-line services. This included the eoSTORE which we deliberately separated from eoMALL to avoid exactly this issue of competition between EARSC and its members.

Maybe we made a mistake in simply leaving eoSTORE development completely to the market. Maybe also the market has taken longer to develop than we had envisaged; the introduction of eoMALL has certainly taken longer than we should have liked. But, we are where we are, and the ESA ITT poses questions of us and others which need to be resolved quite quickly if we are to the risk of market distortion which I highlighted in my first blog on the subject.

EARSC has three real options (if we rule out doing nothing);

1. We could lead a proposal on behalf of the community. This would be a very aggressive response and one which I think is inappropriate for EARSC. In reality, I should prefer not to be involved in the contract at all.
2. We could participate to any proposal which will lead to a development which will benefit a collective of companies. In this approach we would participate to the proposal provided that there would be at least 3 EO service companies behind it. We could even bring all members to the table in a collective governance model.
3. We could support any company putting together a proposal provided certain conditions are met. We may have some difficulty without ESA help to ensure that those conditions are met once the contract is awarded.

Those conditions would be twofold: that the new platform should integrate with eoMALL and that it should benefit the industry collectively. This could follow either of the approaches I set out in my last log ie the project is run by a partnership of companies or the platform is developed independently and licensed to any company interested to use it later. In this way the ESA investment benefits the community.

What can EARSC offer to a contractor? Three things:

1. To gather the collective requirements of the industry. Here the basis exists in the MAEOS group of EARSC members which is participating to eoMALL.
2. To help prepare the governance of the operations. This should involve a collective of companies working together and could be under EARSC or not – to be decided during the project.
3. To give guidance and advice in IPR. With a collective approach and depending on the governance selected, this could differ.

The EARSC board meets on Monday (1<sup>st</sup> April) and this will be on the agenda for discussion and to take a decision on how we should proceed.