24. January 2007

Initial report regarding the activities of the FSFE Freedom Task Force:

Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Nlnet and FSFE, the Free Software Foundation Europe has established a project called the Freedom Task Force (FTF). This project is intended to strengthen the legal pillars of the Free Software eco-system in Europe through providing various services ranging from educational work through to legal guardianship for projects.

Involved centrally in these activities are, under the supervision of FSFE's general assembly: Georg Greve (FSFE president), Jonas Öberg (FSFE vice-president), Shane Coughlan (FSFE FTF co-ordinator), Joachim Jakobs (FSFE media co-ordinator), Till Jaeger (FSFE legal representative) and Carlo Piana (FSFE legal representative). Various technical and legal experts are volunteering time and experience to aide FTF activities.

Concrete efforts undertaken by FSFE were in particular:

The creation of internal infrastructure to support FTF activities:
1. The establishment of a dedicated communication network infrastructure to support the activities of the FTF, consisting of four primary mailing lists (ftf-team, ftf-legal, ftf-technical and ftf-discussion), an issue tracking system, a private subversion repository for shared tools and a secure archive for shared documents.

2. The establishment of a dedicated office to act as the central point for all FTF related activity in Zurich, Switzerland. The FTF office hosts the FTF co-ordinator, the physical machines running the FTF subversion and shared archive, as well as secure physical storage for documents relating to FTF activities.

3. The establishment of a partnership agreement with Harald Welte of gpl-violations.org regarding the formation of sustainable networks in Europe to support Free Software licensing issues, and for co-operative action regarding the resolution of GNU GPL violations for the long-term benefit of the development community in the European sphere.

4. The establishment of an informal network of Free Software legal representatives from across the world, including parties in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain and the USA, to help discuss and document issues relating to the legal understanding of Free Software licences. This network contributes to FTF activities through the ftf-legal mailing list.

5. The establishment of an informal network of Free Software technical representatives from both inside FSFE and from gpl-violations.org to help discuss and document issues relating to the technical understanding of Free Software licences. This network contributes to FTF activities through the ftf-technical mailing list.

6. The establishment of an informal network of Free Software volunteers to help in the generation of Free Software licensing documentation and to help spread Free Software licensing information at grass-root levels throughout Europe. This network contributes to FTF activities through the ftf-discussion mailing list.

7. The establishment of a private archive of firmware analysis tools to facilitate the examination of code that potentially infringes the GNU GPL licence. This archive of tools is hosted on the FTF subversion repository and consists of the largest collection of such analysis tools available to Free Software organisations today, encompassing two tools originating from FSF Licensing Lab, one tool developed internally on the FTF Technical list and one tool donated by Uberwall. This archive is shared with gpl-violations.org and FSF Licensing Lab to ensure the maximum possible benefit to the whole community.

The creation of external infrastructure to support FTF activities:

1. The establishment of a sustainable working relationship with KDE e.V., the non-profit organization that represents the KDE Project in legal and financial matters.

2. The establishment of a sustainable working relationship with large multinational companies, such as Sun Microsystems.

3. The establishment of lines of communication with other bodies working in Free Software licensing education and enforcement. We maintain constant contact with gpl-violations.org representatives and regularly send information or interact with FSF's Licensing Lab in the US and SFLC.

4. Co-ordination with gpl-violations.org in tackling some long-term problems in the European Free Software arena.

The public launch of FTF services:

- The public launch of the FTF at the FSFE fellowship meeting in Bozano, Italy as part of the first FSFE fellowship conference, with a simultaneous press release distributed through FSFE public relations channels.

The introduction of services or tools to support the Free Software eco-system:

1. The introduction of a revised Fiduciary Licensing Agreement (FLA) document intended to allow the effective consolidation of project copyright. The FLA was originally written by Axel Metzger and Georg Greve, with the revised edition receiving input primarily from Lucie Guibault, Shane Coughlan, Till Jaeger and Carlo Piana.

2. The introduction of a fiduciary assignment programme to help projects consolidate their copyright and to gain the protection of FSFE's legal and technical experience in Free Software licensing issues. The FTF fiduciary programme offers legal guardianship to projects selected according to our guidelines of acceptance, thus helping projects with a relatively high value to the overall eco-system to evolve into more sustainable entities.

3. The introduction of a service to allow individuals, projects and businesses to contact the FTF with questions regarding licensing matters and to report violations. This service makes use of a tracking system based on the roundup software to ensure that each incoming request is recorded.

4. The formulation and provision of a two-day Free Software licensing course in partnership with the "Internet Academy" training institute in Sweden which will be offered through the "Internet Academy" brochure from May.

5. The continued development of on-line resources related to GNU GPL compliance, most notably the revision and enhancement of the gpl-violations.org FAQs into the FTF FAQs and the creation of a compliance checklist to enable companies to adopt best-practice procedures in the deployment of GNU GPL code.

The creation of Special Interest Groups:

1. The establishment of a private Special Interest Group to discuss Free Software licensing issues in the context of embedded devices. This SIG is the first of its kind.

2. The establishment of a private Special Interest Group to discuss Free Software and business in the context of licensing.

Upcoming activities of the FTF will include:

1. Talks are under way with TIS Innovation Park, South Tyrol, Italy regarding avenues of co-operation. Potential methods of interaction currently include the expansion of the FTF training course currently being offered in Sweden into a course also offered in Italy, the creation of a FTF expert group in South Tyrol, and joint research projects regarding the use of Free Software licensing in practical business arenas.

2. The possibility of expanding the FTF training course offering to Switzerland in partnership with Digicomp, a Swiss technology training organisation, is currently being examined.

3. Shane Coughlan, FTF co-ordinator, will attend the LIFT07 conference in Geneva, Switzerland, between the 7th and the 9th of February. LIFT is an event intended to facilitate and promote discussion about new technologies and their impact on society. Shane will participate in the 'Legal issues and perspectives' workshop.

4. Shane Coughlan, FTF co-ordinator, will attend the FOSDEM conference in Brussels, Belgium, between the 24th and 25th of February. Free and Open source Software Developers' European Meeting is a 2 days event, organized by volunteers, to promote the widespread use of Free and Open Source software. Shane will give a lightning talk discussing issues around Free Software licensing and describing the services offered to the community by the FTF.

5. Discussions are under way regarding the formation of a working group consisting of various embedded device manufacturers and distributors along with the FTF and gpl-violations.org representatives to create and put into action measures to help reduce accidental violations of Free Software licences in the embedded market. This would be a follow-on activity using the momentum generated by the Special Interest Group currently in session.

6. The FTF is preparing for the introduction of the GNU GPL version 3 licence (GPLv3) somewhere around the end of the first quarter of this year. At this point the FSFE GPLv3 project will be subsumed into the FTF activities and support will be given to individuals, projects and businesses interested in adoption or transitional activity regarding the licence. The final launch date of the licence has not been set by Free Software Foundation (North America) so concrete plans regarding launch speeches or meetings have not been finalised at this juncture.

7. The FTF is examine methods of promoting the FLA licence for adoption on a wide-scale by projects. Talks are still on-going regarding the precise methods that will be employed to ensure that the maximum number of Free Software projects can benefit from increased legal coherency.

Budgeting and future direction:

Regarding the budget of the FTF project, our costs have not escalated beyond initial projections. For the most part the activities of the FTF have been accomplished through a judicious use of technology and available personnel. That being said, the FTF is a large infrastructure project currently operating on a very small budget. While there is no immediate liquidity problem, it is expected to take a while before the FTF has sufficient traction to generate donations and sponsorship to sustain itself while also allowing for growth.

FSFE plans to address these issues by seeking donations and sponsorship from parties that the FTF interacts with, by running training courses with trusted partners, and by undertaking consultancy and by examine the possibility of research projects in co-operation with TIS Innovation Park, South Tyrol, Italy.