



Brussels, 23 January 2008

Summary Report of the Workshop :

"Towards interoperability and mutual recognition of eSignatures" held in Brussels on 12 December 2007

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1. WELCOME – OPENING ADDRESS

The morning session is chaired by Mr Karel De Vriendt, Head of Unit, DG DIGIT/IDABC :

- Karel De Vriendt welcomes the participants to the workshop, and explains the goals and ambitions, along with the practical modalities of the workshop.
- A summary overview is given of the history of the eSignatures Directive, along with the role of both studies to be discussed today.
- Finally, the agenda of the workshop is presented and approved.

2. JOINT PRESENTATION SIEMENS - TIME.LEX, OF THE IDABC "PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF ESIGNATURES FOR EGOVERNMENT APPLICATIONS"

- Siemens and time.lex (Hans Graux and Guy Lambert) present (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29666>) an overview of the Preliminary Study, covering both the main findings of the analysis work and the recommendations resulting from the Study. Specifically, the presentation covers:
 - A description of the scope and goals of the study;
 - A description of eSignature practices in the surveyed countries, based on the eGovernment applications analysed in the course of the Study;
 - Identification of the main interoperability issues resulting from these eSignature practices, and presentation of the resulting recommendations, focusing specifically on the need for better information dissemination and recommending the establishment of an eSignature validation platform.

- Q&A Session
 - Have you examined the compliance of ETSI standards with the provisions of article 7?
 - This question is actually related to the second study, and will therefore be commented on in the afternoon session.
 - Does the study also focus on corporate users, or does it only look at private persons?
 - Yes, corporate use is included in the study as well, since this is necessary for eSignature applications. This can be clearly seen in the strong emphasis on eProcurement, and applications in the fiscal/social security sector, all of which are of greater importance to corporate users.
 - Was the validation platform approach suggested by the Member States, or is it your own initiative? Can this actually work in practice?
 - The proposal was not ‘steered’ by the MS or by any specific Member State; it is merely our recommendation based on the identified difficulties. Indeed, it actually functions in practice, as can be seen e.g. in Spanish eGovernment applications.
 - Does the study also recommend to implement the federated model within Member States, i.e. federating, at country level, regional initiatives?
 - Even if the study did not considered eSignature recognition issues within Member States, it could be envisaged to replicate the federated model also replicated within Member States

3. PANEL SESSION ON RESULTS OF THE IDABC STUDY

3.1. Presentation by Bart Callens – Certipost (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29657>)

- The presentation provides a general introduction of Certipost’s eSignature related services, specifically electronic Document Delivery Services.
- The speaker is generally supportive of the study, but also wants to stress that qualified signatures should be used when appropriate, and not as a matter of standard practice. There is some concern that the study could be misinterpreted as being overly favorable to qualified signature solutions.

3.2. Presentation by Jon Olnes - DNV (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29658>)

- The presentation provides an overview of DNV’s eSignature solutions, and stresses specifically that DNV also wants to create a validation platform itself; therefore, DNV obviously agrees with this specific recommendation and its necessity.

- DNV's main concern is the role that the public sector could play in this regard. There is some concern that the European governments would try to assume a leading role in providing validation services; DNV wonders if the private sector could not also play this role, perhaps as an accredited CSP service?
- DNV agrees with the discussions in the study about the clear and unavoidable link between eSignatures and electronic authentication, and stresses the importance of national identifiers in this regard. Access to and use of these identifiers facilitates a CSP's work greatly.
- It is also important to note that DNV has created an eID 'authentication policy' with 7 tiers to assess the reliability of existing PKI signature solutions (comparable to similar initiatives in the field of electronic authentication. Insofar as it might be necessary to use such a system to assess the reliability of electronic signatures, this system could be used as a basis.
- Finally, DNV believes strongly that it can create a private sector validation authority (VA), and sees itself as a potential member of a network of VAs.

3.3. Presentation by Peter Steiert – Teletrust [\(<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29656>\)](http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29656)

- Presentation of Teletrust's work, including its management of the Bridge-CA.
- Teletrust agrees also that the private sector can play a key part in the validation of foreign signatures; a validation platform should not be an exclusively MS-controlled initiative in Teletrust's view.
- Teletrust stresses the importance of pragmatism: in many cases, non-PKI authentication is accepted as sufficient in eGovernment applications. Why not start there and advance in phases? This is also where Bridge-Gateways come in, since they can facilitate the cross border authentication function.
- It is important to realize that generic eSignatures for all application types are not possible, and certainly not desirable. Some applications must inherently be interoperable in order to be viable (e.g. eProcurement); others do not have to be (local or highly specialized applications).
- Teletrust believes in spontaneous gradual harmonization between countries of eSignature requirements: over time strict countries will lower their barriers, flexible ones will raise them.

3.4. Presentation by Vincent Tilman – ChamberSign (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29662>)

- ChamberSign has a network of Chambers of Commerce in place, many of which either operate CSPs or have cooperation agreements with autonomous CSPs.
- In order to make these interoperate, ChamberSign tried to connect these using a Bridge CA with TLS, but it didn't work out in practice, due to organizational and legal difficulties.
- In practice, the key business drivers for eSignatures are eGovernment services and eBanking; these are the applications that any eSignature solutions should cover
- ChamberSign would mainly like to argue against 'mono usage certificates', i.e. certificates that will only be good for one application. This can be resolved through a trust matrix managed by a reliable TTP (i.e., conceptually similar to a VA). ChamberSign does not feel strongly either way if this matrix is public or private sector controlled, as long as accession to it is cheap for users.

3.5. Presentation by Olivier Delos – SEALED (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29661>)

- While SEALED appreciates the general tenets of the Preliminary Study, it argues against a VA or Bridge CA solution, for political and liability reasons. It believes such a proposal is not sufficiently pragmatic and requires excessive investment.
- Such a platform should not be necessary, at least for qualified signatures, where improved information dissemination could solve many of the problems, and where other interoperability issues are less relevant (specifically with regard to the legal value of the signature, which is a non-issue for qualified signatures, at least in principle).
- On the other hand, for non-qualified signatures, SEALED mainly sees a benefit in further common (standardized) policies that would allow for the signatures to be harmonized further – i.e., interoperability could better be achieved by reshaping the existing standardisation work, to make it less complex and more easily accessible (possibly supported by an EC decision). For non-qualified signatures, the certificate would not only serve as a link between the signature and the signatory, but also as a vehicle for policy information that the relying parties could use to assess its value.
- SEALED proposed, as quick wins, to establish a common set of rules for qualified signatures:
 - Make use qcStatement to allow the Relying Party to verify whether the signature is qualified or not;

- Use of ETSI QCP+ identified to check whether the signature was produced by a SSCD;
- Provide, at EC level, a consolidated list of supervised/accredited CSP.

4. LUNCH BREAK

After the lunch break, the afternoon session is chaired by Ms Anne Bucher, Head of Unit, DG INFSO/C1.

5. PRESENTATION BY OLIVIER DELOS – SEALED, OF THE STUDY "STANDARDISATION ASPECTS OF ESIGNATURES"

- The Standardisation study (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29667>) is presented, focusing specifically on:
 - The context and scope of the study;
 - The information collected from specific correspondents in the course of the study; it is noted that the results correspond strongly to those of the Preliminary study by Siemens/time.lex
 - The current standardization landscape, along with its strengths and weaknesses;
- It is noted that the standardization landscape is frequently considered to be inadequate, specifically because it is too complex, with occasional overlaps or ambiguities, and generally not accessible enough. The result is a persistent confusion in the eSignatures market.
- An overview of the recommendations is provided, including the need for a new Commission Decision to more easily reference existing standards, and improved information dissemination which should (at least initially) focus on qualified signatures.
- Market development and business relevance and accessibility should be key considerations in implementing these
- Q&A Session
 - Several members of the audience who are active in standardization bodies object to the suggestion that the existing standards do not sufficiently take into account business realities and that the private sector was not sufficiently consulted. They stress that standardization initiatives have always been open to participation by any interested party from any sector.
 - SEALED notes that this may be true, but that this perception none the less exists in the marketplace, and that this disconnect is part of the reason why the uptake of specific standards is not as positive as it might be.

- Recommendations made by the standardization study seem to fit very well in the EU context. But what about work achieved by other international standardization bodies (ISO, ITU ...)? To what extent, EU recommendations may have influence outside EU?
- It is true that it is expected from the market to have more international standards. Anyway, it should also be highlighted that EU standards are very good standards adopted by international standardization bodies..

6. PANEL SESSION "STANDARDISATION OF ESIGNATURES"

A number of experts are invited to give their views on the conclusions of the study and on the future of e-signatures in general.

6.1. Intervention by Riccardo Genghini from ETSI

- Riccardo Genghini agrees with the conclusions of the study: there is a need to better organise the existing standards, the marketing of the standards has always been neglected. He underlines that there is no funding in the ESOs for this reshaping activity.
- The EESSI activity was an open process and it is the responsibility of the market to move to the standards

6.2. Presentation by Ronny Bjones from Microsoft (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29665>)

- He insists on the lack of user perspective, on the need to develop guidance for the developers and on the necessity to demystify the use of e-signatures.
- There is a necessity to review the standards according to the state of the art because of the changes of these 5 last years

6.3. Presentation by Stefan Engel-Flehsig from CEN (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29668>)

- He presents the link between e-signatures and e-invoice as an application of e-signatures. He insists on the need to find an intra-community solution to reach interoperability and mutual recognition

6.4. Presentation by Hans Graux from time.lex (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29663>)

- Hans Graux discusses the similarities and differences between the studies and how they relate to each other. Specifically:
 - Both studies emphasize the need for better information dissemination to stakeholders, specifically to improve the accessibility of the large body of available information.
 - The studies differ otherwise in their approach, because their goals are ultimately very different:
 - The preliminary study focuses on interoperability, i.e. allowing different solutions to work together;
 - The standardization study focuses on standardization, i.e. eliminating or reducing the difference between existing solutions.
- Therefore, the studies complement each other quite well. How they are followed up is a different matter, and mostly depends on the goals one wishes to achieve. It is possible to combine both (striving to eliminate difference, and meanwhile try to allow the (temporarily) different systems to interact) or to choose one of both routes. Ultimately this is a policy choice that should be examined internally within the Commission.

6.5. Presentation by Patrick van Eecke from DLA (<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=29664>)

- Patrick van Eecke presents his view on the current status of eSignatures and on both studies.
- He recalls that the Directive does not impose the use of a "pan- European legally valid e-signature".
- As a possible avenue for future interoperability between eSignatures, he refers to the approach taken in the creation and management of the .eu domain name:
 - In this model, a central body (EURid) manages the domain names. However, it does not operate as a registrar; for this function, it relies on local licensed registration authorities. EURid's function is limited to issuing and policing specific policies for the management of the domain, and resolving any conflicts between registrars.
 - Would this not also be a possible route forwards for eSignatures? The creation of a central European body would permit central policies to be established, and local CSP's could voluntarily register with this European body to allow their signatures to

become valid across Europe. Any conflict management could also become the responsibility of this European body.

- Of course, there are a number of issues still to be resolved even in this model, but as a thinking exercise it can hopefully provide some inspiration.

6.6. Attendance interventions

- During the debate, some participants discuss the approach presented by Patrick Van Eecke.
- The Austrian representative insists on the need for the Commission to ensure the legal compatibility between any new initiative and the Directive.
- There is a common understanding on a clear need to enforce interoperability and real support of business practices. Existing solutions are not well known by applications providers and shall be more promoted (e.g. technical tools enabling the automatic validation of the quality of certificates). Supporting solutions should be sustained by the Commission, but in such a way that it does not constraint the market more than needed. Potential tools, e.g. bridge CAs or VAs, should enhance interoperability and help signatures validation under the condition that they are not becoming an (additional) obligation for the market.

7. CONCLUSION AND WRAP-UP

The Chair thanked all panelists and participants for their constructive contributions and highlighted some concluding remarks on the two presented studies and the follow-up actions :

- Preliminary conclusions :
 - Issues around interoperability are confirmed: legal, technical, organisational
 - The results of the two studies highlight the need for clarification and information (awareness raising on) of :
 - certain articles of the Directive
 - the consequences of some technical choices (authentication Vs signature)
 - clarification of the existing standards (mapping and guidance) and their role (legal compliance)
 - awareness of the existing referenced standards
 - There is need to give a response at European level, as for example the creation of a validation structure. This solution implies political will and rules of governance

- Follow-up :
 - The Commission has issued on 20 November a Communication on Single Market Review, announcing that "the Commission will present in 2008 a specific Action Plan to further promote the implementation of mutually recognised and interoperable electronic signatures and e-authentication (electronic identity) between the Member States, thereby facilitating the provision of cross-border public services".
 - As a result, the Commission will use and integrate the results of these studies and the received feedback in this workshop to reflect on the most appropriate measures and instruments to put in place in this Action Plan
 - Finally all participants are invited to send to the Commission their written comments on the recommendations of the two studies discussed during the workshop

8. END OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop is concluded around 17.30.