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[1]

Much like one signs a document with a pen in the offline world, electronic signatures deliver a way to sign documents in the online world.

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In the past only hand-written signatures were legally valid. The [Directive on a Community framework for electronic signature \(eSignature Directive\)](#) [2], adopted in 1999, extended that recognition to electronic signatures. A reliable system of electronic signatures that work across EU countries is vital for safe electronic commerce and efficient electronic delivery of public services to businesses and citizens.

The eSignature Directive establishes the legal framework at European level for electronic signatures and certification services. The aim is to make electronic signatures easier to use and help them become legally recognised within the Member States. The Directive does not favour any specific technology.

However, in order to ensure the security and legal validity of an electronic transaction in cross-border scenarios (as at national level), the eSignature is certainly important but not sufficient.

Other trust services are needed to ensure:

- Time stamping, i.e. the date and time on an electronic document which proves that the document existed at a point-in-time and that it has not changed since then
- Electronic seal, i.e. the electronic equivalent of a seal or stamp which is applied on a document to guarantee its origin and integrity
- Electronic delivery, i.e. a service that, to a certain extent, is the equivalent in the digital world of registered mail in the physical world
- Legal admissibility of electronic documents to ensure their authenticity and integrity
- Website authentication, i.e. trusted information on a website (e.g. a certificate) which allows users to verify the authenticity of the website and its link to the entity/person owning the website

Without certainty on the legal validity of all these related services, businesses and citizens will remain reluctant to use the digital interactions as their natural way of interaction because they will be unsure of the issue of a possible dispute. This is the intention behind the proposal for a ["Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market"](#) [3], which was adopted in June 2012.

## Upcoming events

- [eIDAS Private Sector Engagement High Level Event 23/04/2015 - Boosting on-line trust and convenience: the business view](#) [4]
- [eIDAS Private Sector Engagement High Level Event 31/03/2015 - eID: emerging business cases](#) [5]

## Related Items

- [Memo and Q&A](#) [6]
- [Publication of the Regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market](#) [7]
- [Member States notification procedure](#) [8]
- [EU Trusted List of Certification Service Providers](#) [9]
- [Standardisation aspects of eSignatures](#) [10]

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- [2] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31999L0093:EN:NOT>
- [3] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0238:FIN:en:PDF>
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- [6] [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-14-586\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-586_en.htm)
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