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Electronic signatures deliver a way to sign documents in the online world, much like one signs a document with a pen in the offline world. The eSignature Directive established the legal framework at European level for electronic signatures and certification services.



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 established 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 was certainly important but not sufficient.

Other trust services are needed to ensure:

- Time stamping: 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: The electronic equivalent of a seal or stamp which is applied on a document to guarantee its origin and integrity

- Electronic delivery: 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: 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 eIDAS Regulation ([Regulation \(EU\) N°910/2014](#) [3]) on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market adopted on 23 July 2014.

As of 1 July 2016, the provisions applicable to trust services set by the eIDAS Regulation apply directly in all 28 Member States.

Related information

- [Questions and answers on trust services](#) [4]
- [EU Trusted List of Trust Service Providers](#) [5]
- Document on [Information by Member States with regard to the implementation of the Trust Services chapter of the eIDAS Regulation](#) [6]
- Document on [Compilation of MS notification on SSCDs benefiting from the transitional measure set in Art.51\(1\) and on QSCDs set in Art.30\(2\) and 39\(2\) of the eIDAS Regulation.](#) [7]

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