European Commission

QUALIFIED ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES ON DOCUMENTS EXCHANGED WITH THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS, BODIES AND AGENCIES

Introduction

Currently, the most common format for exchanging documents between European Institutions, Bodies and Agencies (EUIBAs) and third parties is in **digital format**, particularly following the **PDF** standard. The EUIBAs are moving steadily towards a **paperless administration**.

In this context, all parties need to **sign documents electronically** with the digital equivalent of a "blue ink" signature which is the **Qualified Electronic Signature (QES)**. QES is compliant with the **highest legal and latest technical requirements** thus providing maximum guarantee about the signer's identity as well as the digital document's integrity.

ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES DEFINED BY eIDAS*

The **eIDAS Regulation** defines the legal framework for electronic signatures. An "electronic signature" is a signature that applies to digital documents, and it can be as simple as a person's name at the end of an email (simple electronic signature). The eIDAS Regulation defines two additional specific categories of electronic signatures: (1) the advanced electronic signature and (2) the qualified electronic signature. Both advanced and qualified electronic signatures are based on a digital certificate.

*Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market and repealing Directive 1999/93/EC: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2014.257.01.0073.01.ENG

WHAT IS A QUALIFIED ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE?

A "**qualified electronic signature**" (QES) complies to the highest legal and latest technical requirements, strengthening the link between the signatory (the person who signs) and the digital certificate identifying it (mentioning the person's name) in two ways:

The QES is based on a qualified certificate for electronic signatures.

The QES is generated inside a qualified electronic signature device (QSCD).

This qualified level introduces **quality assurance**, backed up with supervised conformity checks and accreditation processes. Thanks to its high level of assurance a QES has the **same legal value and effect as a handwritten "blue ink" signature** across Europe.

Explore how to use QES on the next pages.

Get started

1 SEARCH FOR A TRUST SERVICE PROVIDER FOR OBTAINING QUALIFIED TRUST SERVICES

The Qualified Trust Service Providers (QTSPs), commercial service providers, who are qualified members of the European Union's Trust Scheme, are listed in the Trusted List Browser (https://esignature.ec.europa.eu/efda/tl-browser). This tool and its content are established and maintained through a collaboration between the Member States and the European Commission. Anybody living inside or outside the European Union is able to acquire these qualified Trust Services with a guarantee that these services are going to be recognised by all the Member States.

Please note that you may already have a qualified signing capability embedded in your national eID card. To receive more information, you can consult the national authorities who issued your eID card.

2 PROVE YOUR IDENTITY

To sign a document with a qualified electronic signature, you will need to acquire a specific digital **certificate**, which is a strong personal digital entitlement (e.g. as your passport). Such a certificate can be enabled by your national eID card, or is issued by a **QTSP** who is authorised to collect, verify and store your data. Some of your personal data (e.g. your names) are present in the certificate. For more details about the data collection and usage of the personal data, you can contact the qualified service provider you are collaborating with.

3 SIGN A DOCUMENT WITH A QES

EUIBAs accept QES in which the following criteria are met:

- The signatory's identity is clearly mentioned in the qualified digital certificate used for producing the QES.
- The QES was produced inside the QSCD.

The private market of the QTSPs offers several qualified Trust Services. We strongly advise you to perform a thorough market research in order to acquire the services by the QTSP that best fit your business needs.

Key attention points

The **signatory's data should be clearly indicated** in the electronic signature properties. Your name and surname will allow your identification as the signatory.

A visual representation of the electronic signature is **optional and adds no additional legal value**. A qualified electronic signature can be verified **only in electronic form**, not on a printed version of the document.

Please bear in mind that **modifications after signing the document** will break the integrity of the existing electronic signatures. It is therefore important that the document is no longer changed after signing.

Please avoid applying **your visible signature on top of the visible signatures** that are already present in the document.

The electronically-signed documents provided to the EUIBAs should **not be locked or password-protected**.

This document was elaborated by DIGIT.

The Directorate-General for Informatics (DIGIT) is the Commission department responsible for providing digital services that support other Commission departments and EU institutions in their daily work and that help public administrations in EU member countries work better together.

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