



Final Statement of the European Forum on Electronic Signature and Trust Services

30 September 2020

The **European Forum on Electronic Signature and Trust Services (EFPE)** – Europe's largest international conference on digital trust and security services and electronic identification – annually brings together representatives of science, state and local administration, business and international organisations championing the cause of electronic communication. For these actors, the event is a mandatory item on their shortlists of get-togethers to attend. This year's 20th edition of the EFPE 2020 Conference was centred around the theme of 'Trusted Economy'. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was held exclusively online. This year's event featured 30 speakers and panellists and the entire conference was attended by nearly 600 participants from 39 countries, including Albania, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, Belarus, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Georgia, Spain, Netherlands, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Latvia, Germany, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, United States, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Hungary, Great Britain, Italy, United Arab Emirates.

Numerous fire chats and panel discussions played an essential role in exploring conference topics. Discussions were grouped into four main thematic areas:

- Trusted Services @ eID: market overlook
- „Trusted Economy” in practice
- Tools of „Trusted Economy”
- Looking ahead

The speakers and experts participating in the conference agreed that **electronic identification** is one of the principal issues faced by Trust Economy. Standardization and unification of both technological and legislative frameworks are a matter of key importance. It is also essential to develop solutions that are easy to use and attractive for end users so as to ensure their rapid uptake. The need to develop legal rules governing the supervision and control of **electronic identification** service providers is another area identified for action. Secure and transparent **eID** provided as a Qualified Trust Service, will greatly benefit the implementation of GDPR and the protection of the rights of consumers and citizens.

It is also necessary to ensure a broader and uniform regulation of solutions based on **remote identification** and **video identification** in the European market. Such solutions are urgently called for, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic that has spread across the globe. Already today, we are seeing a rapid technological development and an increasing popularity of solutions that rely on the use of remote channels in virtually every industry. Experts regard it as a natural driving force for the development of trust services and it is essential to ensure that these services are supported by regulators and public administrations on equal terms across the European Union.

Hands-on implementation of **paperless** technologies into business processes was another important topic addressed at the conference. The speakers highlighted the benefits and new opportunities offered by trust services that could be fully integrated into corporate systems. This has made it easy



to use solutions such as, among others, electronic signature, electronic seal, time stamping and, most importantly, validation. Notably, businesses that fully embraced electronic processes based on trust services even prior to the pandemic have gained a competitive advantage in the market.

An analysis of the key role that **e-delivery** services can and should play in electronic communication was another important topic explored during the conference. Unfortunately, only in some EU countries are these services available and widely used, and they are hardly used at a cross-border level. This situation calls for urgent cooperation between Member States and providers of trust services in order to create opportunities for the use of registered electronic delivery throughout the digital single market.

In their speeches, the panelists stressed that some of the conclusions of the discussions and presentations should be taken into account in the **review of the eIDAS Regulation**, which is currently underway. **The revision of eIDAS** is an excellent opportunity to make the necessary adjustments and changes to that instrument four years into its application, for example with regard to the already discussed issue of the uniform approach of Member States' regulators towards remote identity verification techniques.

Qualified website authentication certificates (QWAC certificates) was another topic addressed during the conference. The speakers noted the absence of good communication with the providers of web browser technologies and the need to create an appropriate standard for displaying sites secured by this type of certificates to users. Web browser providers' inclination to regulate the standards and validity of certificates in isolation from existing security standards and user requirements was identified as a threat, as it could lead to a situation where such operators would impose requirements that were not compatible with the EU law.

Launched during the conference, the report 'Trusted economy in the new reality. Mitigation of the risks associated with rapid digitization' addresses the question in which areas and how the accelerated digitization of enterprises and public administration proceeded during the COVID-19 pandemic between March and September 2020. While focusing on the Polish experience, the authors expanded their perspective to include other European countries where the experience of the initial months of the pandemic and its consequences was just as, if not more, hard and intensive. The second important purpose of the report is to consider to what extent trust services and electronic identification (eID) – that is solutions that have been created and developed specifically as basic tools for digitization – have proved their worth in the current circumstances. Special attention is paid to legal aspects in order to verify how legislation has been able to keep up with the changes that have been happening at a pace not seen before. The report is available for download at: www.efpe.eu

The benefits of **electronic identification** services can already be seen today in relation to trust services, which will undoubtedly develop at an even accelerated pace in the coming years. The participants and the organisers agreed that the EFPE conference brings an essential contribution to the dissemination of hands-on knowledge and that next year's event should specifically address the needs of new beneficiaries of electronic identification and trust services. A tighter interaction between the public and the private sector is also anticipated. In particular, it is expected that measures aimed at easy recognition and acceptance of qualified trust services by public administrations will be strengthened. At the same time, the prevailing view is that public administration in individual countries should focus its efforts primarily on the digitization of existing processes and remote services for citizens and businesses rather than on building its own trust services, all the more so considering the existence of



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a developed market of such services. The resulting synergies are expected to contribute to the spread of electronic communication in the broadest sense of the term, while making it fully cross-border in nature, a feature of particular importance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that has swept across the globe in 2020.

This final document was prepared by international experts and participants at the EFPE 2020 conference in English, Polish and Russian. We urge policymakers and lawmakers to consider this modest contribution of the EFPE to the European and international discourse in their future actions.