Telecommunications Council Approves Legal Framework for Electronic Signatures

IRIS 2000-1:1/5

Marina Benassi
Attorney at law

At the meeting on 30 November 1999, the Telecommunications Ministers of the European Member States unanimously approved the text of an Electronic Signature Directive that would give digital signatures for online contracts a legal status equivalent to that of conventional handwritten signatures (see IRIS 1999-7:7). The Electronic Signature Directive will form the first attempt made by the European Union to create a solid and concrete regulatory framework for digital signatures and will support and enhance the European effort being made towards the development of a uniform regulatory framework for electronic commerce throughout the EU.

The Directive adopted by the Ministers aims to lay down the standard requirements to be imposed for the validity of electronic signature certificates in order to ensure a certain degree of harmonization throughout the EU as well as a minimum level of security. The Directive explicitly excludes legal discrimination with regard to documents presenting an electronic signature solely on this ground. Free circulation and full legal validity will be assured provided that the set of requirements established by the Directive is met.

The Directive is moreover "technology-neutral": this means that full recognition will be guaranteed irrespective of the format of the electronic signature.

Directive 1999/ /EC on a Community framework for electronic signatures.

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31999L0093:EN:HTML

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026