

Chambers highlight importance of cross-border e-Business to European economy

The closing event of the WESIGN project in Stockholm today, gathering Chambers of Commerce from across Europe, underlined the potentially pivotal role of e-Business in the evolution of the internal market and in Europe's economic recovery.

Chambers involved in the project presented the results of research conducted among their member companies, showing that businesses are keen to work with innovative techniques that ensure the confidentiality of data, such as certified e-Signature. For example, 62.5% of Greek respondents said that they're interested in testing the e-Signature application in the near future, and 92% of Italian companies that already use the application said they would continue to do so in the future.

The electronic signature can be used for various purposes, such as securing e-mail exchange, custom documents, storage and encryption, e-Invoice and e-Procurement, allowing considerable savings of time and money.

However, the discussions also highlighted that a lack of interoperability between existing national systems significantly hinders the uptake of e-Signature in Europe.

Ben Butters, Director of European Affairs at EUROCHAMBRES, explained: *"For example, French authorities may reject documents signed electronically by a British company because the way in which such certificates are delivered differs greatly between these two countries. Improving the interoperability of e-Signatures across Europe is crucial to simplify the life of entrepreneurs seeking to operate cross border and make the most of e-Business and e-Government applications."*

The Services Directive: a strong incentive for improved interoperability

The implementation of the Services Directive can act as a catalyst for the spread of e-Certificates in Europe. The directive foresees the creation of electronically interoperable Points of Single Contact in all Member States.

Yet, according to a recent EUROCHAMBRES survey, the lack of interoperability of the electronic systems is still a major issue which seems likely to hinder the effectiveness of the whole directive.

"Member States should take the deadline for implementation of the Directive, namely 28 December 2009, as a limit to improve coordination between their electronic models. The European Union should provide a good example by recognising the use of e-Signature in its own administrative procedures, which is regrettably not the case at the moment," concluded Mr Butters.

About WESIGN

Launched in January 2008 for a period of 18 months, the WESIGN project aimed at enhancing the access of SMEs to digital certificates. It was co-funded by the European Commission under the eTEN programme and implemented by Chambers of Commerce in nine countries, including EUROCHAMBRES.

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All our press releases can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.eu/content/default.asp?PageID=153
More information on WESIGN on www.wesign.org

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EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 19 million enterprises in Europe – 96% of which are SMEs – through members in 45 countries and a European network of 2000 regional and local Chambers.