Security in electronic communication: digital signatures and encryption

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Adopting the report by Mr Wolfgang Ullmann (Green, D) on security and trust in electronic communication, Parliament called for a legal framework to be created to ensure mutual trust in digital signatures and confidentiality, and for the legal framework to be designed primarily to abolish national restrictions on certification. Steps should be taken to remove obstacles to the use of digital signatures in the legal system, industry and public administration, and every effort made to ensure that digital and conventional signatures had the same status in law. European Union institutions should lead the way in the use of digital signatures. Parliament also called on the Commission and the Member States to press ahead with dialogue and agreements at international level to allow the creation of a worldwide virtual economic area through common technical standards and mutual recognition. Parliament underlined the importance of international dialogue between the European Union and various international organizations (OECD, UN, ITU, ICC and WTO) to avoid a situation in which regulations formed a barrier to trade with major trading partners and underlined the need for reciprocity in the treatment of the European Union by other trading partners. It stressed the importance of mutual recognition of digital signatures between Member States and the need to define minimum standards at European level, allowing Member States to generate confidence in the quality and reliability of the certification regulations; if necessary, Member States could set higher standards. With regard to the directive on digital signatures, Parliament called for it to provide for cross-border certification, possibly with an authority to which third parties from other Member States could apply for a guarantee that certification had taken place in the Member State concerned. Common conditions also had to be laid down for the setting-up and operation of certification bodies; each Member States should have an accrediting body to supervise compliance with these conditions in an objective, non-discriminatory way. General rules to reinforce confidence had to be sufficiently flexible to take account of new technological developments. Parliament considered that developing an encryption market could, despite the controversy surrounding the illicit use, play an important role in developing electronic commerce and guaranteeing the fundamental right to privacy and to communication without interference. It called on European enterprises to establish common rules in this area at national and international level to promote the development of digital signatures.