

Joint Declaration

on cooperation and exchange of best practices in the field of self-sovereign identity

between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Kingdom of Spain

Context

We are living a historical moment in time: the COVID19 pandemic, more than any other event in recent history, has highlighted the need for digital services and laid bare the shortcomings in digitalisation prevalent across our continent. It has also shown how digital solutions, designed having users' needs and preferences in mind, can help tackle effectively and efficiently the various issues our societies are facing, making them more resilient.

Digital identity - or the ability to make claims about your identity or attributes in order to access public and private services in a digital space - is a fundamental building block in today's world. Many digital interactions, and especially those that are most relevant, like dealing with public authorities, using internet banking, or buying online, require parties being able to identify each other reliably, and to share identity information between them in a secure and trustworthy way.

Thus, digital identity constitutes the foundational layer upon which digital services - public and private alike - can be provided to our citizens, who should be empowered to securely share their own identity data under their sole control. It is one of the most important levers European Member States and the European Union as a whole have to fulfil the potential of our economies and the European single market in a digital world.

However, the window of opportunity to influence the future of digital identity in Europe is narrowing: several major players are moving into this space and will soon be determining the future of digital identity, including for European citizens. The recent announcement by a large company to provide digital identities within their wallet is a case in point. This would lead to a world in which the majority of European economic and social life will be intermediated by foreign actors, whose goals and principles may not be aligned with those sustained by the European Union. Once we have reached that point, there will be no way back.

We have a unique opportunity to prevent this by acting now and creating a bold vision for digital identity nationally and in Europe, inspired by the European approach to digitalisation, which puts people at its core and is rooted at the European common principles and values. It is a vision that gives citizens the full control of their digital identities, making sure that the rights granted offline are also enforceable online. Getting this right could mean a step-change in digital sovereignty and support the growth of our economies and the European single market at such a crucial moment in time.

No single European member will be able to do this on its own. We will only succeed by working hand in hand and providing a viable and attractive digital identity offer to our citizens. Being aware of this opportunity, Germany and Spain - two of Europe's most populous and influential countries - have decided to join forces to tackle this challenge.

Self-sovereign identity approach

Digital identity has seen incredible developments and progress over the last years. Its evolution has seen a move from centralised, to federated, to self-sovereign identity (SSI).

In short, SSI allows a citizen to be in full control of all their identity attributes and manage their use in a secure, distributed way from their smartphone. It constitutes a step-change in the evolution of digital identity. Further, it marks a significant improvement in usability and increase in utility for the citizen, which could finally solve the adoption problems we have seen across the continent. Finally, it constitutes the gold standard in privacy-by-design identity approaches and would further cement Europe's reputation as the global leader in privacy.

Several initiatives are already on their way in Europe, highlighting the momentum SSI is gaining:

1. In Spain, its Technical Standards national body (UNE) has approved the first European standard on the management of SSI related credentials using distributed ledger technologies (like blockchain), the UNE 71307-1:2020 standard. This standard has been adopted by the European Standards Committee (CEN) as a basis for a future European standard on the subject, and is grounded on the SSI digital identity

model implemented by the Spanish private sector in several use cases. In the public sector, the Spanish Government has included a new model for digital identity, simpler, more effective and user-friendly, as one of the initiatives of its Plan for the Digitalization of Public Administrations.

2. Germany - spearheaded by Chancellor Angela Merkel - has prioritised digital identification as a key focus area in 2021 and is already implementing a nationwide public-private SSI initiative which has officially launched with its first use case in May 2021 with further use cases lined up over the coming months.
3. The European Commission recently published their proposal for an updated eIDAS regulation, the main framework governing the use of digital identities in Europe, in order to allow for a European Digital Identity. With its focus on user-centric, wallet-based digital identity as well as the provision of electronic ledgers and electronic attestations of attributes as trust services, the new eIDAS seems open to the use of new technologies such as SSI.
4. The European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI), currently being developed by the European Blockchain Partnership, is working on the creation of a European Self-Sovereign Identity Framework (ESSIF) to support the implementation of SSI based use cases on the EBSI infrastructure.

Objective

In light of the context laid out above, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Kingdom of Spain (hereinafter: the Sides) jointly decide to pursue opportunities for collaborating on cross-border digital identity based on self-sovereign identity.

In particular, the Sides envision the following five objectives:

1. Sharing best practices and knowledge (technical, regulatory, operational) in the sphere of digital identity and SSI in particular.
2. Exploring how to ensure that identity documents and digital identity credentials issued by the State remain at the core of the decentralised wallet-based ecosystem, so that digital identities based on SSI originate securely and reliably from them.
3. Designing and conceptualising a cross-border pilot to be implemented in 2022.
4. Using their experiences in the pilot to provide input into the framework of the already designated experts for the development of the common Union Toolbox for a coordinated approach towards a European Digital Identity Framework, as recommended by the European Commission.
5. Creating a joint digital identity working group to coordinate objectives 1 to 4.

Furthermore, the Sides commit to present results at regular intervals to all relevant stakeholders.

Both countries wish to keep this collaboration open to other Member states willing to progress on the implementation of cross-border pilots based on self-sovereign identity, and encourage them to join the initiative.

The signatories of this declaration invite digital identity stakeholders to support this collaboration.

Signed in duplicate at Berlin on 29.07.2021.

For the Federal Republic of Germany

For the Kingdom of Spain

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