EU Commission avoids significant delays in digital wallet with last-minute agreement

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By Luca Bertuzzi

The first batch of technical specifications for the European digital wallet was adopted at a meeting with EU countries' representatives today, the same day as the statutory deadline. The European Commission introduced some final tweaks to the secondary regulations to pacify the resistance of certain member states, most notably Germany, albeit some Nordic and Baltic countries still voted against.

The European Commission has managed to avoid significant delays in the European digital identity wallet with the last-minute adoption of the technical specifications included in five implementing regulations.

The EU digital wallet is meant to provide an European alternative to the e-wallets provided by tech companies such as Google and Apple. The underlying regulation set Nov. 21 as the statutory deadline to adopt its first batch of technical specifications.

The specifications were adopted with five implementing acts by qualified majority at a meeting of technical experts of EU national governments today, following around five hours of intense discussions.

The five implementing acts are meant to detail some of the critical technical features for the digital wallet that is meant to become operational in 2026, namely concerning its core functionalities, personal identification, certification, protocols, and trusted frameworks.

These secondary regulations had become a bone of contention between the EU executive branch and several member states. In August, the German government sent a letter to the commission raising several concerns and putting forth alternative wording agreed with experts from France, the Netherlands and Spain (see here).

Since then, the commission tried to introduce the requests from the member states into the draft text. In October, the EU executive put revised versions of the draft secondary regulations on the table of another meeting of technical experts.

However, the commission eventually did not put these new drafts to a vote as it said they were going to introduce some minor amendments following the discussion (see here).

For critics, the commission's decision to postpone the vote was a clear sign that EU countries did not support their text. Still, this resistance was finally overcome today as the implementing acts received the necessary votes for a qualified majority following some last-minute tweaks.

Germany voted in favor of all secondary regulations, except for one that still made it through.

Epicenter.works, an NGO that has been vocal in opposing the first draft of the implementing acts and that was mentioned in the German government's August letter, also recognized that the latest versions made significant progress in terms of privacy, albeit it maintains some concerns over the right to use pseudonyms.

"Recent changes to the text put users in control about their data by ensuring every bit of information needs their consent before it can be shared," Thomas Lohninger, epicenter.works' executive director, told MLex. "It also prevents governments from obtaining information about concrete user behavior by putting the transaction logs solely on the device of the end user and not on government servers," he said.

The only countries that voted against the secondary regulations are Baltic and Nordics, MLex understands, but that was not enough to prevent them from getting adopted.

The European Commission did not immediately react to MLex's request for comment.

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