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NEW REGISTRATION CRITERIA FOR THE .EU TLD IN ORDER TO REACH ALL EU CITIZENS

The European Parliament has introduced a change to the TLD (Top Level Domain) regulation .eu in order to bring the TLD into line with the present and future needs of the digital world and those of new bodies that may be interested in registering an .eu domain name in order to promote its commercial activities.

The .eu TLD, introduced in 2006 to promote the common European market on the internet and to encourage the development of an information society, has from the start represented an ambitious political and technical project created by the European Commission together with the registry appointed to handle operations, EURid.

The .eu TLD is in fact an important tool for promoting European businesses, because it provides a safe space on the internet, i.e. in the biggest engine of economic and social change that has ever been known. For these reasons, under the admissibility criteria adopted in 2006 an .eu domain could be validly assigned to:

- i) Any business that has its registered office, central administration site, or main site of business in the territory of the European Community;
- ii) Any organization set up in the territory of the European Community, except where covered by national law;
- iii) Any physical person residing in the territory of the European Community.

The admissibility criteria were extended in 2014 to include the European Economic Area, enabling citizens and businesses in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway to register domains with this TLD.

The .eu TLD has been received very favorably, with over 1.5 million new registrations made in its first week (making it the 8th-largest TLD in the world), and it has seen an average annual growth of 2.2% over the last 10 years. However, 2018 saw a fall in the overall number of domain names registered compared to the previous year (-3.4%). There are two main causes: the initiatives taken by EURid against illegal online activities, which led to the revocation of over 36,000 domain names, and the enduring uncertainty associated with Brexit. The repercussions of this particular political stalemate have been seen in the domain name market, with a slump in registrations of .eu domain names by bodies in the UK over the last two years (-43% in the last 12 months alone). These figures have seen the UK slip from 4th to 7th place for registered .eu domains, behind Germany, the Low Countries, France, Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic.

To ensure that the .eu TLD can absorb the changes in the online market and in the political context from 2006 to today, the new regulation will come into force on 13 October 2022, but the new eligibility criteria provided for by this new regulation have already come into force (on 19 October 2019).

These new criteria lift the geographic restriction, enabling all EU citizens - including those residing in countries outside the EU - to apply to register an .eu domain name. In detail, the registration of a domain name under the .eu TLD can therefore now be requested by any of the following:

- i) A business set up in the EU, or in Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway;
- ii) An organization set up in the EU, or in Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway, except where covered by national law;
- iii) A citizen of the European Union, independently of their place of residence;
- iv) A physical person residing in a member country, or in Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway, who is not a citizen of the EU.

This change will result in new opportunities for development for the .eu TLD, confirming its central importance for commercial activities conducted linked to the internet and established in the EU and beyond.