ECOWAS COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CEDEAO
COMISSÃO DA CEDEAO

ECOWAS ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN - The journey

ECOWAS COMMISSION

I. INTRODUCTION

- The need to enhance the expedited cross-border movement of goods of ECOWAS origin within the Community space whilst ensuring that such goods meet the origin requirements as a means to stimulate economic growth in ECOWAS member states triggered the reflection on the use of information and communication technology to support intra-regional trade.
- The reflection which begun in the pre-COVID era, saw the automation of the procedures and processes underpinning the management of the Community preferential tariff treatment of Community goods commonly referred to as ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS).
- The ETLS has a functioning website and web portal used by managers of the Scheme in member states and at the ECOWAS Commission since 2021.

CERTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY ORIGIN

- The request for certificate of origin, its delivery, approval by Customs prior to export and presentation to Customs of the country of importation as proof of origin and therefore eligible for tariff preference have become cumbersome and very often, subject to fraud. Customs administrations in member states spend longer time verifying the authenticity of certificates of origin.
- The entire certificate of origin regime therefore became an impediment to trade thereby undermining the effectiveness of intra-community trade.

AUTOMATION OF COMMUNITY CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN

- The acceptance of electronic certificate of origin has been provided for in a Community text creating the legal basis for the automation of the community certificate of origin.
- In 2019, the need to automate the Community certificate of origin became more pertinent leading to the establishment of a Technical working group comprising the ECOWAS Commission and 4 member states: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire.
- These member states had already achieved higher levels of automation in the application for and delivery of certificate of origin at the country level as well as using different customs IT systems that need to be connected to each other.

AUTOMATION OF COMMUNITY CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN I

- The terms of reference of the working group were to discuss:
- The scope of automation
- The technical specifications of the digitized community certificate of origin
- The concept and design/architecture of the ECOWAS e-certificate of origin system
- Digital signature for the e-CO and its infrastructure, etc.
- Following the work of the group, the following were agreed as the way forward:

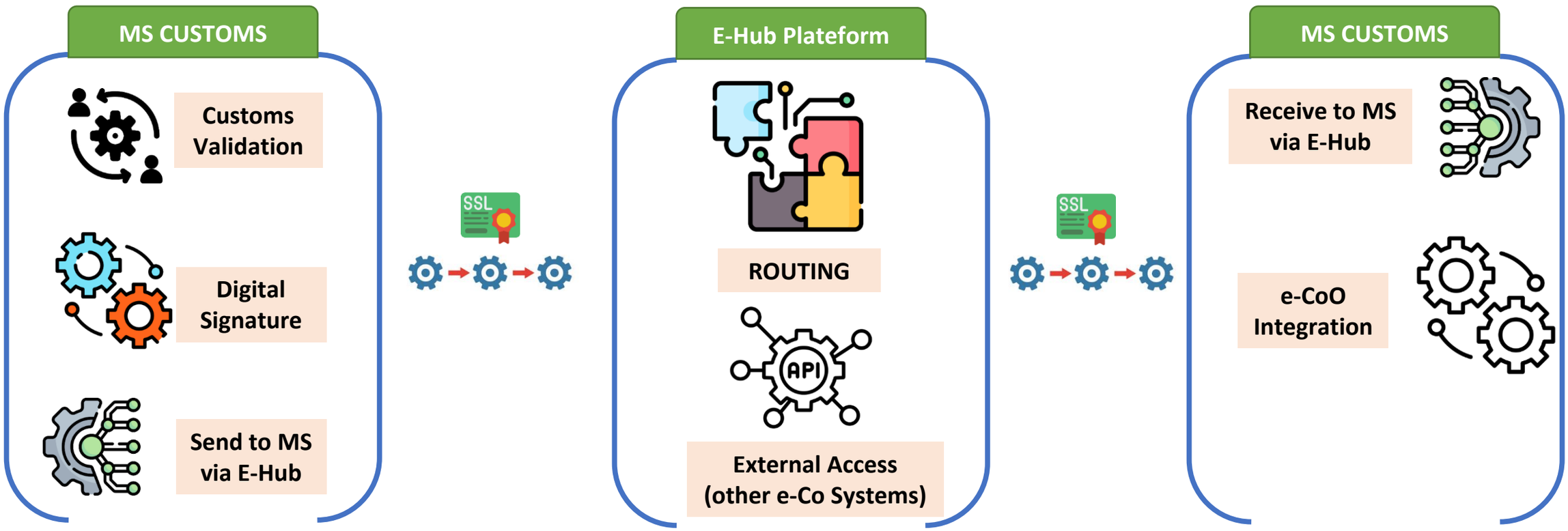
✓ End-to-end automation of the certificate of origin process starting from the application by the exporter to the reception of the certificate by the Customs in the importing country.

AUTOMATION OF COMMUNITY CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN II

- ✓ Work with the national certificate of origin issuing authority and the customs administration to automate in-country process.
- ✓ The establishment of a regional central server (e-Co Hub) to facilitate the transfer of certificates of origin between the countries of the region.
- ✓ The use of Extensible Markup Language (XML) which is a simple and very flexible text format for the exchange of files between Member States.
- ✓ The adoption of digital signature as a standard for the e-CO. The e-CO sent must be digitally signed and the mechanism to be used is a Public Key Infrastructure (PKI).

E-CO ARCHITECTURE

General Architecture



The digital signature of the e-Co

- **Authentic:** The identity of the signatory can be traced with certainty.
- **Tamper-proof:** One person (who signs) cannot pretend to be another.
- **Non-reusable**: The signature is part of the signed document and cannot be moved to another document.
- **Unalterable:** Once the document is signed, it cannot be modified *.
- **Irrevocable:** Who signed cannot contest it.

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THANK YOU