

Blockchain Timestamping and Creative Work Protection

The EU's first explicit blockchain timestamp legislation and its implications for creators

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What is blockchain timestamping?

This guide presents the legal framework applicable in Italy to blockchain timestamping as proof of prior existence. Italy holds a unique position in Europe: it is the first EU country to have explicitly legislated on blockchain timestamps, giving them the same legal effect as a qualified electronic timestamp under eIDAS.

Blockchain timestamping creates permanent, tamper-proof evidence that a document existed at a specific point in time. It does not grant intellectual property rights — but it proves prior existence with mathematical certainty.

How it works (simplified)

- 1. Digital fingerprint:** Your file is converted into a unique 64-character code (SHA-256 hash) — mathematically unique to that exact file.
- 2. Permanent record:** That fingerprint is inscribed on Ethereum, a public ledger maintained by thousands of computers worldwide. Once recorded, it cannot be altered or deleted.
- 3. Timestamp:** The blockchain automatically records the exact date and time — publicly verifiable by anyone, at any time, for free.
- 4. Your certificate:** You receive a ZIP containing the PDF certificate, metadata, and a link to the Ethereum transaction.

Legal framework in Italy

Italy's legal framework for blockchain timestamping is the most explicit in the European Union. Rather than relying solely on general evidence principles, Italy enacted specific legislation in 2019 that directly equates blockchain storage with qualified electronic timestamping under EU law.

Law No. 12/19 — Article 8 ter (in force February 2019)

On 11 January 2019, Italy enacted Law No. 12/19 as part of a national reform to simplify administrative formalities. Article 8 ter, paragraph 3 explicitly states that storage of a computerised document through technologies based on distributed ledgers produces the same legal effect as an electronic timestamp under eIDAS (Regulation EU No. 910/2014).

Law No. 12/19, Article 8 ter — The key provision

"Storage of a computerised document through the use of technologies based on distributed ledgers produces the same legal effect as an 'electronic time stamp' as defined in European Regulation No. 910/2014 (eIDAS)."

Italy is the first EU country to enact explicit legislation giving blockchain timestamps the same legal standing as a qualified electronic timestamp. No court challenge is required — the equivalence is established by statute.

What 'same legal effect as eIDAS' means in practice

Under eIDAS Article 41, a qualified electronic timestamp benefits from a legal presumption of accuracy of the date and time, and integrity of the data. By equating blockchain storage with this standard, Italian law grants blockchain timestamps the same presumption — without the need for a Qualified Trust Service Provider (QTSP).

Practical implication for Italian creators

In Italy, a blockchain timestamp is not merely admissible evidence (as in France following TJ Marseille 2025) — it benefits from a statutory legal presumption of accuracy and integrity.

This is a stronger position than most EU countries. Italian creators and businesses benefit from the clearest legal framework in the EU for blockchain-based proof.

Italy's position compared to other EU countries

Italy's explicit legislation places it in a distinct legal category relative to its EU neighbours.

Country	Legal basis	Strength
Italy	Law No. 12/19, Art. 8 ter — explicit statutory equivalence with eIDAS timestamp	Strongest — statutory presumption
France	Art. 1358 Code civil + TJ Marseille 2025 — freedom of evidence + first EU court recognition	Strong — admissible + growing precedent
EU (all 27)	eIDAS Art. 41 — cannot be denied admissibility solely because electronic	Solid baseline — admissible everywhere
Japan	Blockchain-friendly jurisdiction, court precedent in criminal proceedings, Web3 national strategy 2022	Good — receptive courts, no specific IP legislation
Germany, Spain...	eIDAS applies directly — no specific blockchain legislation	Good — admissible, no national precedent

Copyright law — Legge sul diritto d'autore (Law 633/1941)

Italian copyright law protects original creative works automatically from the moment of creation, with no registration formality required. Protection lasts 70 years after the author's death. Moral rights (diritto morale) are perpetual and inalienable. Blockchain timestamping complements copyright by providing dated proof of the work's existence — with Italy's Law 12/19, this proof carries a statutory presumption of accuracy.

Use cases for creators and businesses in Italy

Italy's vibrant creative economy — fashion, design, music, film, publishing, artisan crafts — makes blockchain timestamping particularly relevant.

Scenario	What the timestamp proves	Stake
Fashion & textile design	Pattern files and sketches before sharing with manufacturers	Priority in counterfeiting disputes
Industrial design	Form and concept before formal filing at UIBM (Italian Patent Office)	Prior art during registration process
Software and algorithms	Exact codebase state at a given date	Alternative to patent, prior art evidence
Music, film, publishing	Final version before submission or distribution	Copyright priority, anti-plagiarism
Artisan and craft works	Photos and technical documentation of original pieces	Protection against imitation
Confidential commercial data	Business plans, formulas, know-how — existence at date X without disclosure	Trade secret protection
Collaborations	Successive versions — who contributed what, and when	Co-author and co-founder disputes

Practical workflow — preparing your file(s)

The file(s) you timestamp must be preserved exactly as anchored. Even changing one character invalidates the proof.

Step	Action	Notes
1	Finalise your document	Make sure it is the version you want to protect — not a draft.
2	Prepare your file(s)	PDFs are stable. Word files modify their metadata when opened. For multiple files, drop them all at once — Etch will bundle them automatically. You may also ZIP them yourself if you prefer.
3	Name it clearly	E.g.: Rossi_Collection_FW2026_FINAL_ANCHORED_2026-03-20.pdf
4	Make it read-only	Windows: right-click > Properties > Read-only. Mac: File > Get Info > Locked.
5	Timestamp it	Upload your file(s) to etchproof.eu — they never leave your browser, only their fingerprints are sent.
6	Store the ZIP	Keep your original file(s) and the proof ZIP together, in at least two locations.

File format stability

The hash changes if the file changes — even by a single bit. Always anchor the final version, in a format that does not modify itself when opened.

Format	Stability	Recommendation
PDF	Ideal	Stable when opened, universal, does not modify its metadata.
Plain text (.txt, .md)	Ideal	No hidden metadata, fully stable.
Source code	Ideal	Plain text, fully stable.
Video / Audio	Good	Stable if not re-encoded.
PNG / JPEG / WebP	Medium	EXIF metadata may change when re-saved. Make a dedicated copy.
SVG / AI / EPS	Medium	Stable if not re-saved in an editor.
PSD / Clip Studio	Medium	Stable if not re-saved. Also export a flattened PDF.
Word (.docx / .pages)	Avoid	Modifies metadata on every open — always export to PDF before anchoring.
Excel / Numbers	Avoid	Same issue as Word.

Important limitations — what timestamping does NOT do

It does NOT grant intellectual property rights. A timestamp proves existence, not ownership or authorship.

It does NOT prove you are the author. It proves you had the file at that date — additional evidence may still be needed.

It does NOT store your file(s). Only the fingerprint (hash) of each file is recorded. Without your original file(s), the proof is useless.

It does NOT constitute absolute proof. Even with Italy's strong legal framework, it is one element in a body of evidence.

The certificate alone is not sufficient. Verification requires both the certificate AND the original file(s).

Cost comparison

Blockchain timestamping offers permanent proof at a fraction of the cost of formal registration options available in Italy.

Method	Approximate cost	Duration
Blockchain timestamping (Etch)	~2 EUR per anchoring — statutory presumption (Law 12/19)	Permanent
Notarised declaration (atto notarile)	150-500 EUR+	Permanent
Design registration (UIBM)	100-300 EUR per design	25 years
EU Trade Mark registration (EUIPO)	850 EUR (1 class)	10 years (renewable)
Italian patent application	600-2,000 EUR+	20 years

How verification works

Anyone can verify your proof, at any time, for free — including Italian courts, lawyers, and opposing parties:

- Calculate the SHA-256 hash of your original file using the verification tool at etchproof.eu.
- Look up the transaction on [Etherscan.io](https://etherscan.io) — the public Ethereum blockchain explorer.
- Confirm that the hash in the blockchain matches your file's hash exactly.

For a multi-file bundle, each file can be verified individually using its own hash. The session hash (anchored on the blockchain) corresponds to the hash of the manifest listing all files.

Even if the Etch service were to cease operations, your proof remains permanently verifiable on the Ethereum blockchain — maintained by thousands of independent nodes worldwide, with no dependence on any company, government, or hardware.

Questions? contact@etchproof.eu | Verification: etchproof.eu/verify

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