

# Unfairness of a protocol for certified delivery

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## Abstract

Recently, Nenadić *et al.* (2004) proposed the RSA-CEGD protocol for certified delivery of e-goods. This is a relatively complex scheme based on verifiable and recoverable encrypted signatures (VRES) to guarantee properties such as strong fairness and non-repudiation, among others. In this paper, we demonstrate how this protocol cannot achieve fairness by presenting a severe attack and also pointing out some other weaknesses.

*Keywords:* Cryptographic protocols; Fair exchange; Non-repudiation;

## 1 Introduction

Interest in protocols for fair exchange of information with non-repudiation stems from its importance in many applications where disputes among parties can occur. Assurance of these properties enables the deployment of a wide range of applications, such as certified e-mail or business transactions through communication networks. As a result, fair non-repudiation has experienced an explosion of proposals in recent years (see [3] for an excellent survey).

Nevertheless, fairness and non-repudiation have not been so extensively studied as other classic issues, such as confidentiality or authentication. Previous experience in these contexts has shown that designing security protocols is an error-prone task. Consider, as an illustrative example, a non-repudiation protocol proposed in 1996 by Zhou and Gollman [8] that was verified and proved correct using three different methods [1, 6, 9]. Surprisingly, in 2002 Gürgens and Rudolph demonstrated the absence of fair non-repudiation in that protocol under reasonable assumptions [2]. In this case, possible attacks were detected after an analysis performed with a different formalism that considered scenarios not checked before.

The RSA-CEGD protocol [4] was recently proposed for certified delivery of e-goods, i.e. commercial products that can be represented in electronic form and transmitted over open networks. The scheme is designed to satisfy six major security requirements: non-repudiation of origin; non-repudiation of receipt;

strong fairness; e-goods content/quality assurance; e-goods and receipt confidentiality; and transparency of the STTP. In this paper we demonstrate that this protocol suffers from severe security problems, and some of the requirements mentioned above cannot be satisfied. In particular, we present attacks that show how the protocol does not assure fairness.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the notation and briefly reviews the RSA-CEGD protocol. Section 3 discusses the vulnerabilities and illustrate them through specific attack scenarios. Finally, Section 4 summarizes the paper by presenting some conclusions.

## 2 Overview of the RSA-CEGD protocol

For readability and completeness, we first provide a brief review of the RSA-CEGD protocol.

### 2.1 Notation

Throughout this paper, we will use the same notation introduced by the authors in the original paper [4]. The protocol's items and cryptographic symbols are described below.

- $P_a, P_b, P_t$ : different protocol parties, where  $P_a$  is the e-goods provider (*message sender*) and  $P_b$  is the purchaser (*message receiver*).  $P_t$  acts as a Semi-Trusted Third Party (STTP).
- $D_a$ : e-goods to be purchased.
- $k_a$ : symmetric key used by  $P_a$  to encrypt  $D_a$ .
- $r_a$ : random prime generated by  $P_a$ .
- $x_a = (r_a \times k_a) \bmod n_a$ : encryption of key  $k_a$  with random number  $r_a$
- $CertD_a = (desc_a, hd_a, h_a, ek_a, sign_{CA})$ : certificate for  $D_a$  issued by a CA, where:
  - $desc_a$  = description (content summary) of  $D_a$
  - $hd_a = h(E_{k_a}(D_a))$ : hash value of the encryption of  $D_a$  with key  $k_a$
  - $h_a = h(D_a)$ : hash value of  $D_a$
  - $ek_a = E_{pk_a}(k_a)$ : encryption of the key  $k_a$  with  $P_a$ 's public key,  $pk_a$
- $E_{sk_a}(hd_a)$ :  $P_a$ 's RSA signature on  $D_a$  serving as a proof of origin of  $D_a$
- $y_a = E_{pk_a}(r_a)$ : RSA encryption of number  $r_a$  with key  $pk_a$
- $r_b$ : random prime generated by  $P_b$  for the generation of the VRES ( $y_b, x_b, xx_b$ ).

<b>The exchange sub-protocol</b>	
E1:	$P_a \rightarrow P_b : E_{k_a}(D_a), CertD_a, x_a, E_{sk_a}(h_a)$
E2:	$P_b \rightarrow P_a : (x_b, xx_b, y_b), s_b, C_{bt}$
E3:	$P_a \rightarrow P_b : r_a$
E4:	$P_b \rightarrow P_a : r_b$

<b>The recovery sub-protocol</b>	
R1:	$P_a \rightarrow P_t : C_{bt}, y_b, s_b, y_a, r_a$
R2:	$P_t \rightarrow P_a : r_b$
R3:	$P_t \rightarrow P_b : r_a$

Figure 1: The RSA-CEGD protocol.

- $rec_b = (h_a)^{d_b} \bmod n_b$  :  $P_b$ 's receipt for  $P_a$ 's e-goods  $D_a$ , i.e.  $P_b$ 's RSA signature on  $D_a$
- $(y_b, x_b, xx_b)$  :  $P_b$ 's VRES, where
  - $y_b = r_b^{e_b} \bmod (n_b \times n_{bt})$  : encryption of  $r_b$  with  $P_b$ 's public key. Also recoverable by  $P_t$
  - $x_b = (r_b \times (h_a)^{d_b}) \bmod n_b = (r_b \times rec_b) \bmod n_b$  : encryption of  $rec_b$  with  $r_b$
  - $xx_b = (r_b \times E_{sk_{bt}}(h(y_b))) \bmod n_{bt}$  : control number that confirms the correct use of  $r_b$
- $C_{bt} = (pk_{bt}, w_{bt}, s_{bt})$  :  $P_b$ 's RSA public-key certificate issued by  $P_t$
- $pk_{bt} = (e_{bt}, n_{bt})$  : public RSA key related to  $C_{bt}$ , with  $e_{bt} = e_b$
- $sk_{bt} = (d_{bt}, n_{bt})$  : private RSA key related to  $C_{bt}$
- $w_{bt} = (h(sk_t, pk_{bt})^{-1} \times d_{bt}) \bmod n_{bt}$
- $s_{bt} = E_{sk_t}(h(pk_{bt}, w_{bt}))$  :  $P_t$ 's signature on  $h(pk_{bt}, w_{bt})$
- $s_b = E_{sk_b}(h(C_{bt}, y_b, y_a, P_a))$  :  $P_b$ 's recovery authorization token.

## 2.2 Exchange and recovery sub-protocols

The RSA-CEGD is an optimistic fair exchange protocol composed of two sub-protocols, as shown in Fig. 1. As usual, the exchange sub-protocol is used to carry out the exchange between parties without any TTP's involvement. In case the process fails to complete successfully, a recovery protocol can be invoked to handle this situation.

The notion of verifiable and recoverable encrypted signature (VRES) underlies at the core of the RSA-CEGD protocol. A VRES is basically an encrypted

signature, which acts as a *receipt* from the receiver's point of view, with two main properties. First, it can be *verified*: the receiver is assured that the VRES contains the expected signature without obtaining any valuable information about the signature itself during the verification process. And second, the receiver is assured that the original signature can be *recovered* with the assistance of a designated TTP in case the original sender refuses to do it.

Due to these two properties, the VRES becomes an interesting cryptographic primitive upon which fairness can be provided. The RSA-CEGD protocol relies on this element within the general scheme we sketch in what follows:

1.  $A$  ciphers the message with an encryption key and sends it to  $B$ .
2.  $B$  generates the VRES of his signature and sends it back to  $A$ .
3. Upon successful verification of the VRES,  $A$  is assured that it is secure for her to send the decryption key to  $B$ , so he can access the message.
4. Finally,  $B$  sends his original signature to  $A$  as a receipt. In case he refuses, a TTP can recover the signature from the VRES, thus restoring fairness.

The RSA-CEGD protocol makes use of a novel VRES method based on the RSA system, hence its name. The idea stems from the so-called *theory of cross-decryption* [7], which establishes that an RSA encrypted text can be decrypted by using two different keys if both pairs of secret/public keys are appropriately chosen. Party  $B$  is enforced to use a key of this kind to encrypt the VRES, while the TTP retains the other. This way, if subsequently  $B$  refuses to provide  $A$  with his signature, the TTP is able to recover it from the VRES.

### 3 Protocol vulnerabilities

Before stating specific attack scenarios, note that:

1. The VRES received by party  $P_a$  in step E2 contains the receipt  $rec_b$ , though it is not directly accessible to her. However, party  $P_a$  is provided with *all* the information required by the STTP to assist  $P_a$  in the recovery of the receipt, i.e. the authorization token  $s_b$  and  $P_b$ 's certificate  $C_{bt}$ .
2. Items  $\langle (x_b, xx_b, y_b), s_b, C_{bt} \rangle$  do not contain themselves any link to the current protocol execution. They only refer to the e-goods  $D_a$ , the receipt  $rec_b$ , an authorization to  $P_a$ ,  $P_b$ 's certificate, and the random numbers  $r_a$  and  $r_b$ .
3. The STTP can restore fairness only upon  $P_a$  request. Party  $P_b$  has no means to invoke a recovery sub-protocol. This puts  $P_a$  in an advantageous position with respect to the other party.

Invocation of the recovery sub-protocol by party  $P_a$  will provide  $P_b$  with the number  $r_a$ , thus being able to recover the encryption key and, hence, access

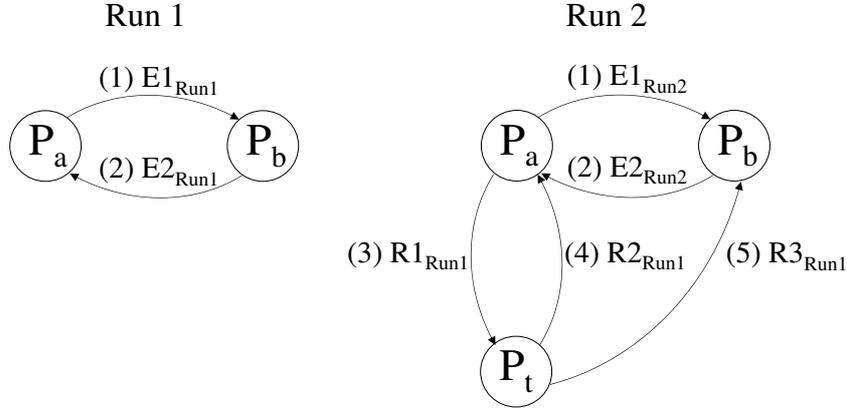


Figure 2: Scheme of the attack.

the e-goods  $D_a$ . Nevertheless,  $P_a$  can appeal to the STTP during a *different* protocol execution, since the information required to access the receipt does not identify the protocol session. In this scenario, the recovery sub-protocol also sends number  $r_a$  to  $P_b$ . However, the protocol specification does not require  $P_b$  to try the key received on messages of previous exchanges. In other words, is not reasonable to assume that  $P_b$  stores all proofs he ever received, especially those related to previous, unsuccessful exchanges.

As a result of the scheme outlined above, party  $P_a$  obtains a valid proof (receipt) of  $P_b$  having received e-goods  $D_a$ .  $P_b$ , on the other hand, does not has access to e-goods  $D_a$  (or is not aware that he has received the correct decryption key). Thus, non-repudiation is not satisfied and the protocol does not provide fairness for  $P_b$ . This situation is described in detail in the attack scenario described in the following section. Furthermore, some other weaknesses are pointed out in Section 3.2.

### 3.1 A replay attack

The basic scenario is graphically sketched in Fig. 2. The attack is executed through two different protocol runs between the same parties,  $P_a$  and  $P_b$ . This is not a strong assumption, since it is reasonable to expect that  $P_b$  wishes to buy several e-goods to the same seller.

During the first protocol running,  $P_a$  carries out step E1 and then waits for the VRES, the authorization token, and  $P_b$ 's certificate. We assume that  $P_a$  performs the required verifications on these items, so she is assured they are valid. At this point,  $P_a$  aborts the protocol. In fact, there is no abort procedure per se, so she only does not continue with step E3. Note as well that  $P_b$  has no means to invoke a recovery sub-protocol in this situation.

Now  $P_a$  owns the received items:

$$\langle (x_b, xx_b, y_b), s_b, C_{bt} \rangle$$

and also number  $r_a$  and its signature,  $y_a$ . From these,  $P_a$  constructs and stores the following message:

$$m_1 = \langle C_{bt}, y_b, s_b, y_a, r_a \rangle$$

Suppose that subsequently  $P_b$  contacts  $P_a$  to initiate another exchange aimed at buying a different e-good, say  $D'_a$ . Again,  $P_a$  follows step E1 and, after E2, she receives:

$$\langle (x'_b, xx'_b, y'_b), s'_b, C_{bt} \rangle$$

from  $P_b$ . Then,  $P_a$  aborts the exchange sub-protocol and starts an instance of the recovery sub-protocol. According to the protocol semantics, it is expected that  $P_a$  sends the following items to the STTP in step R1:

$$m_2 = \langle C_{bt}, y'_b, s'_b, y'_a, r'_a \rangle$$

However,  $P_a$  chooses  $m_1$  as the message to send. As this is a valid proof, the STTP will recover numbers  $r_b$  and  $r_a$ , which will be sent to  $P_a$  and  $P_b$ , respectively. The key point is that both numbers are not related with the current protocol execution, but with the previous one. This way,  $P_a$  can use  $r_b$  to obtain the receipt  $rec_b$  contained in  $m_1$ . Even though  $P_b$  also receives  $r_a$ , this number is useless for him to recover the key required to access  $D'_a$ . In fact, this  $r_a$  might provide  $P_b$  with access to the former e-goods he tried to buy. However, in all likelihood he is not aware of this.

As a result,  $P_a$  has a valid receipt of  $P_b$  having received e-goods  $D_a$ , though  $P_b$  does not actually own it. Therefore, the protocol does not provide fairness for  $P_b$ .

### 3.2 Indistinguishability of evidences of origin

Parties' identities are not included in the receipt, nor any other information related with the current protocol execution. Even using authenticated channels, evidences obtained do not link together the sender, the originator, the receiver, the current protocol execution, etc. This fact yields to a weakness related to the indistinguishability of evidences exchanged during the protocol, in particular, evidence of origin (EOO).

Suppose  $P_a$  and  $P_b$  perform a protocol execution, so finally  $P_b$  obtains  $D_a$  and an EOO =  $E_{sk_a}(hd_a)$ , where  $hd_a = h(E_{k_a}(D_a))$ . This evidence does not assure itself that  $P_b$  is the intended receiver. In other words, if the exchange would have been carried out between parties  $P_a$  and  $P_c$ , then the EOO received by  $P_c$  would have been identical (assuming that the same symmetric key,  $k_a$  is used). This way, once  $P_b$  owns  $D_a$  and EOO, he might provide another party,  $P_c$ , with both items by using a traditional channel. As a result,  $P_c$  possesses the e-goods coupled with a valid EOO for her. Party  $P_a$ , on the other hand, does not own a receipt issued by  $P_c$ . Consequently, the protocol neither provides fairness for  $P_a$ .

### 3.3 On the security of a modified RSA-CEGD

Nenadić *et al.* have presented a slightly different version of the RSA-CEGD protocol in [5]. The structure of this new proposal remains unaltered with respect to the original version. In particular, items sent by  $P_b$  during step E2 are the same that appears in the protocol here studied, i.e. the VRES, the authorization token, and  $P_b$ 's certificate. Clearly, the attacks described above are still applicable for this version.

## 4 Conclusions

In this paper, we have demonstrated how the RSA-CEGD protocol suffers from severe vulnerabilities. Our attacks show up that this scheme can lead to an unfair situation for any of the two parties involved in the exchange. To the best of our knowledge, the aforementioned weaknesses have not been pointed out before.

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