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The Erik Synchronization Protocol for use with the Resource Public Key
Infrastructure (RPKI)
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Abstract

This document specifies the Erik Synchronization Protocol for use with the Resource Public Key Infrastructure (RPKI). Erik Synchronization can be characterized as a data replication system using Merkle trees, a content-addressable naming scheme, concurrency control using monotonically increasing sequence numbers, and HTTP transport. Relying Parties can combine information retrieved via Erik Synchronization with other RPKI transport protocols. The protocol's design is intended to be efficient, fast, and easy to implement.

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1. Introduction

This document specifies the Erik Synchronization Protocol for use with the Resource Public Key Infrastructure (RPKI) [RFC6480]. Erik Synchronization can be characterized as a data replication system using Merkle Trees [M1987], a content-addressable naming scheme [RFC6920], concurrency control using monotonically increasing sequence numbers [RFC0677], and HTTP transport [RFC9110]. Relying Parties can combine information retrieved via Erik Synchronization with other RPKI transport protocols ([RFC5781] and [RFC8182]). The protocol's design is intended to be efficient, fast, and easy to implement [RFC1925].

The notion of cache-to-cache data replication was documented in Section 3 of [RFC7115].

Validated caches may also be created and maintained from other validated caches. Network operators SHOULD take maximum advantage of this feature to minimize load on the global distributed RPKI database. Of course, the recipient relying parties should re-validate the data.

-- RFC7115, section 3

Historic records show that experiments have been performed in this space using, for example, peer-to-peer file sharing technology (see [P2P]), but no standardised and widely-deployed mechanism for cache-to-cache replication emerged since then. The authors hope that the Erik Synchronization protocol might be suitable to fill this gap and help reduce load on the global RPKI.

1.1. Requirements Language

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

1.2. Related Work

The reader is assumed to be familiar with the terms and concepts described in "Maintenance of duplicate databases" [RFC0677], "An Infrastructure to Support Secure Internet Routing" [RFC6480], "The RPKI Repository Delta Protocol (RRDP)" [RFC8182], "Manifests for the Resource Public Key Infrastructure (RPKI)" [RFC9286], and "A Digital Signature Based on a Conventional Encryption Function" [M1987].

1.3. Glossary

This section describes the terminology and abbreviations used in this document. Though the definitions might not be clear on a first read, later on the terms will be introduced with more detail.

Erik relay An intermediate between CA publication repositories and Relying Parties.

FQDN The fully qualified domain name of a RPKI repository instance referenced in an end-entity certificate's Subject Information Access (SIA) extension's id-ad-signedObject accessDescription.

Hash A message digest calculated for an object using the SHA-256 algorithm.

ErikIndex An ordered listing of Partition identifiers and associated ErikPartition objects' hashes.

ErikPartition An ordered listing of the manifest objects' hashes, manifestNumber values, thisUpdate values, and their certificates' SIA extension values.

2. Informal Overview

In this synchronization protocol Merkle trees are used to determine whether differences exist between client and relay. Merkle trees are hierarchical data structures: the hash value of each node is computed recursively by hashing the concatenated hash values of the node's children. The hash of the ErikIndex represents the entire dataset related to a given FQDN. If the ErikIndex hash is not the same between two replicas, the relay provides the client with hashes of smaller and smaller portions of the to-be-replicated dataset until the exact list of out-of-sync or missing objects is identified. Sequence numbers are then used to determine whether these differences are relevant enough for the client to fetch. All data is fetched using addresses derived from hashes (except for ErikIndex objects). This approach reduces unnecessary data transfer between caches which contain mostly similar data.

The client starts by querying an Erik relay for the relay's current ErikIndex for a given FQDN. If the ErikIndex is different compared to the previous run (or compared to the Index calculated from the locally cached objects). With the ErikIndex in hand, the client can determine which ErikPartitions are missing and fetch accordingly. The client then can compare the `_manifestNumber_` sequence number and `_thisUpdate_` for each manifest listed in the ErikPartition, and proceed to fetch (purportedly) newer versions of manifests of interest. Whenever a relay has manifests with a lower sequence number on offer, the client can ignore those. The client now has sufficient information to proceed to fetch any missing Certificates, Signed objects, and CRLs. With the information contained within manifests, clients can fetch addressed by content (by hash) and store by name (or some other scheme).

3. Erik Synchronization Data Structure Definitions

In this synchronization protocol the `_signal layer_` makes use of DER-encoded messages [X.690].

`_Design note: DER encoding was selected for its canonical properities and because RPKI cache implementations already support ASN.1 encoding._`

RpkiErikSynchronization-2025

```
{ iso(1) member-body(2) us(840) rsadsi(113549)
  pkcs(1) pkcs9(9) smime(16) mod(0)
  id-mod-rpkiErikSynchronization-2025(TBD) }
```

DEFINITIONS EXPLICIT TAGS ::=
BEGIN

IMPORTS

```
CONTENT-TYPE, Digest, DigestAlgorithmIdentifier
FROM CryptographicMessageSyntax-2010 -- in [RFC6268]
{ iso(1) member-body(2) us(840) rsadsi(113549) pkcs(1)
  pkcs-9(9) smime(16) modules(0) id-mod-cms-2009(58) }
```

```
AccessDescription, KeyIdentifier
FROM PKIX1Implicit88 -- in [RFC5280]
{ iso(1) identified-organization(3) dod(6) internet(1) security(5)
  mechanisms(5) pkix(7) id-mod(0) id-pkix1-implicit(19) }
```

;

```
ct-rpkiErikIndex CONTENT-TYPE ::=
{ TYPE ErikIndex IDENTIFIED BY id-ct-rpkiErikIndex }
```

```
id-ct-rpkiErikIndex OBJECT IDENTIFIER ::=
```

```
{ iso(1) identified-organization(3) dod(6) internet(1) private(4)
  enterprise(1) snijders(41948) erikindex(826) }
```

```
ErikIndex ::= SEQUENCE {
  version [0]          INTEGER DEFAULT 0,
  indexScope           IA5String,
  indexTime            GeneralizedTime,
  hashAlg              DigestAlgorithmIdentifier,
  partitionList        SEQUENCE SIZE (1..ub-Partitions) OF PartitionRef }
```

```
ub-Partitions INTEGER ::= 1024
```

```
PartitionRef ::= SEQUENCE {
  identifier           INTEGER (1..ub-Partitions),
  hash                 Digest,
  size                 INTEGER (100..MAX) }
```

```
ct-rpkiErikPartition CONTENT-TYPE ::=
  { TYPE ErikPartition IDENTIFIED BY id-ct-rpkiErikPartition }
```

```
id-ct-rpkiErikPartition OBJECT IDENTIFIER ::=
  { iso(1) identified-organization(3) dod(6) internet(1) private(4)
    enterprise(1) snijders(41948) erikpartition(827) }
```

```
ErikPartition ::= SEQUENCE {
  version [0]          INTEGER DEFAULT 0,
  partitionTime        GeneralizedTime,
  hashAlg              DigestAlgorithmIdentifier,
  manifestList         SEQUENCE SIZE (1..MAX) OF ManifestRef }
```

```
ManifestRef ::= SEQUENCE {
  hash                 Digest,
  size                 INTEGER (1000..MAX),
  aki                  KeyIdentifier,
  manifestNumber       INTEGER (0..MAX),
  thisUpdate           GeneralizedTime,
  location              SEQUENCE SIZE (1..MAX) OF AccessDescription }
END
```

3.1. ErikIndex

An ErikIndex represents all current manifest objects available under a given FQDN and thus the complete state of the repository as it is known to the relay.

3.1.1. The version field

The version number of the ErikIndex object MUST be 0.

3.1.2. The indexScope field

The indexScope field contains the fully qualified domain name of the Signed Object location of the manifests referenced through this particular ErikIndex. The FQDN MUST be in the "preferred name syntax", as specified by Section 3.5 of [RFC1034] and modified by Section 2.1 of [RFC1123].

3.1.3. The indexTime field

The indexTime is the most recent partitionTime value among the ErikPartitions referenced from this ErikIndex. The field's value roughly indicates when the ErikIndex was generated and can be used for troubleshooting and measurement purposes.

For the purposes of this profile, GeneralizedTime values MUST be expressed UTC (Zulu) and MUST include seconds (i.e., times are YYYYMMDDHHMMSSZ), even where the number of seconds is zero. GeneralizedTime values MUST NOT include fractional seconds. See Section 4.1.2.5.2 of [RFC5280].

Design note: using the most recent partitionTime, rather than the local system's notion of "now", helps reduce churn in distributed systems.

3.1.4. The hashAlg field

This field contains the OID of the hash algorithm used to hash the ErikPartitions. The hash algorithm used MUST conform to the RPKI Algorithms and Key Size Profile specification [RFC7935].

3.1.5. The partitionList field

This field is a sequence of PartitionRef instances. There is one PartitionRef for each current ErikPartition. Each PartitionRef is a 3-tuple consisting of the partition identifier, the hash of the partition object, and the size of the partition object.

Information elements are unique with respect to one another and sorted in ascending order of the partition identifier.

3.2. ErikPartition

An ErikPartition represents a subset of manifest objects available under a given FQDN. Each ErikPartition is an ordered listing of the manifest objects' hashes, manifestNumber values, thisUpdate values, and their end-entity certificates' SIA extension values.

3.2.1. The version field

The version number of the ErikPartition object MUST be 0.

3.2.2. The partitionTime field

The partitionTime is the most recent thisUpdate value among the manifests contained within this ErikPartition. The field's value roughly indicates when the ErikPartition was generated and can be used for troubleshooting and measurement purposes.

For the purposes of this profile, GeneralizedTime values MUST be expressed UTC (Zulu) and MUST include seconds (i.e., times are YYYYMMDDHHMMSSZ), even where the number of seconds is zero. GeneralizedTime values MUST NOT include fractional seconds. See Section 4.1.2.5.2 of [RFC5280].

Design note: using the most recent manifest thisUpdate value, rather than the local system's notion of "now", helps reduce churn in distributed systems.

3.2.3. The hashAlg field

This field contains the OID of the hash algorithm used to hash the manifest objects referenced in this ErikPartition. The hash algorithm used MUST conform to the RPKI Algorithms and Key Size Profile specification [RFC7935].

3.2.4. The manifestList field

This field is a sequence of ManifestRef instances. There is one ManifestRef for each current manifest. A manifest is nominally current until the time specified in nextUpdate or until a manifest is issued with a greater manifestNumber, whichever comes first (see Section 4.2.1 of [RFC9286]).

A ManifestRef is a 4-tuple consisting of the hash of the manifest object, the size of the manifest object, the manifest issuer's key identifier, the manifestNumber, and the thisUpdate contained within the object, and a sequence of AccessDescription instances from the manifest's End-Entity certificate's Subject Information Access extension.

Information elements are unique with respect to one another and sorted in ascending order of the hash.

4. Client-side Processing

A client can decide whether or not to fetch ErikIndex and ErikPartition objects, by comparing the hash to previous fetches.

A client can decide whether or not to fetch a given manifest object, by comparing the manifestNumber and thisUpdate with what's locally cached and what's offered by the remote relay.

A client can compute which products listed in the manifest's fileList need to be fetched from the relay.

As there is no concept of 'sessions' (like in RRDP), clients can interchangeably use different Erik relay. When one Erik relay generates a HTTP error, the client can try fetching the requested object from another Erik relay.

5. Querying an Erik Relay

5.1. Fetching objects by hash

This specification uses "Named Information" identifiers mapped to .well-known HTTP/HTTPS URLs for object retrieval, as described in [RFC6920].

For example, issuance #54 of ripe-ncc-ta.mft has the following SHA256 digest:
c2d0427bc5a32c42eealab5663d592b1fc29c7d4ef16ab0b5eld631d039dcc21.

To fetch the aforementioned object from an relay hosted at relay.example.net, a client would access the following HTTP URL:
<https://relay.example.net/.well-known/ni/sha-256/wtBCe8WjLELuoatWY9WSsfwpX9TvFqsLXh1jHQOdzCE>

5.2. Fetching ErikIndex objects

The URIs to fetch ErikIndex objects can be constructed using the following Well-Known URI template with the erik keyword as suffix and the IndexScope as parameter: `https://{relay_host}/.well-known/erik/{indexScope}`.

For example, the URI to fetch an ErikIndex for the `rpki.ripe.net` indexScope from a relay at `relay.example.net` would be:
`https://relay.example.net/.well-known/erik/rpki.ripe.net`.

6. Transport Error Detection and Handling

The client MUST calculate the hash of fetched objects and verify it is the same as the expected hash (which is embedded in the name through which the object was retrieved). If there is a hash mismatch, the client may try fetching the object from a different Erik relay or treat this as a `_failed fetch_` (see Section 6.6 of [RFC9286]).

7. Setting Up an Erik Relay

Erik relays can be operated by third parties, without permission from or coordination with publication point operators or CAs.

Relays generate ErikIndexes and ErikPartitions derived from their current validation state, the client then cherry-picks which objects (if any) it wishes to fetch. Relays fetch fresh data from other relays or from CA-designated publication points.

Design notes: a decision must be made a deterministic "manifest-to-partition" assignment scheme. Job's proof-of-concept relay (see Appendix A) uses the first few octets of the the Manifest's AKI as a stable partition assignment scheme. Other strategies could be to assign manifests to ErikPartitions based on the "hour-of-day" of the CMS signing timestamp, or the first few octets of the SHA-256 of the manifest object.

8. Comparison with other RPKI transport protocols

Ignoring obvious "on the wire format" differences between Erik, Rsync, and RRDp; there are a number of key design differences between the protocols. Rsync and RRDp can be described as "general purpose" synchronisation protocols, while the Erik protocol design is RPKI-specific. In the Erik protocol, manifest objects (which RPs require for validation anyway) are an integral part of the signaling layer.

8.1. Comparison with Rsync

In Rsync, the server and the client construct and transfer a full listing of all available objects, and then transfer objects as necessary. In effect, this allows clients to 'jump' to the latest repository state, regardless of the state of the local cache.

A major downside of Rsync is that the list of files itself can become a burden to transfer. As of June 2025, in order to merely establish whether a client is synchronized or not with the RIPE NCC repository at `rpki.ripe.net`, as much as 5.8 megabytes of data are exchanged without exchanging any RPKI data.

When synchronizing once an hour, Rsync generally consumes less network traffic than RRDP.

8.2. Comparison with RRDP

The key concept in RRDP is that the client downloads a "journal", containing all add/update/delete operations and replays this journal to arrive at the current repository state.

A major downside of RRDP is that (depending on the RRDP polling interval) clients end up downloading data which has become outdated. Imagine a hypothetical CA which issues and revokes a ROA every 10 minutes and a client that synchronizes every 60 minutes; in effect the client must fetch 5 outdated states, wasting bandwidth.

When synchronizing every 15 minutes, RRDP generally consumes less network traffic than Rsync.

8.2.1. Garbage Collection

In contrast to RRDP, the Erik protocol has no concept of server-specific "stateful" sessions that persist across polling attempts. This obviates the need for withdraw instructions as part of the protocol exchange: clients can simply delete objects that are no longer referenced from their current validation state and refetch them later on if needed.

9. Open Questions

This section is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

- * Which of the possible deterministic manifest-to-partition assignment strategies yield the best results? AKI?

- * Are deterministic and cheap Snapshots possible? If so, what is the best archive format for Snapshots? The ustar/gzip combo might not easily yield deterministic results across different implementations.
- * Is the concept of Differentials/Deltas needed in Erik Synchronization?
- * What will be the upperbound for the number of partitions? (ub-Partitions)

10. Operational Considerations

As of July 2025, the global Internet's RPKI churn rate appears to be 2 new objects per second. The ecosystem is estimated to be composed of ~ 5000 RPKI cache instances and ~ 50 repository servers. Assuming 10 minute fetching intervals and 150 metadata requests per synchronization run (for exchange of Merkle tree data), an Erik relay serving all the Internet's RPKI cache instances would probably need to be able to sustain serving an average of at least 11,000 HTTP requests per second. This order of magnitude in terms of scaling requirements can easily be handled by a single commodity server.

11. Security Considerations

This document makes no changes to RPKI certificate validation procedures.

See Section 5 of [RFC8182] for applicable security considerations.

12. IANA Considerations

12.1. S/MIME Module Identifier

The IANA is requested to add an item to the "SMI Security for S/MIME Module Identifier" registry as follows:

Decimal	Description	References
TDB	id-mod-rpkiErikSynchronization-2025	[this-draft]

12.2. OIDs for Content Types

For the current proof-of-concept phase the id-ct-rpkiErikIndex and id-ct-rpkiErikPartition OIDs were assigned from a PEN arc. This section will be updated once it is clear which IANA-managed registries would be best suited for OID assignment for these object identifiers.

12.3. Well-Known URI

An URI Suffix in the Well-Known URIs registry specific to Erik synchronization will be requested. See <https://github.com/protocol-registries/well-known-uris/issues/67> for the request.

The proposed suffix is erik.

13. References

13.1. Normative References

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13.2. Informative References

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- [rpkitouch] Snijders, J., "rpkitouch", September 2025, <<https://www.github.com/job/rpkitouch>>.

Appendix A. Implementation status

This section is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

This section records the status of known implementations of the protocol defined by this specification at the time of posting of this Internet-Draft, and is based on a proposal described in RFC 7942. The description of implementations in this section is intended to assist the IETF in its decision processes in progressing drafts to RFCs. Please note that the listing of any individual implementation here does not imply endorsement by the IETF. Furthermore, no effort has been spent to verify the information presented here that was supplied by IETF contributors. This is not intended as, and must not be construed to be, a catalog of available implementations or their features. Readers are advised to note that other implementations may exist.

According to RFC 7942, "this will allow reviewers and working groups to assign due consideration to documents that have the benefit of running code, which may serve as evidence of valuable experimentation and feedback that have made the implemented protocols more mature. It is up to the individual working groups to use this information as they see fit".

A few experimental Erik relays are available, each running on slightly different schedules. Client implementers are encouraged to round-robin between these instances to observe results.

<http://aws.rpki-servers.org/> Dublin, Ireland, - distributed computing cluster (6 machines, NFS backend)

<http://atl.rpki-servers.org/> Atlanta, USA, - distributed computing cluster (2 machines, NFS backend)

<http://miso.sobornost.net/> Amsterdam, NL, single node

<http://nycl.digitalocean.rpkiviews.org/> New York, USA, - single node

An experimental Erik static content generator was developed by Job Snijders in the form of [rpkitouch] using C.

Appendix B. Example objects

Included in this section are an ErikIndex for rpki.ripe.net and an ErikPartition referenced from the aforementioned ErikIndex, both Base64 encoded.

B.1. Example ErikIndex

This object was retrieved from <http://miso.sobornost.net/.well-known/erik/rpki.ripe.net>.

```
MIIRxwYKKwYBBAGCxlYGOqCCK7cEgiuzMIIRrxYNcnBraS5yaXB1Lm5ldBgPMjAyNTA5MjMw
NzQzMjRlBGlhkgBZQMEAgEwgiuAMCkCAQAEIMQZXNo01VHt7ExBd0EM0uv+/oqftDzHqo3m
KNRkIPj8AgI7/zApAgEBBCAoNYzf0h4GMfXQgF6r+ZBZtQCpIMjA+Hjo/MximoIk5AICRZAw
KQIBAgQgOf7md80+smDgtzzFzZWJr2nsPRTEvG3zO6or479L/gACAj2VMckCAQMEIMNDymEH
tI02zXKe3S3iRylo9wNj7d67xd6/X6qIpYTuAgJGwzApAgEEBCB9S1ZqZS7oRGL4flxkG1zW
85irPg8RC6ACjrMU5LdPqgICPZYwKQIBBQQgWChTaYoMduMdh01/2M15X42Fha3lscqvjSoR
Sq1BA5MCAky6MCKCAQYEIDluxOgSRpTAgYuRKRz59hRRvSmN64rqWFwyi3q7M04HAgI/+zAp
AgEHBCDF+bRH/b3ZLAeGkHFZ+fXqjYdw3XhoEssgA2GQF6ucJAICR/QwKQIBCAQgpb75mXQ
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B.2. Example ErikPartition

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