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APPLICATION NOTE

# AC500 V3 - ENCRYPT AND SIGN YOUR APPLICATION



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Scope of the document

This Application Note describes how to protect the project and the running application in an AC500 V3 PLC.

To archive this a user management is used, the communication and the boot application are encrypted with a certificate from the controller in order to prevent unauthorized access and to make sure that it cannot be exchanged.

In addition, we want to sign the application on the controller.

It is not possible to just sign the application. It's always required to encrypt the application as well. It's possible to encrypt the application without sign it.

To do this, a corresponding certificate must be created on the controller and installed in the Windows Certificate Store of your computer.



Note: Be sure you have a battery plugged to you PLC. This is required to re-store the date and time inside the PLC. Certificates have always an expiration date.

All available certificates are located in the Windows Certificate Store “certmgr” on your computer. There are two types of keys:

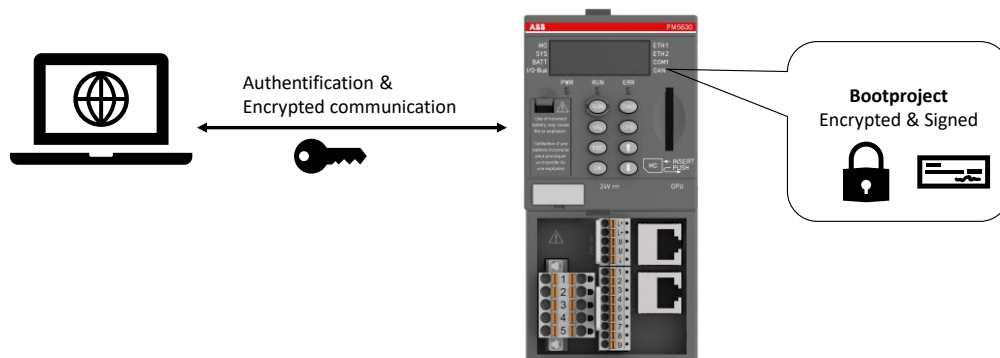
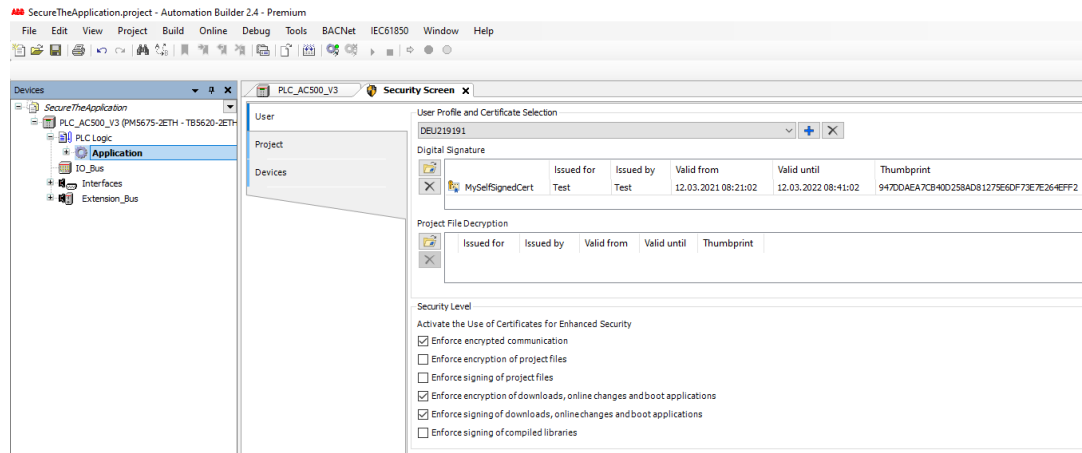
- Certificates with private keys
  - for file decryption
  - for digital signatures
- Certificates with public keys
  - for file encryption
  - for verifying digital signatures

## 1.2 Compatibility

The application example explained in this document have been used with the below engineering system versions. They should also work with other versions, nevertheless some small adaptations may be necessary, for future versions.

- AC500 V3 PLC
- Automation Builder V2.6.0 or newer

## 1.3 Overview



The steps described in this Application Note can be used to protect the Application. In the first step the communication between computer and AC500 V3 is authenticated and encrypted to make sure that no unauthorized person can access the PLC.

In the second step the download and boot application become encrypted and signed to make sure that nobody can replicate the boot application or load a not trusted application.

## 2 User management and encrypted communication

### 2.1 User management

To prevent that any unauthorized person can access the PLC, overwrite the Application, change the firmware or similar a User Management is needed.

How the User Management can be activated and configured is described in the Application Note **AC500 User Management with V3** in chapter 2.2 in this example the default user Management is used.

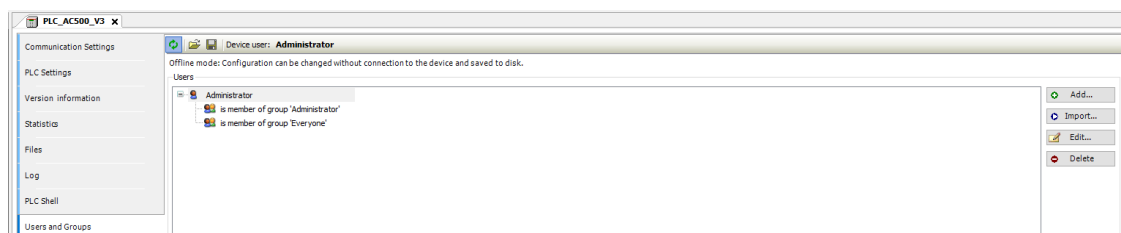


#### CAUTION!

**Please check and remember your Administrator password.**

**There is also no workaround to login to the PLC without this password. If this happens, the PLC must be replaced!**

Only an Administrator has been added to the user management and the password has been set.



If now a project should be downloaded an authorized user needs to log in.

**Device User Logon**

You are currently not authorized to perform this operation on the device. Please enter the name and password of a user account which has got the sufficient rights.

Device Name: PLC\_AC500\_V3 (PM5675-2ETH)

Device Address:

User Name: Administrator

Password:

Operation: View  
Object: "Device"

OK Cancel

If a user who doesn't have a username and password tries to log in or update the firmware, it is not possible as he has insufficient rights. Each successful or failed login attempt will be tracked inside the Audit Log of the PLC.

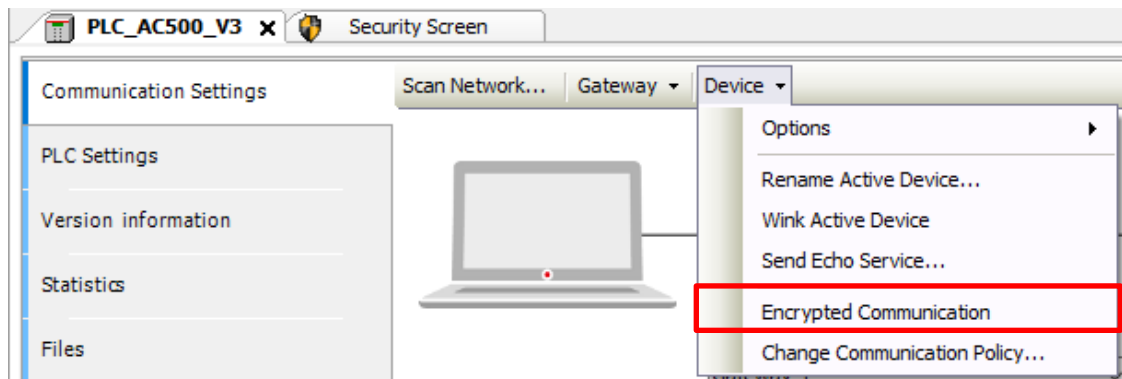
## 2.2 Encrypted communication

As described in the last chapter only authorized user can log in to the PLC.

To ensure that nobody can read the login data you sent from your computer to the PLC an encrypted communication must be used. The steps to archive this are also described in the Application Note **AC500 User Management with V3** in the chapter 2.2.1.4.

Afterwards go to the Communication Settings.

1. In the tab “Device” choose “Encrypted Communication”



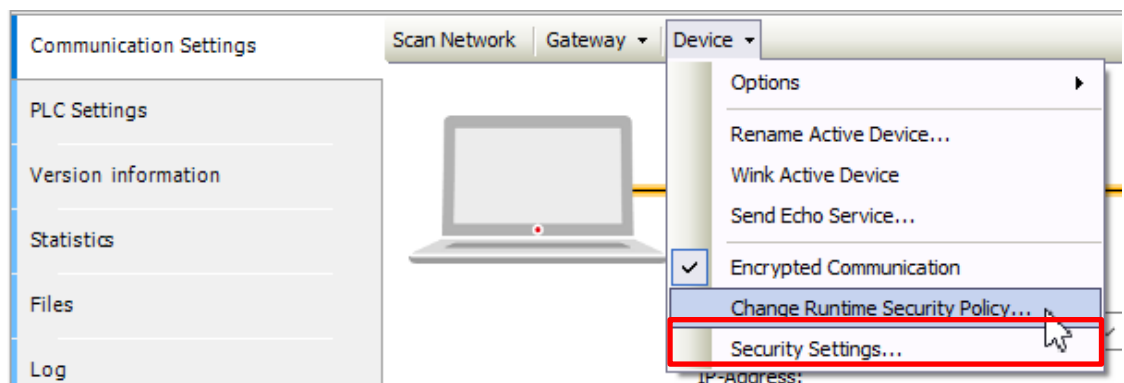
Now the communication between the PLC and the PC is encrypted so that nobody can get any log in information or read any system values. This setting is only done locally on your Automation Builder and will be saved within the project.



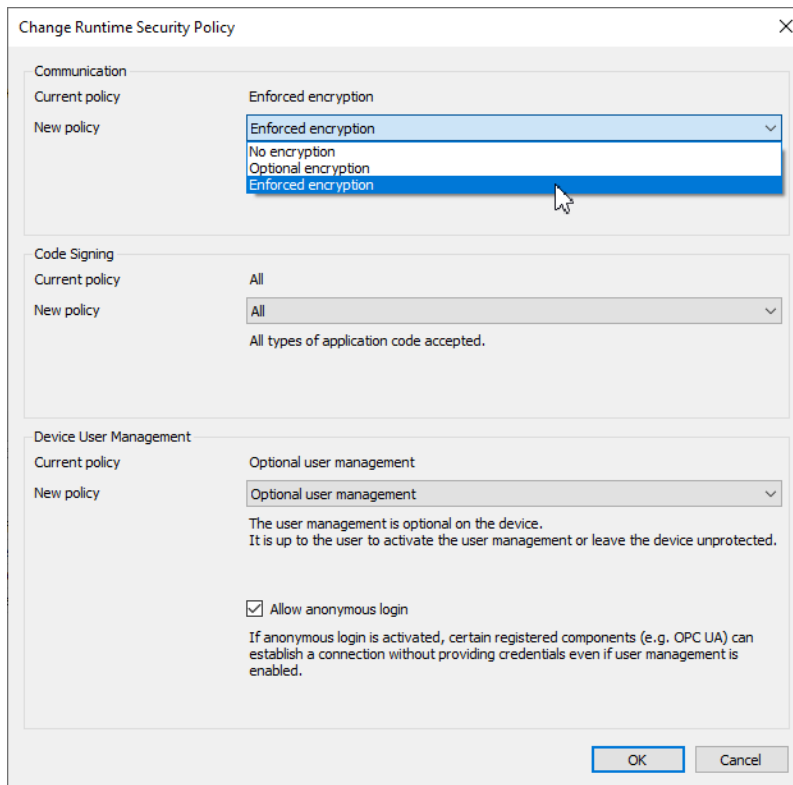
Note: In case you want to login from different computers to the controller, you will need the appropriate certificate for each computer. Otherwise the communication from other PCs is not encrypted and attackers could read confidential data.

In the next step the communication policy from the device is changed to allow only encrypted communication. Then it is not possible to log in without an encrypted communication.

2. Click “Change Communication Policy”



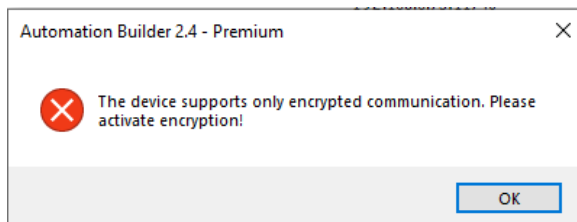
3. Change the communication policy to “Enforced encryption”



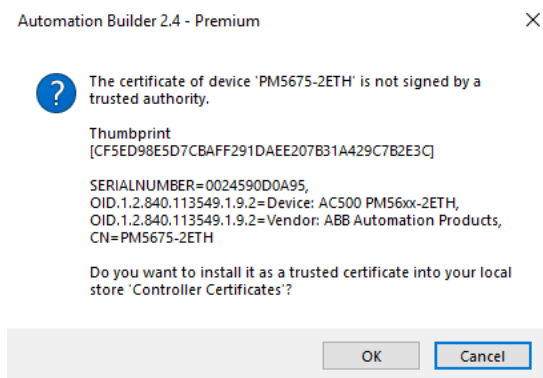
It is also possible to force the usermanagement here. Then it is not possible to delete the usermanagement from the PLC. The settings to force the signing of an application is described in chapter 5.2.

In the next step the communication from another PC to this PLC shall be established.

4. When trying to log in without encrypted communication following error will pop up



5. Use also on the second computer encrypted communication like shown in step 1
6. With the next login the certificate for the encrypted communication will be stored in your certificate manager on your PC. Click "OK" to confirm



### 3 Encrypt the application with certificate


In addition to secure the communication to the PLC also the stored boot application can be encrypted to make sure that nobody who could access the PLC is able to duplicate the existing boot application for other PLCs.

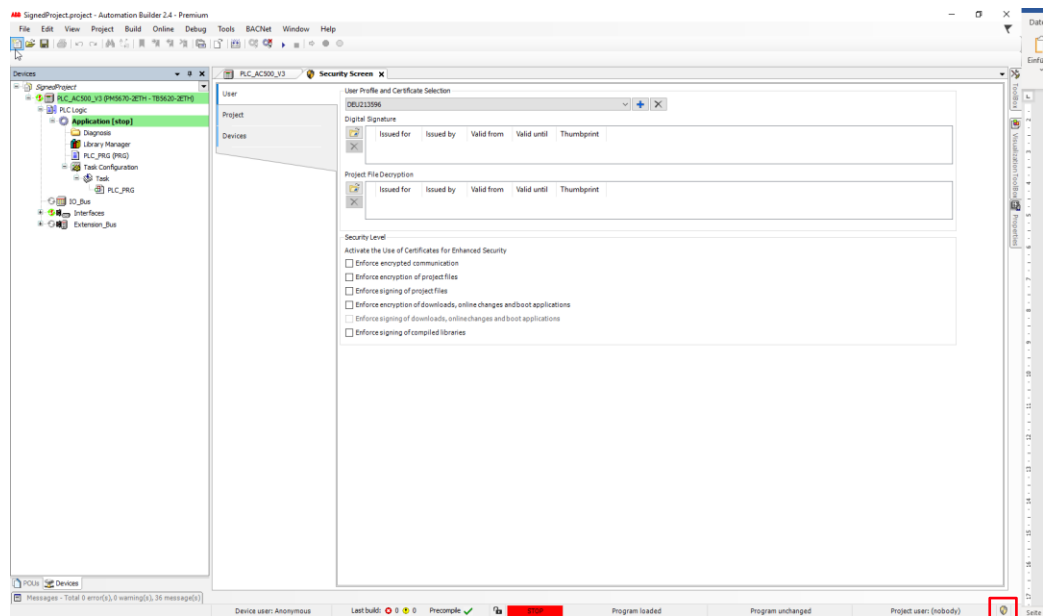
In this chapter, the boot application, Download and Online Change gets encrypted.


There is a project with an application that must be downloaded to the controller as an encrypted boot application. In the Windows Certificate Store of a computer, the certificate of this controller for encrypting the application will be installed.



**Note:** In case you want to download the application to different controllers, you will need the appropriate certificate for each controller.

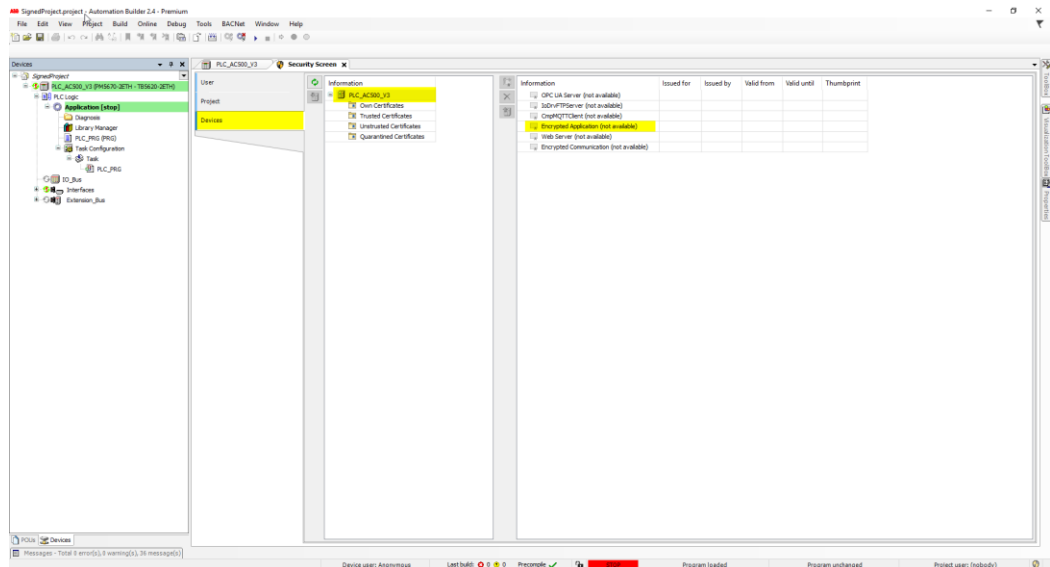
1. Login to your PLC
2. Open the “Security-Screen” view by double-clicking the  symbol in the status bar or by clicking “View → Security-Screen”



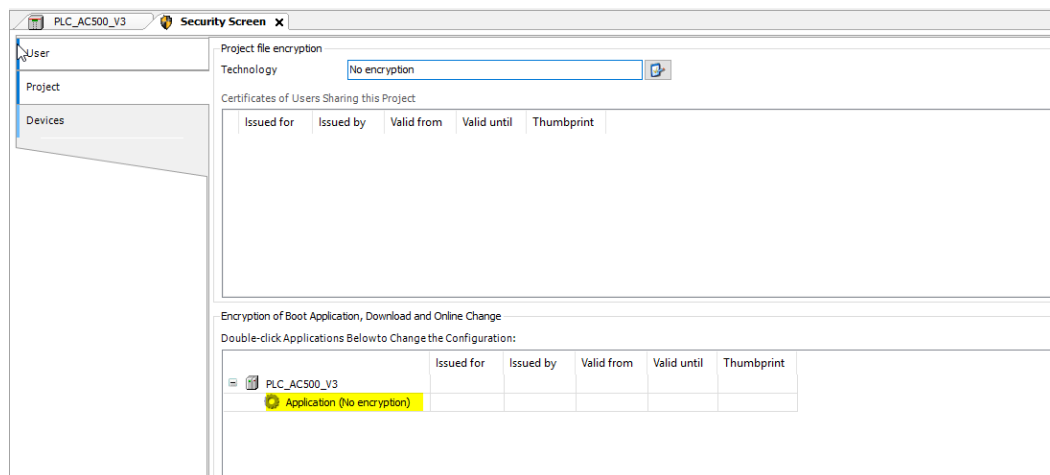
3. Go to “Devices” tab and click the  button to refresh the list of available devices and their certificate store

You can see that there are no certificates available. If the certificate already exists, some of the steps below can be skipped.

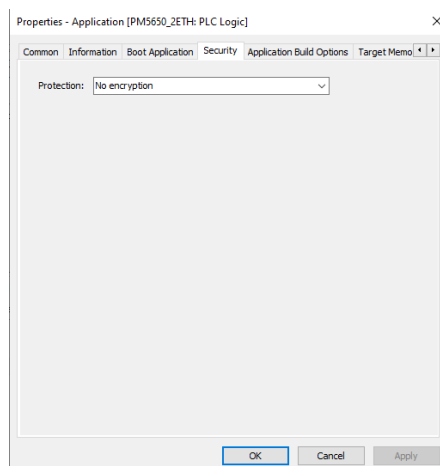




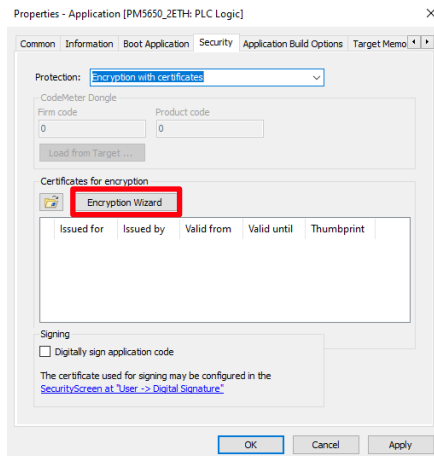
4. Open the “Project” tab and double-click the “Application” entry in the area “Encryption of boot application, download, and online change”



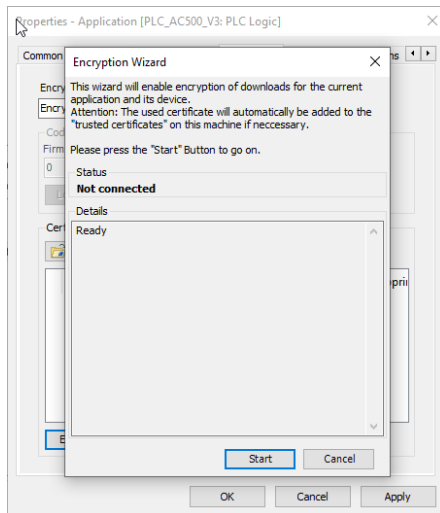
5. The “Properties” dialog of the Application opens



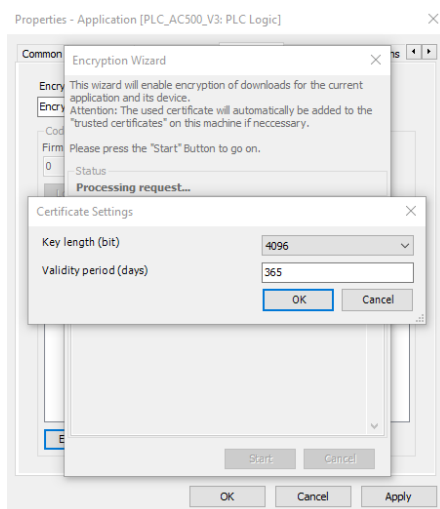
6. Select the “Security” tab and select “Encryption with certificates” as the “Protection”.



7. Click on the “Encryption Wizard” button

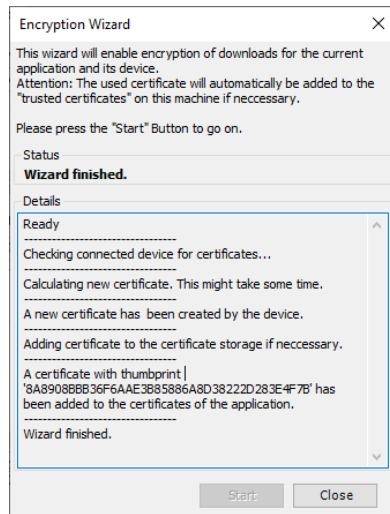


8. Click on “Start” and select the Key Length “4096” and the Validity period in days:



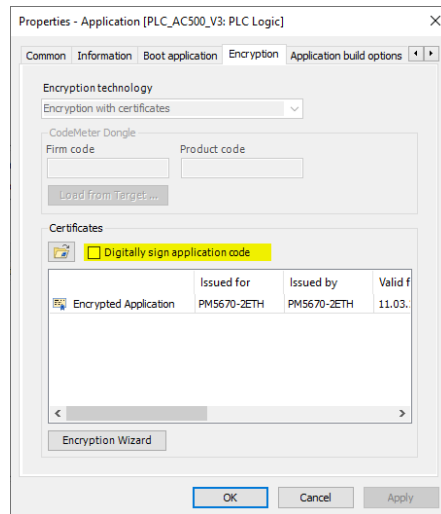
9. Confirm with “OK”

10. The server certificate on the PLC will be created. Also, the certificate will be installed on the Cert store in Windows.

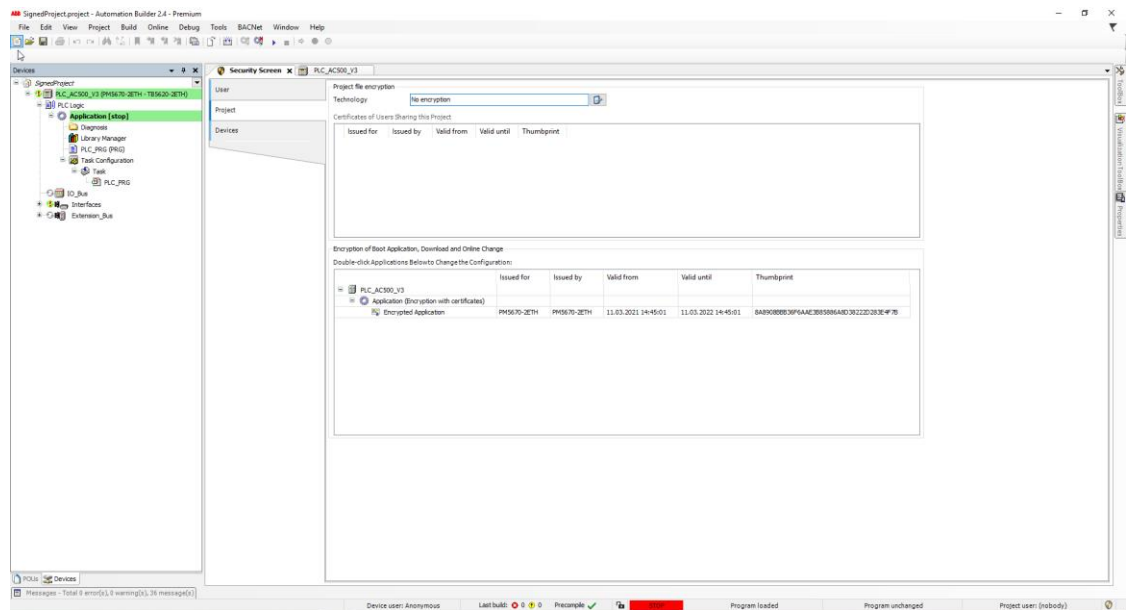



11. Click "Close"

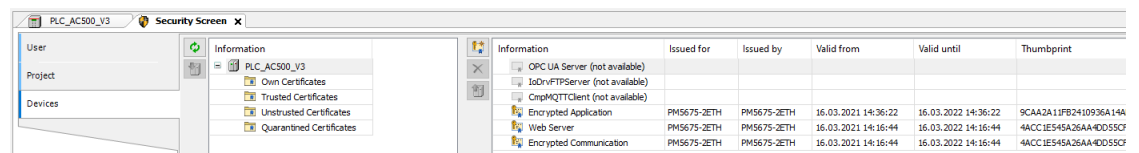
12. The certificate is automatically added for the encrypted application. Please remove the checkbox for “Digitally signing application code” if it is set. This will be handled in chapter 5.



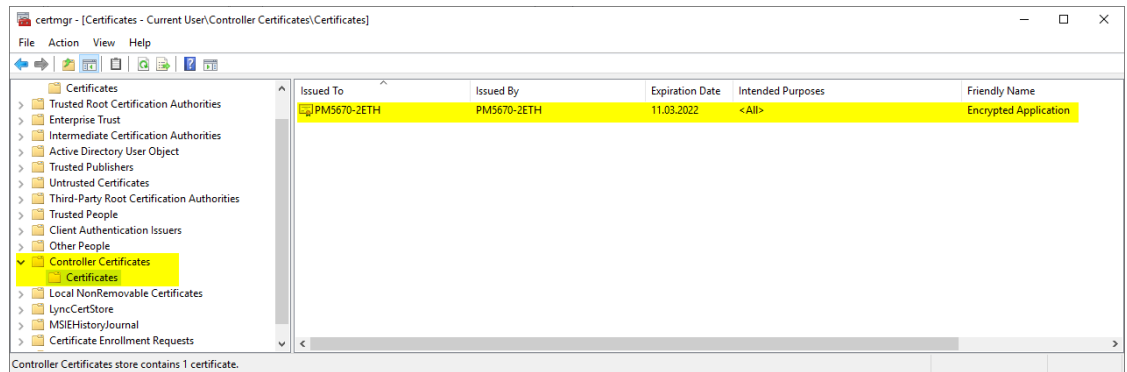
13. Confirm with “OK” and find then encrypted application added



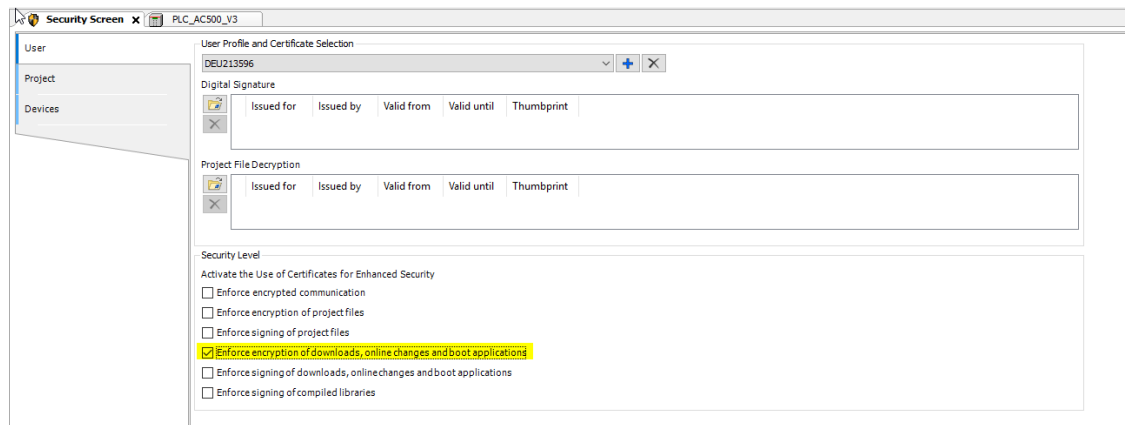
14. Go to “Devices” tab and click the  button to refresh the list of available devices and their certificate store. You can see that the certificate is available



15. When you go to your **certmgr.msc**, see chapter 4 step 4, navigate to “Controller Certificates” you can see the installed certificate on your Certificate Store on Windows



16. Open the “Users” tab in the “Security-Screen”.  
Activate the option “Enforce encryption of downloads, online changes, and boot applications” in the “Security-Level” area.



17. Logout of the PLC
18. Select Build → Clean All
19. Login to the PLC
20. The certificate is now used to encrypt the application.

## 4 Create self-signed certificates with Win10

In the face of increasing security precautions and security issues, it has become of fundamental importance to websites and services to be implemented with always activated security. Various service providers now need secure connections, also for development environments. In most cases it is not possible to use cryptographic certificates for the local development environment any developer, but you can easily get self-signed certificates for free.

These certificates can be used in local environments and cover the security requirements during the development of the solution.

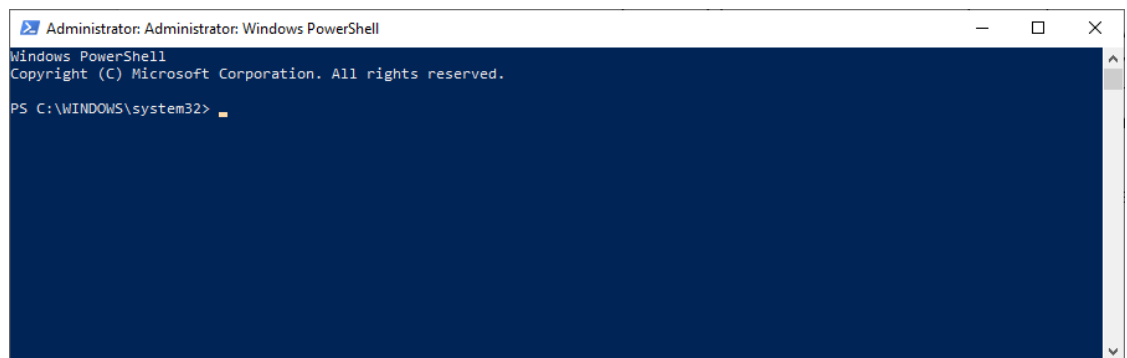


### CAUTION!

**Self-signed certificates should NEVER be used on production or public websites and networks.**

PowerShell in Windows 10 includes the command **New-SelfSignedCertificate**. This command can be used to create self-signed certificates.

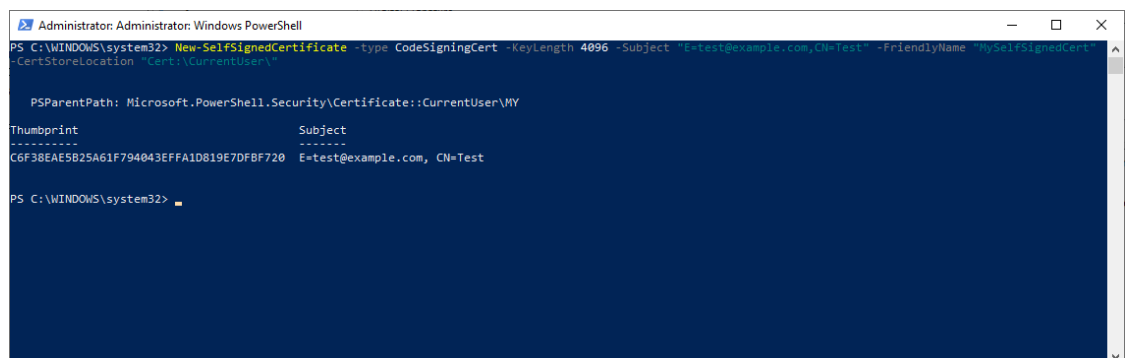
1. Open a PowerShell window in Administrator mode



2. Enter the following command:

```
New-SelfSignedCertificate -type CodeSigningCert -KeyLength 4096 -Subject "E=test@example.com,CN=Test" -FriendlyName "SelfSignedCertForSigning" -CertStoreLocation "Cert:\CurrentUser\"
```

3. The result will be a Thumbprint



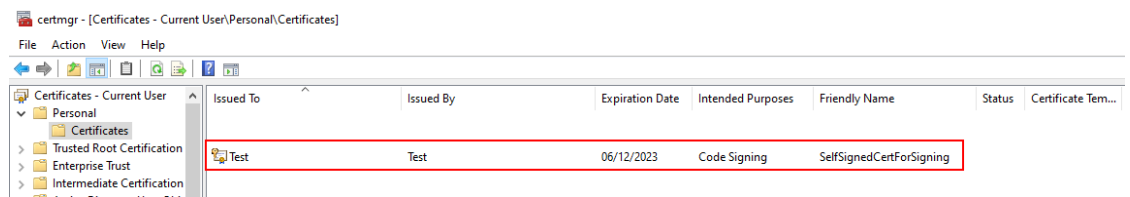
4. Start the **certmgr.msc** via PowerShell



5. A new window will open

Navigate to Personal→ Certificates

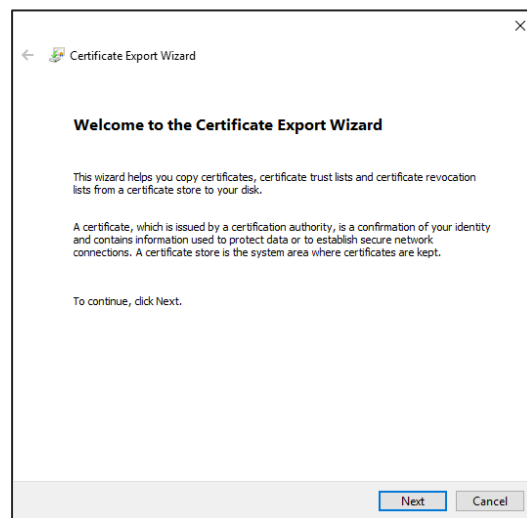
Here you can see the currently created self-signed certificate with private key



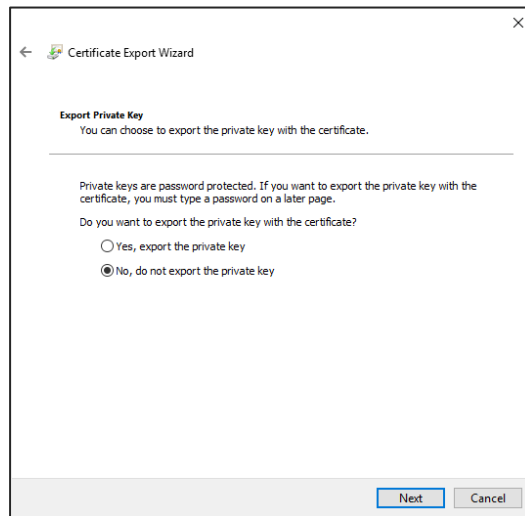
6. Select the Test certificate, right click and select:

**All Tasks -> Export...**

7. Click Next

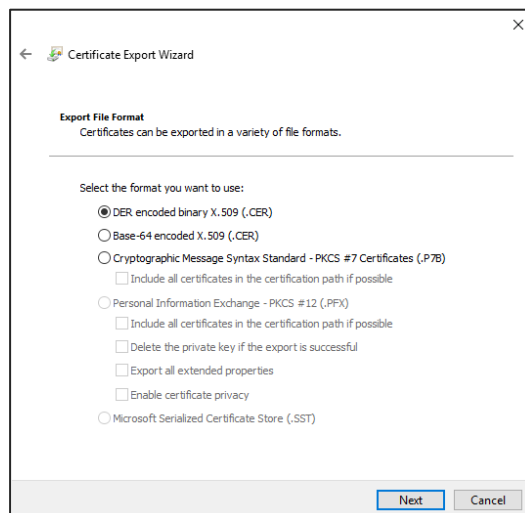


8. Select: **No, do not export the private key**



The screenshot shows the 'Export Private Key' step of the Certificate Export Wizard. The title bar reads 'Certificate Export Wizard'. The main heading is 'Export Private Key' with the subtext 'You can choose to export the private key with the certificate.' Below this, a note states: 'Private keys are password protected. If you want to export the private key with the certificate, you must type a password on a later page.' The question 'Do you want to export the private key with the certificate?' is followed by two radio button options: 'Yes, export the private key' and 'No, do not export the private key'. The 'No' option is selected. At the bottom right are 'Next' and 'Cancel' buttons.

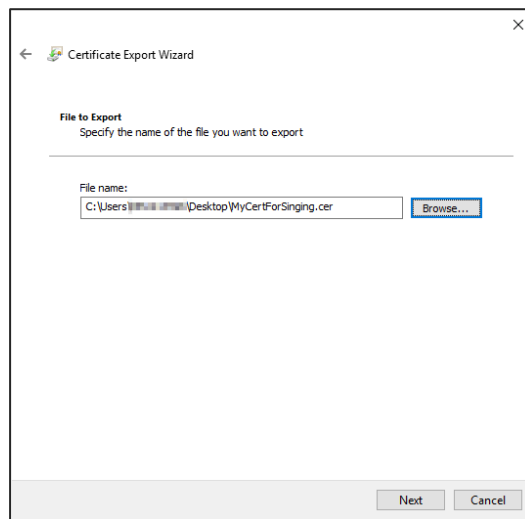
9. Select **DER encoded binary X.509 (.CER)**



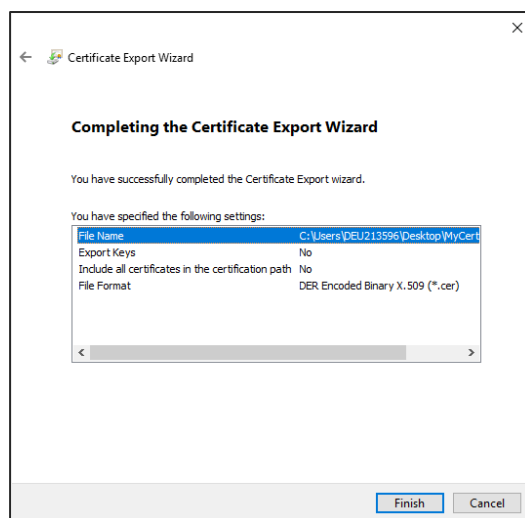
The screenshot shows the 'Export File Format' step of the Certificate Export Wizard. The title bar reads 'Certificate Export Wizard'. The main heading is 'Export File Format' with the subtext 'Certificates can be exported in a variety of file formats.' Below this, the instruction 'Select the format you want to use:' is followed by several radio button options: 'DER encoded binary X.509 (.CER)' (selected), 'Base-64 encoded X.509 (.CER)', 'Cryptographic Message Syntax Standard - PKCS #7 Certificates (.P7B)', 'Personal Information Exchange - PKCS #12 (.PFX)', and 'Microsoft Serialized Certificate Store (.SST)'. There are also several unchecked checkboxes: 'Include all certificates in the certification path if possible', 'Include all certificates in the certification path if possible', 'Delete the private key if the export is successful', 'Export all extended properties', and 'Enable certificate privacy'. At the bottom right are 'Next' and 'Cancel' buttons.



10. Choose a path and name e.g. **MyCertForSinging.cer** to store the certificate.  
Confirm with Next



11. The final result will be shown:




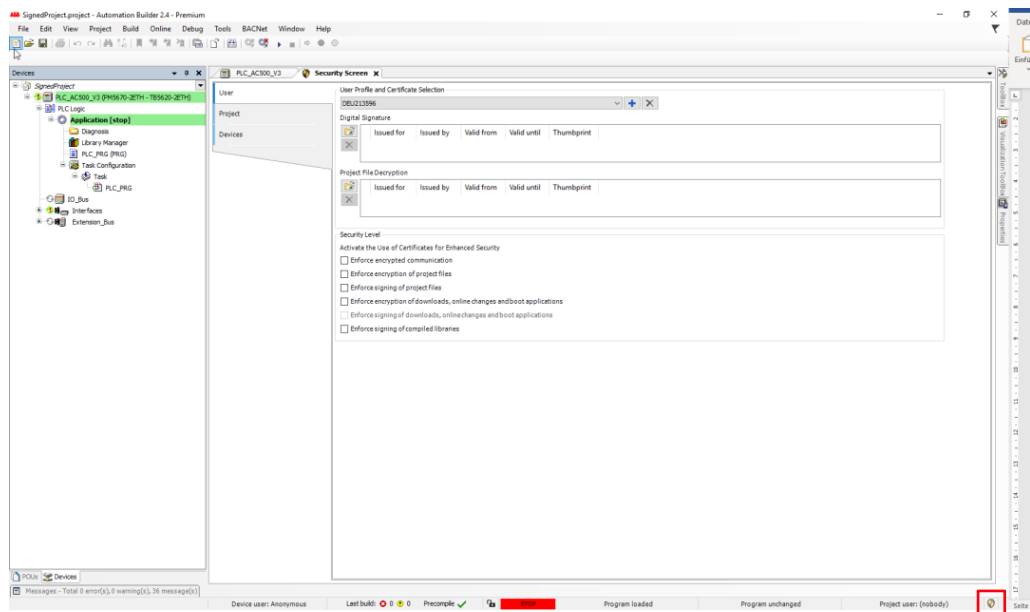
12. Confirm with Finish

## 5 Sign the application with certificate

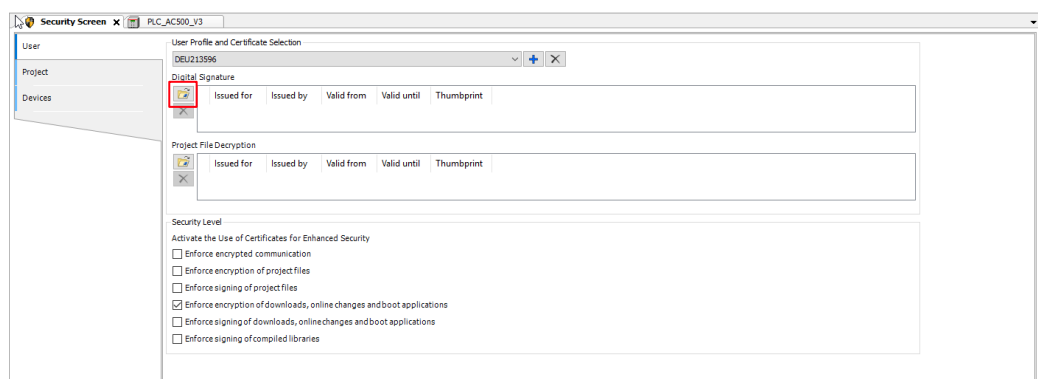
In this step, boot application becomes signed. Currently AB allows only to sign the application, when you also encrypt the application. The encryption of the application was already handled in chapter 3.


### 5.1 Import Certificate into Automation Builder

1. Open the “Security-Screen” view by double-clicking the  symbol in the status bar or by clicking “View → Security-Screen”




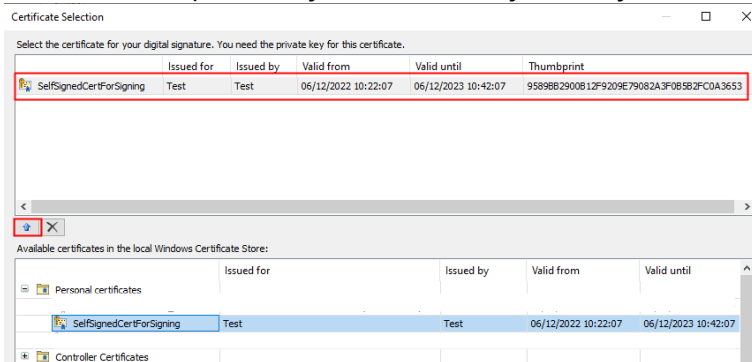
2. In the “User” tab, select the user profile for which the communication will be encrypted. By default, the specified user profile is the one you have used on your computer to sign into Windows.




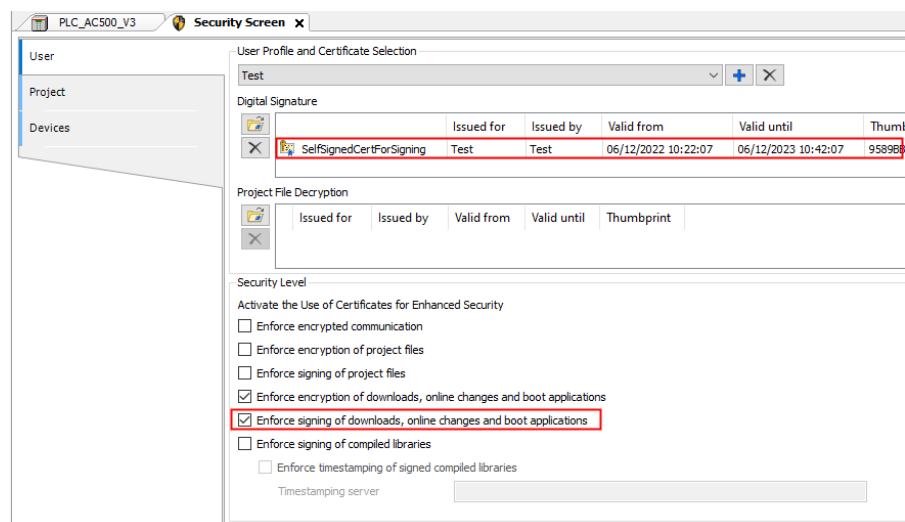
3. Click the  button in the “Digital signature” area. The “Certificate Selection” dialog opens.


- Select the certificate with a private key from the list “Personal certificates” which was created in chapter 4.

Certificates with a private key are identified by the  symbol.

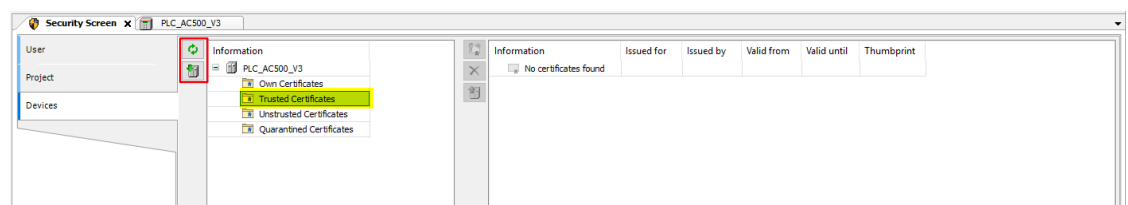



- Click on the arrow up  button to add the certificate to the upper part of the dialog
- Click “OK” to confirm your selection. The selected certificate is displayed in the “Security Screen” in the “Digital signature” area.
- Activate the option “Enforce signing of downloads, online changes and boot applications” in the “Security-Level” area.

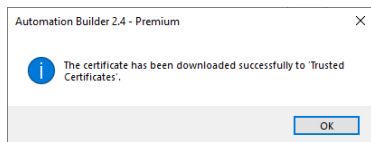


- Go to “Devices” tab and click the  button to refresh the list of available devices and their certificate store.

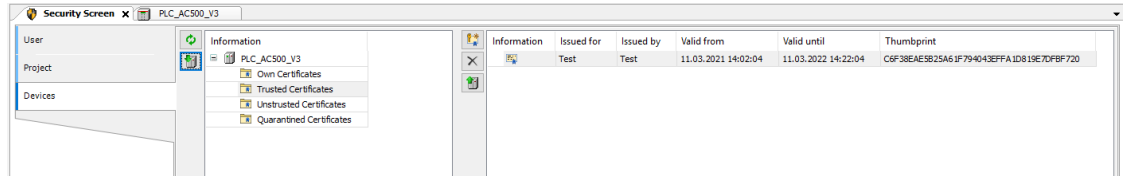
Select “Trusted Certificates”



- Import the certificate (**MyCertForSinging.cer**), created in chapter: 4, to the “Trusted Certificates” in your PLC, using the  symbol.
- Once imported the confirmation screen appears



11. The imported certificate is now visible in the “Trusted Certificates” area.



12. Logout of the PLC

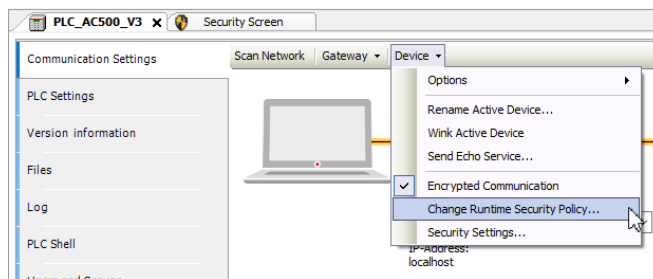
13. Select Build → Clean All

14. Login to the PLC

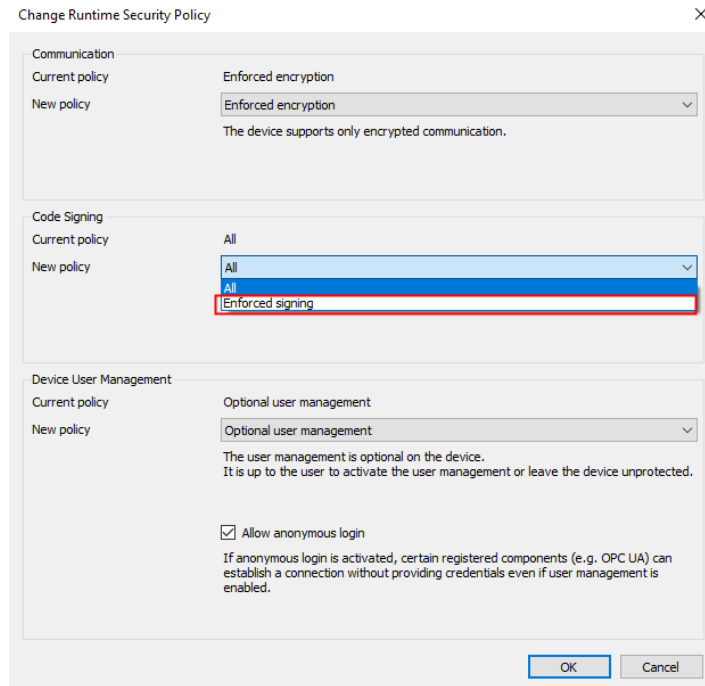
## 5.2 Change policy to signed only

In the last chapter the signing in one project was activated. But another project which is not encrypted & signed can also be loaded from the CPU. In this chapter it is explained how to enforce the signing of projects.

1. Open the Communication Settings
2. Click Device → Change Runtime Security Policy...

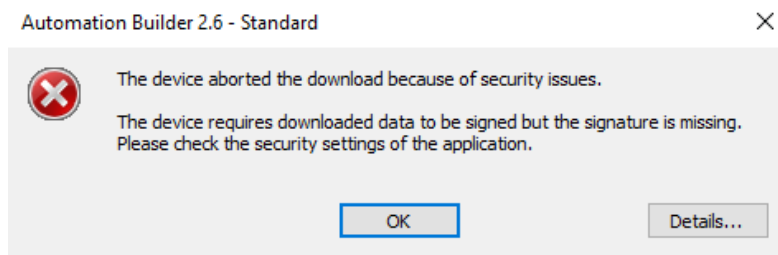


3. In the section Code Signing the policy is changed to Enforced signing



#### 4. Confirm with OK

In future, only signed boot applications can be loaded. In case an unsigned application is downloaded following error pops up.



#### CAUTION!

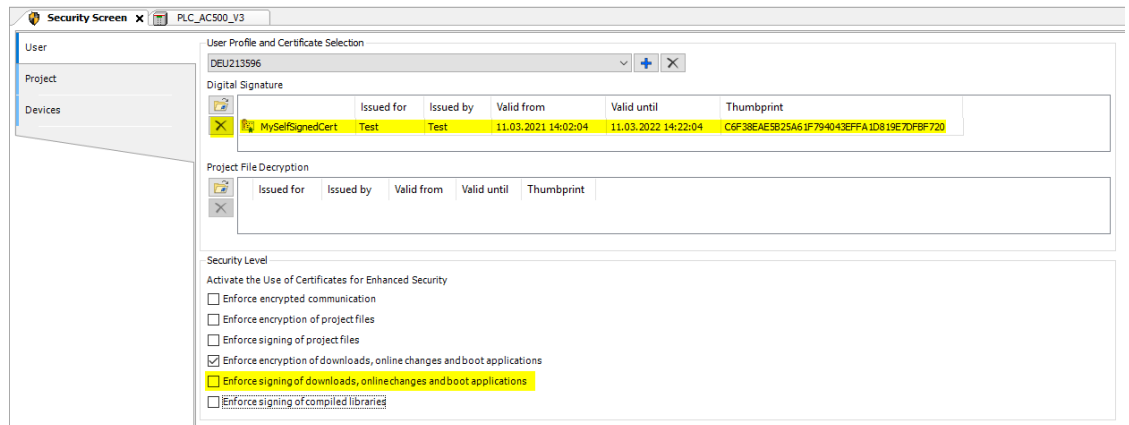
**A not signed boot application can be downloaded to the PLC which is replacing the existing boot application. When trying to load this not signed boot application the error occurs. Nevertheless, the old boot application is already replaced so not boot application is available anymore.**

## 6 Delete certificates and user management

Certificates can be deleted in the “Security Screen” view, either directly on the “User” tab or in the “Certificate Selection” dialog.

### 6.1 Delete certificate for signing the application

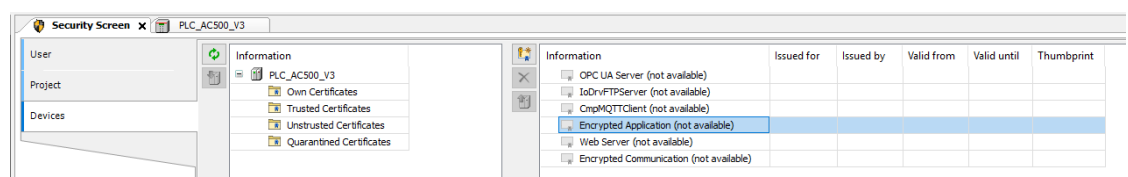
- Dialog “Security Screen”, tab “User”, “Digital signature”.  
Select a certificate and click



Remove the checkboxes in the “Security Level”.

### 6.2 Deleting a certificate for the encryption of boot application, download and, online change

1. In the “Security Screen” view, on the “User” tab, remove the checkbox for “Enforce encryption of downloads, online changes, and boot applications”
2. In the “Security Screen” view, on the “Project” tab, in the bottom view, double click the entry for the “Application”.
3. The “Properties dialog for the application opens with the “Encryption” tab.
4. In the “Certificates” group, click .  
In the “Certificate Selection” dialog, delete the certificate by selecting the certificate and click
5. Click “OK” to close the “Certificate Selection” dialog.
6. The certificate is no longer displayed in the “Properties” dialog.
7. Remove the checkbox in the “Certificates” section for “Digitally sign application code”
8. Set the “Encryption technology” to “No encryption”
9. Click “Apply” and “OK”
10. In the “Security Screen” view, on the “Device” tab, select the PLC and remove the certificate for “Encrypted Application”

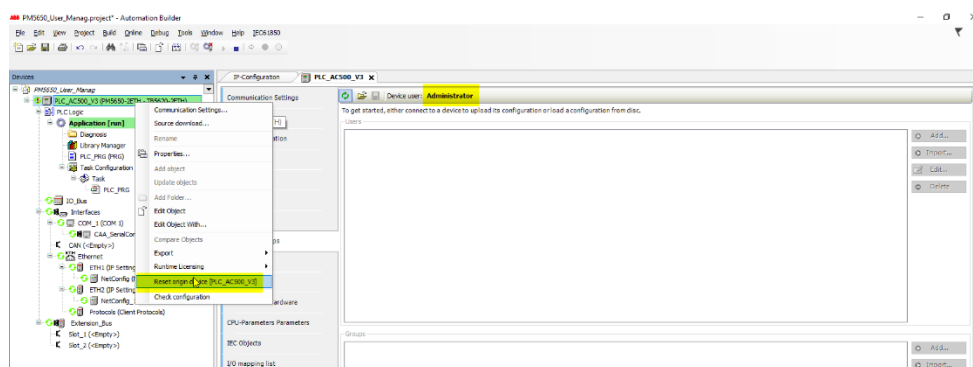


## 6.3 Deleting a certificate for the encrypted communication

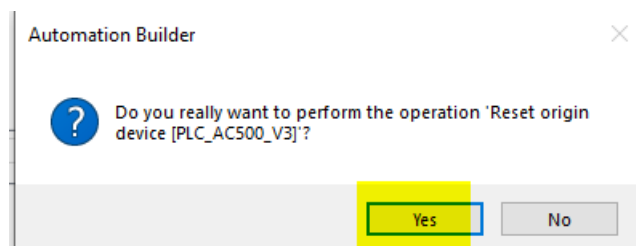
1. In the “Security Screen” view, on the “User” tab, remove the checkbox for “Enforce encrypted communication”
2. In the “Security Screen” view, on the “Device” tab, select the PLC and remove the certificate for “Encrypted Communication”

## 6.4 Delete the user management

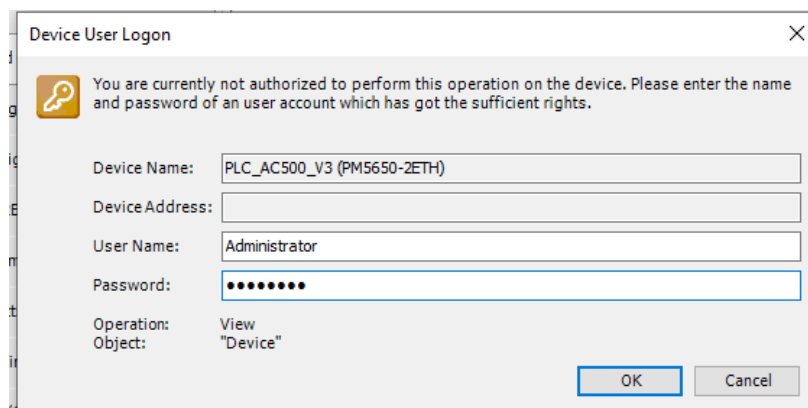
1. Login as Administrator
2. Right click to the PLC\_AC500 in the device tree
3. Select reset origin Device



4. Confirm with yes



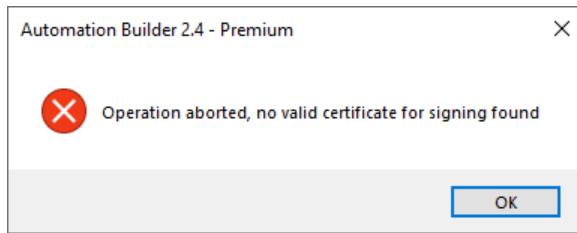
5. Wait about 30s, you'll be logged out
6. Login Again, you'll be asked for Username and Password



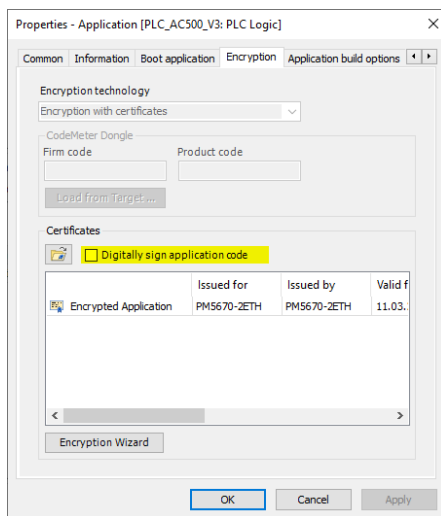
7. Type in and confirm. The error message “Too many Tries” is shown
8. Now the user management is deleted and no more password is needed

## 7 FAQs

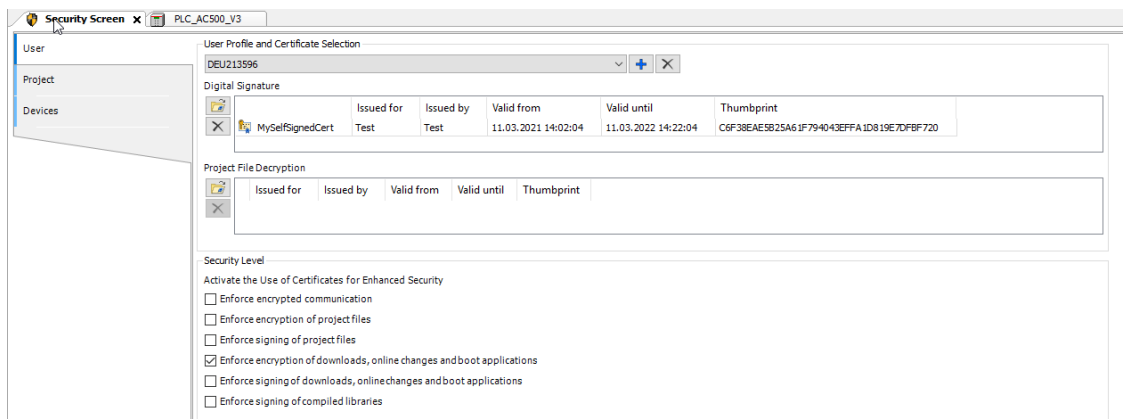
**Q1:** What's wrong when I got the Error: Operation aborted, no valid certificate for signing found



**A1:** If you do not want to use Code Signing, it could happen, that you have selected the “Digitally sign application code” is selected



If you want to use Code Signing than, please be sure you have imported your certificate.





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[www.abb.com/plc](http://www.abb.com/plc)

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