

The 4future.institute analyses the structural conditions under which Europe can remain capable of acting – politically, economically, and socially. This paper examines one of the most pressing of these conditions: Europe's digital sovereignty. The findings are unambiguous – and the need for action is immediate.

Europe's core digital infrastructure – cloud services, identity systems, communication platforms, AI – is almost entirely provided by platforms operating under foreign legal frameworks that contradict European law and exhibit near-monopolistic market structures. Europe can no longer govern essential digital functions sovereignly – neither legally, nor technologically, nor economically.

The Structural Digital Trilemma

Europe finds itself in a persistent tension between three forces:

1. Legal Contradiction

The GDPR requires European data controllers to maintain control over personal data. US laws such as the CLOUD Act and FISA 702, however, compel US providers to disclose data – even when stored within the EU. In modern multi-tenant cloud environments, this conflict cannot be fully resolved through technical or organisational means.

European data controllers cannot fully meet their legal obligations.

2. Technological Dependency

The dominant use of proprietary multi-tenant clouds prevents technical auditability, any meaningful ability to switch providers, and control over identity, data, and security architecture.

Platforms become de facto monopolistic infrastructures beyond democratic oversight.

3. Economic Vulnerability

A significant share of digital value creation flows to non-European markets. Europe is losing innovative capacity, tax revenues, and technological competence.

Digital dependencies become economic dependencies.

These dependencies undermine democratic agency (rule of law, state control), economic stability (value creation, competitiveness), societal resilience (education, digital literacy, self-determination), and security (critical infrastructure, sovereign digital spaces).

Digital sovereignty is therefore not a technical detail – it is a **strategic prerequisite for a strong, capable Europe.**

Why Europe Must Act Now

The geopolitical landscape has shifted. Transatlantic reliability can no longer be taken for granted. At the same time, AI development is accelerating digital dependencies at a pace that systematically outstrips regulatory responses. The window for an independent European digital strategy is open – but it is closing.

What Europe Needs Now

These five measures form a system – not isolated individual steps. Law without infrastructure remains theory. Infrastructure without education remains elite technology.

1. An Enforceable European Legal Framework

Clear rules on data access and jurisdiction, mandatory transparency on government access requests, and certification of sovereign cloud and AI services.

2. A European Cloud and AI Infrastructure

Auditable, interoperable, and replaceable – operated exclusively under compatible legal frameworks, with support for open-source, verifiable core technologies.

3. Open Standards and the Freedom to Switch

Mandatory interoperability (CalDAV, CardDAV, IMAP, open document formats, OIDC).

→ Only open standards create genuine freedom of choice.

4. Strategic European Digital Investment

Every investment in European infrastructure remains within the European economic area.

→ Strengthening innovation, employment, and technological competence.

5. A Society That Understands Digital Systems

Digital sovereignty does not end with institutions and infrastructure. It begins with people who can understand, question, and actively shape digital systems. An education system that cultivates critical thinking is not a soft add-on – it is the democratic foundation of all other measures.

Core Message

Digital sovereignty does not mean autarky. It means the freedom to choose whom we trust, on which technologies we build, and under which legal framework our digital future stands.

Europe has a window of opportunity – now. Those who do not control the infrastructure will, in the long run, not control the decisions that rest upon it. The economic consequences of this dependency are already becoming visible – the political consequences will follow.

For further information, background analyses, and additional resources, visit:

<https://4future.institute>

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