

Tech Cooperation and Tech Sovereignty in the New World Order

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The EU and Germany have built a digital state on infrastructure they don't control. AI systems are embedded in critical operations ranging from municipal services to the Bundeswehr, while lock-in windows close. In great power competition, tech dependence amounts to strategic submission. The infrastructure for AI and quantum computing is being built elsewhere. Germany has the economic capacity and research capabilities, but political will is lacking.

THE SHIFT

HOW THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER PLAYS OUT IN TECH

The world has fundamentally changed. The liberal order, with its faith in economic interdependence as a stabilizing force, has given way to a renaissance of state power. National security interests, technological resilience, and control over digital infrastructure are back at the center of geopolitics. This “geo-economic turn” is most visible in the digital sphere. Technology has become the primary battlefield of great power competition. The events of early 2026 have shattered any remaining illusions. The US abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, its threats to seize Greenland, and its withdrawal from international organizations and agreements make clear that the rules-based order, which long allowed the EU and Germany to defer hard choices about tech dependence, is broken.

The Trump administration's transactional approach and sphere-of-influence worldview expose Germany's most critical vulnerability: structural dependence on non-EU-controlled digital infrastructure. In a world where might makes right, this dependence is tantamount to strategic submission. Technology is no longer about economic competitiveness alone. It is fundamental to security and sovereignty.

While there is a growing awareness of this predicament, Europe's response remains inadequate. The current approach, regulation without infrastructure, leaves Germany vulnerable to coercion from multiple directions. While Brussels sets global standards through legislation like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the AI Act, European governments have built their digital states on American clouds and Chinese hardware. Standards without infrastructure or products is influence without agency.

Europe possesses world-class research, engineering talent, and sufficient capital. What is missing is the political will to break with comfortable habits, the courage to prioritize brutally, and the readiness to invest at scale. Nostalgia for a rules-based order where these choices seemed unnecessary paralyzes decision-making. Yet the infrastructure for AI, quantum computing, and biotechnology is being built now and lock-in windows are closing. Every month of delay makes migration to a new system more expensive, meaning infrastructure dependency may become irreversible.

Digital sovereignty is not about building everything ourselves or retreating into isolationism. It means acting independently when strategic interests demand it. This requires us to control critical infrastructure, to maintain the ability to verify and audit essential systems, and to have credible exit options. In Germany, federal fragmentation means each of its 16 states takes

a different approach to critical systems. Massive digitalization ambitions in e-government and smart cities, like [Munich's re-adoption of Microsoft](#) in 2020, risk accelerating its dependency on foreign infrastructure. Bavaria [struggles to even discuss lock-in effects](#). Schleswig-Holstein offers a [counterexample](#), weaning state bureaucracy off Microsoft through open-source software, and releasing funds that can in turn support promising European companies.

In this environment, technological dependencies create unprecedented vulnerabilities that great powers are positioned to exploit. The United States may wield the CLOUD Act to [access data](#) stored by American companies regardless of location, extending jurisdictional reach globally and using platform dominance as diplomatic leverage. China has built a sophisticated domestic ecosystem spanning cloud services, social media, search engines, and AI. Through the [Digital Silk Road](#), particularly in its maritime route spanning Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, China is spreading its technology infrastructure. China's [National Intelligence Law grants Beijing access to data](#) held by Chinese companies internationally, mirroring American extraterritorial reach. Yet the picture is more complex than this bipolarity. India, Brazil, the EU and Gulf states are building sovereign digital ecosystems, recognizing that technological dependence equals strategic vulnerability. Their alignment choices will rebalance rather than simply reflect the US-China divide.

THE IMPLICATIONS

IMPACTS ON COOPERATION, INTEGRATION, AND GERMAN POLICY

AI escalates these stakes. It is becoming the base layer of information infrastructure, curating what citizens see, managing government services, and shaping access to knowledge.

Infrastructure capture is a security threat. The danger extends beyond content manipulation to control over the infrastructure itself. When AI systems curate search results, manage administrative processes, and determine what information citizens see, whoever controls these systems controls access to reality. Attribution becomes impossible. If service is degraded, is this a technical failure, commercial optimization, or deliberate manipulation? Germany cannot answer this about systems it does not control.

cannot guarantee data and operational sovereignty when critical infrastructure is controlled by third parties.

Europe has spent its energy crafting regulations that govern non-European technologies. The paradox is that complacency in fostering its own innovation ecosystem has imposed [burdens on European startups](#) while Big Tech has absorbed compliance costs as market entry barriers, further curbing innovation within the EU. The Brussels Effect

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Consider a German municipality implementing AI-based services on American cloud infrastructure with proprietary models. Foreign actors would gain access to sensitive data about German citizens and have the ability to degrade services remotely. More insidiously, the AI model would be able to systematically manipulate how information is curated. Non-European technology companies could be compelled to halt updates or service equipment, directly threatening national security. The German Bundeswehr's partial reliance on [Google Cloud](#) exemplifies this vulnerability. Germany has neither control nor visibility, yet there are viable European alternatives, like [OVHCloud](#) (France) and open-source [Nextcloud](#) (German), but migration grows costlier every day.

Tech interdependence, once considered stabilizing, has become weaponized. "Trusted partner" frameworks are emerging because traditional alliances

means little if European standards merely reshape decisions already made in Silicon Valley and Shenzhen, with the EU always one step behind. The EU needs to focus on producing innovative and demand-driven technologies at home. This would help initiate a Brussels 2.0 effect of actively shaping global standards and markets that align with EU values – such as sovereign cloud infrastructure ensuring data protection, AI systems with transparent governance, or digital platforms respecting privacy by design, not retrofitted through regulation. Yet the [EU's Information and Communications Technology \(ICT\) market share dropped from 22% to 18%](#) between 2013 and 2023, even as regulatory output accelerated.

[The Commission's June 2025 Digital Strategy](#) treats sovereignty as a cooperation framework rather than a power basis. Financing clarity, governance structures, and political accountability remain absent. Its "Tech Business

Offer” fundamentally misunderstands that successful digital models are demand driven. Gaia-X tells the cautionary tale: technically sound, politically celebrated, economically irrelevant.

THE RESPONSE

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Global demand for a democratic alternative to US tech capitalism and Chinese digital authoritarianism is growing. European credibility in privacy and ethics creates unique differentiation. The Trump administration’s approach is eroding trust in American platforms precisely when Europe needs the opening.

As the EU’s largest economy, with France as a committed partner on technological sovereignty, Germany can drive EU-level change through coordinated procurement policies. Germany’s research strength in photonics and open-source contributions like LibreOffice and [Ecosia](#)’s independent search index demonstrate existing capabilities. Airbus proves European ambition succeeds when political will matches strategic necessity.

What Germany must do requires brutal prioritization:

- **Infrastructure audit and transition.**

Leverage Germany’s KRITIS-Dachgesetz framework for the protection of critical infrastructure to conduct comprehensive dependency mapping across critical systems, then establish procurement quotas requiring European providers for all new critical digital infrastructure by 2027 as well as diversification requirements in public tenders (mandatory multi-vendor strategy).

- **European Sovereignty Compact.**

Leverage the Franco-German partnership to establish a Sovereignty Compact under Article 20 of the TEU, enabling willing states to build shared infrastructure in strategic domains: sovereign cloud, AI base models, digital identity.

- **End fragmentation domestically and across Europe through concrete synergies.** Regarding quantum technologies, this means harmonizing Germany’s federal approaches while integrating quantum ecosystems in Munich, Paris, and Delft.

Economic capacity and global demand are already in place, but political will remains the bottleneck. In a world where might makes right, technological dependence is strategic submission. Germany must choose sovereignty while choice remains possible.



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