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## **How can we achieve strategic digital autonomy ?**

Trump : a salutary electroshock!

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The major geopolitical reshuffle currently taking place around the conflict in Ukraine shows us that strategic digital autonomy is no longer simply an economic ambition, but an absolute necessity for the independence and decision-making autonomy of our nations. The world in which we live is marked by the intensification of cyber-attacks, foreign interference and technological dependence.

France and Europe must take their digital destiny in hand, or risk becoming permanently enslaved and seeing their social models gradually disappear. Imbued with technology, the issue today is much more societal and political than technical. It therefore needs to be placed at this level of decision making and governance, that of the State and our national and European representatives, but also of the

digital clients. It is no longer primarily a matter technical experts.

Since 2018, the issue of digital sovereignty has become "political" because of our dependence on our "partner-competitors", our American allies, and the issues surrounding data capture; each country, each bloc, is increasingly openly defending its own interests by using the law as a form extraterritorial interference.

### **2018/2025 was a time of realisation and the end of naivety..... But what should we do now?**

We were partners, allies but competitors - that's nothing new, as President François Mitterrand had already said - but we were united by common values. Digital sovereignty seemed to be more of an economic than a geopolitical issue, although the problems of data, particularly personal and health data, raised questions and were the subject of difficult negotiations between Europe and the United States.

Fortunately, a number of national and European initiatives were launched during this period, including France 2030, ANSSI initiatives, SecnumCloud and EUCS certifications, sovereign and trusted clouds, the "SREN" law aimed at securing and regulating the digital space in France, the courageous efforts of a number of MPs and senators, the Cyber Campus network, the work of Cigref, etc.

They have remained within a logic of cooperation, often undergone, with the major non-European players, without daring to rethink the relationship model, because it was more their interest to use their perfectly efficient systems than to embark on other very risky paths, but the move towards the cloud, AI and entrusting their data to an 'untrusted' partner increasingly raising questions.

Digital technology in all its forms is, and increasingly will be, a field of competition, contestation and confrontation, both commercially and culturally, as well as strategically.

Even if offensive actions remain a certain threshold of violence, they are a reality. Many states carry them out, as the VIGINUM agency regularly shows, and they seek insidiously undermine confidence in the State, the functioning of the Nation and its cohesion. For the past ten or so, disinformation has been orchestrated using technical attacks via skilfully managed and planned hybrid campaigns. More recently, AI has become a means and a weapon for distorting people's perceptions, making subject of its supervision and regulation a strategic one.

**The election of President Donald Trump marks a break on several levels.**

**First of all, there has been a break with** the previous administration, which worked in certain ways to consolidate its supremacy as a digital empire and its 'stranglehold' on the European digital space. **Brutality, surprise, hyperactivity, uncertainty**, but also control over the American media....

**A break in support: the GAFAs very quickly and very strongly rallied behind the speeches and actions of the MAGA movement**, driven by the lure of financial gain thanks to an unbridled Internet world where data can be captured without constraint, AI developed without counter-power or regulation, or by a vision a futuristic world driven by a few major Silicon Valley bosses. **There is even talk of the "techno-right" as a new ideological trend combining libertarian utopias and conservative values.**

**A major break in alliances**, with President Trump, in the space of a few days and virtually single-handedly, shattering the system of international relations and alliances built up over the previous century, harking back to the American "Big Stick Policy" of the very early 20th century.

**In this context, anything can happen...** Yesterday's enemy seems to have become a new friend, or at least a partner like any other.

Is there a Russian agent of influence in the White House, as the press seems to be reporting? Is America too in the process of becoming an autocracy that is turning its back on all the values that have built the transatlantic relationship? The question, unthinkable just a few weeks ago, is now on the table.

**We're facing a world of uncertainty!**

**What about a presidential decree making the data of Europeans**, companies or organisations hosted by the GAFAs **available to the US administration?**

**What about the sequestration or hostage-taking of our companies' data** at these same GAFAs, legally validated under American law?

**Hosting data in France or Europe with a GAFAs effectively brings it under US jurisdiction.** This is also true for technical data entrusted to US cyber service providers from sensors deployed and operated in the Cloud, and even more so for everything to do with metadata and algorithms.

We know that! In the absence of European infrastructure, technology and high-performance services, are really no alternatives, and that's what we need to build collectively, step by step, so that we have a complementary offering at the right technological level.

**This is the point that needs to change quickly; a way forward exists, as shown by the various initiatives around trusted/sovereign clouds, but these need to be scaled up through a new relationship with the major GAFAs.** It's a kind of New Deal between a 'united Europe' - governments and organisations representing customers, such as CIGREF, NUMEUM, MEDEF, CGPME, CIO clubsetc. - and private companies governed by US law, which need to adapt themselves and their infrastructures. **Ultimately, it is the companies (Comex) and the CIOs who have the power to decide whether or not to sign a contract, and to influence their suppliers.** We therefore need to rely on them and make them key players in these initiatives through collective action.

Many of the Europeans employed by these companies feel increasingly , but they may also have a role to play internally in explaining that such thuggish behaviour is not conducive to confidence and stability. Uncertainty is bad for business in the medium term. Far from seeing them as pariahs, it's better to talk to them and get them involved so that they can act as "go-betweens. There enough associations to put this subject on the table without taboos.

## **Firstly, there is an urgent need to prepare for uncertainty created by the new American administration!**

In the short term, let's start with the most sensitive issue, which is **the need to protect and defend ourselves autonomously, and then to ensure legal security** - backups - for the most important data, and to back up everything that can be backed up under a European legal framework; SECNUMCLOUD, of course, for everything that deserves to be backed up, and several sovereign cloud initiatives are already available or will soon be available. In cyber, there are successful European solutions that deserve to be scaled up.

## **Secondly, a paradigm shift for IT Departments... Do we innovation or development facilities everywhere, so that we resort to the high-performance but non-European "Market Places" to achieve the fastest possible "time to market"? The tools are extraordinary, but we really need them everywhere? For sensitive areas, can't we think of more 'bespoke' systems hosted on a European infrastructure?**

We need to retain control not only of "sensitive data", but also of the "algorithms that model the know-how and specific operating methods of organisations, where the added value that lies at the "strategic heart" of organisations is to be found.

Let's take another look at all the current contracts, which often have skyrocketing prices (Broadcom/Vmware, for example, or the various opinions regularly issued by CIGREF).

**Some are doing it! All CIOs need to get to grips with it. They are the ones who define the architecture and the use of service providers; they have decision-making powers.**

Although the infrastructure has not yet been scaled up, the Secnumcloud and EUCS+ initiatives are underway, with French operators such as OVH, S3NS, SCALEWAY, NUMSPOT, OUTSCALE, BLEU, OODRIVE and others already on board...

These measures must be taken as a matter of urgency, and there is still a long way to go to regain the IT ground abandoned to non-European players, where our strategic interests and our citizens' data require it.

**Our American partner wanted and provoked this break.** He is returning to the beginning of the post-1914 Pax America; he is turning his back on part of his history and his values. **It should not be experienced as a purely negative trauma, but as a formidable challenge to be met, an opportunity to be seized, in which France has a major role to play, alone and with its closest partners in Europe.**

## **A turning point in its history not to be missed or missed any more**

**Let's not forget Suez in 1956!** As a result of an agreement between the USA and the USSR, the French and British were ordered to halt their operations. This was the starting point for the creation of the Force de Dissuasion by General de Gaulle with the aim of "regaining our strategic autonomy to defend our national interests".

**The Nora-Minc report** on the computerisation of French society in 1977 had already anticipated many things, but there have been so many failures and collective resignations since then in the face of the emergence of American hegemony.

**General de Gaulle** was able to mobilise the nation's forces and create the Deterrent Force in just ten years.

In the 1970s, governments and industry joined forces to create **the Airbus consortium.**

More recently, the nation came together to **rebuild Notre Dame Cathedral**. The State was able to act alongside private companies and a wide range of players, all with original leadership entrusted to a general, a field far removed from his career path.

If we have succeeded in creating a dynamic to restore an architecture, can't we imagine how to initiate and drive a European dynamic to build an autonomous digital infrastructure with partners who respect the freedom and dignity of citizens?

We have many assets and energies to unleash. France initiated the Paris Appeal in 2019 and more recently the **AI Summit**, where the digital world was able to demonstrate its diversity and dynamism, and not just the United States...

**We now need to take our digital destiny into our own hands and stop putting up with it. It's not easy, in fact it's very complicated, but France needs to be at the heart of the European dynamic to drive it forward.** Bring together Germany, the countries Northern Europe Italy Spain.... Actors and entrepreneurs from every nation convinced of the need to transform a weakness into a strength.

The State must not try to act alone, it must be a joint action between politicians and civil servants, but also and above all with representatives of consumer companies and their CIOs (Cigref, Club Décision DSI...).

A living force at the heart of economic and political life, capable of following a leader to take Europe in this direction.

**France has what it takes to position itself as a catalyst, a source inspiration and a leader.** We have top-level schools and skills; cyber, AI, very dynamic innovation and research, French Tech, Business France, support schemes like France 2030 and fund-raising.

**The skills, creativity and entrepreneurs are also there,** but a market is lacking

The aim is to create a "domestic" French and European business of sufficient size to enable it to flourish and develop, and to scale up...

This is one of the most important and essential stages, if not the key. Over and above all the aid and support, we need to create a European digital market that is favourable to European players and partners chosen exclusively under European law, on the basis of balanced relationships, as can be seen in the Trusted Cloud initiatives or at IA Summit.

Coca Cola is an American company, but it produces in France. McDonald's is American, but its raw materials are produced in Europe.... These are far-fetched images of digital technology, but the GAFAs must also understand that their attitude has become intolerable and that it will end up damaging their business, both in Europe and the rest of the world.

**Nor should we forget that the digital space is the strategic area confrontation in which States are the first to confront each other,** remaining below the threshold of armed aggression, combining actions of interference, disinformation, propaganda, or even more technical actions to disrupt, sabotage or even destroy. Undermining the moral strength of populations, causing them to lose confidence in the State and its institutions, disorganising society and armies before the attack, or even winning without fighting - the ultimate in the Art of War (Sun Tzu).

**European rearmament, the source of many declarations, also includes a very dual digital field that begins with our industries, institutions and organisations...**

These challenges confirm, more than ever, the founding vision of the Cyber Centre Excellence: to promote strategic autonomy in cyber defence and cyber security, to promote a real cyber defence/cybersecurity with a European dimension. Dependence on non-European foreign technologies and the fragmentation of national capabilities are major risks to our digital sovereignty. It is imperative to guarantee the defence of our critical infrastructures, the protection of our strategic industries and the security of our citizens.

**Autonomy in cybersecurity is not just a technical issue: it is a political issue, an imperative for sovereignty, competitiveness and social stability.**

Against this backdrop, the Cyber Centre of Excellence is fully committed to playing a key role in structuring the French and European ecosystem, centred on European sovereignty and aligned with the policies of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, ANSSI, European institutions and European partners.

**Without further delay, a working group will be set up to discuss this issue** with our partners. members.

This reflection reflects a turning point that requires a clear vision and concrete actions to strengthen our strategic autonomy.

Four major initiatives could be envisaged:

**Launch a national "State/National representation/Business" dynamic with a European knock-on effect to coordinate and monitor at the highest level all the concrete actions to be taken without further delay.** A genuine 2025/2027 action needs to be drawn up, as well as a broad-based dynamic subject to global governance encompassing the entire digital sector (cyber, data, cloud, AI, quantum, etc.) and involving first and foremost "consumerbusinesses and not just the major groups. France was able to do this for the 2024 Olympics!

Promote both sovereign and trusted offerings, but also launch an exchange between players. The aim is to help the "French" and the GAFAs to understand that the current situation is untenable and will be a "lose-lose" situation, as recent developments on the US stock market seem to show. Doing business doesn't mean crushing your customers or taking them hostage....

The Revue Stratégique 2025 launched by the President of the Republic could be the first receptacle for its initial work.

**Convene a Digital Citizens' Forum with all partners to define the 2027/2032 plan,** inspired by the methodologies used for the White Papers on Defence and National Security. France's SGDSN is well versed in this type exercise.

**Extend the work of France 2030 beyond technical projects.** Encourage a move up the range of "domestic" markets accessible to bids from consortia of European companies, and facilitate access to larger markets (government, OIV, etc.).

**Launch awareness-raising campaigns and consultations with associations of CIOs** from companies of all sizes, publishers and digital services companies. Large groups, but also and above all SMEs, who need more advice and less complex information systems, better adapted initially to European service offerings.

It will be a long road ahead, but the electroshock of President Trump's seizure of power and his ecosystem has the merit of showing us that the world of the past is over; that the world of tomorrow seems to be marked above all by uncertainty, power struggles and the will to dominate.

**Europe is on its own and must take its destiny into its own hands.** This also involves, and very importantly, military defence, economic power and digital technology, which now permeates every aspect of our societies.

**Where there is a will, there is a way....**



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