Europe at the Crossroads:
Open Cooperation or Protectionism?
Technological Sovereignty Roundtable

BACKROUND

The digital economy is the fastest growing area within the member states of the European Union and globally. What we observe in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic fully demonstrates that digital technologies became an essential part of all sectors of the economy as well as of our everyday life.

Against this backdrop, the ever-increasing digital transformation raises in the EU many concerns: How to ensure Europe's ability to stay innovative and competitive, to boost its capacity in key technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, HPC or cloud computing? What are the best ways to protect and make secure data of European citizens and businesses? How to gain control over the data generated in Europe, especially non-personal data, and exploit the potential of Europe's strong industrial base? How to make Europe stronger and more resilient vis a vis pandemic and other global threads?

As a solution to these issues some policymakers are calling for independence, sovereignty, autonomy. This effort has been captured by the European Commission's overall strategy to strengthen the European "technological sovereignty" and this term is currently dominating in EU's debates, policies and legislative proposals.

While European and national policy makers are issuing more assertive policies to achieve this objective, there are serious questions we have to ask:

The most important: What is technological sovereignty? Up to now, there is not a coherent vision or unifying definition of what this term means. In many areas, the term technological sovereignty is applied in completely different ways. Therefore, it is very important to clarify the concept and its meaning. Only after we understand what technological sovereignty is and what it is not, we can mitigate pressing concerns:

- The impact it may have on the ability of European companies to access foreign markets;

- That it can serve as a pretext for protectionist policies;

- That actions based on above-mentioned prescriptive policies may reduce access of European businesses and citizens to innovative technologies, products and services;

- That it can lead to the seclusion of the European Union and deterioration of the position of European companies in international competition.

That is why we need to have a thorough debate in order to reach a common understanding of the concept of technological sovereignty. That debate should clearly address the European Union's pain points, such as competitiveness, innovation, data governance, trust and security. The concept in which the EU

- instead bets on openness, and works with like-minded democratic nations to develop "rules of the road" in order to support digital trade while ensuring a safe and secure data economy that includes common approaches to data protection and further use of data; and

- strikes a balance between its sovereignty on one side, and on the other side openness and ability for like-minded international partners to continue investing in Europe.