



## Digital Sovereignty – Rhetoric and Reality

### *Call for Papers*

Organised by the **Vienna Working Group on Digital Europe**:

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### *Practical Information*

Authors are invited to submit abstracts of around 500 words until 14 November 2021 through an online form, which can be found at <https://bit.ly/3knieZ>. In order to allow for constructive discussions and to plan future common projects, we will ask selected contributors to prepare full drafts of their papers until 30 March 2022. To simplify the planning, we would kindly ask you to indicate together with the submission of your proposal if you are willing to participate in common publication projects, most likely in the form of special issues, or if you just want to join our conference. We particularly encourage submissions from researchers from underrepresented groups or regions, early in their research career, or returning from career breaks. Don't hesitate to contact [eif@univie.ac.at](mailto:eif@univie.ac.at) in case you have any questions or comments!

### *Description*

Digitalisation, it has become commonplace, is rapidly transforming the way we “travel or design, make and consume things” (von der Leyen, 2020 b). It requires policymakers to walk a tightrope between market-making and market-correcting, between fostering digital markets and regulating them (Newman, 2020; Seidl, 2021). However, digitalisation is not limited to questions of political economy but increasingly gains a geo-economic dimension. The internet is fragmenting into a splinternet (Lemley, 2021) and states increasingly seek to protect and promote their model of digital governance. A quarter of a century after John Perry Barlow told the governments of the world that they have “no sovereignty” (Barlow, 1996) in cyberspace, those very governments reassert their “digital sovereignty” (Chander and Sun, 2021).

The debate on digital sovereignty has reached Europe too, where the term has become a buzzword among EU policymakers (Obendiek, 2021). Ursula von der Leyen has made it the centrepiece of her Commission's digital agenda, describing it as the “capability that Europe must have to make its own choices, based on its own values, respecting its own rules” (von der Leyen, 2020 a). And for Thierry Breton, digital sovereignty is about “Europe defending its strategic interests. Being assertive of our values. Firm in our ambitions. Confident of our means.” (Breton, 2020). But what is behind the buzz? What does the term actually mean? And most importantly, does the political rhetoric match the policy reality?

In other words, we are interested in if and how the discourse on digital sovereignty is translated into actual policy in the EU. Existing scholarship has outlined the contested nature of key digital policies, such as the GDPR (Laurer and Seidl, 2020; Schünemann and Windwehr, 2020). We are interested in the degree and nature of policy change in various policy subfields that are affected by digitalisation, from trade policy (data flows) to industrial policy (creating digital champions), from data protection (data

sovereignty) to internal market policy (digital single market), and from monetary policy (digital Euro) to competition policy (digital market power). Where policy is changing, are we observing first-order change in the settings of existing instruments, second-order change in the types of instruments used, third-order change in the policy goals, or even 'paradigmatic change' (Daigneault, 2014; Hall, 1993)?

Our *Call for Papers* invites researchers from political science, international relations, political sociology, and related disciplines to help us answer these questions. We are particularly interested in contributions that unpack recent developments in different policy subfields and assess to what extent the ideas surrounding digital sovereignty have translated into actual policy change; and if so, of what order that policy change is. Contributions can use different methodologies but should apply high methodological standards. Authors should be able to situate their theoretical framework in the literature on policy paradigms. They should also speak to the literature on the political economy of digitalisation (how is the digital economy affected by political decisions, be they market-making or market-correcting?) and/or the literature on the geoeconomics of digitalisation (how does geography and geopolitics affect the political economy, be that in terms of market-closing or market-opening to the global digital economy?).

## Timeline

Deadline for the submission of paper proposals: 14.11.2021

Deadline for the submission of full paper drafts: 30.03.2022

Online Conference organised by EIF: 28/29.04.2022

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