ITS webinar on strategic autonomy – the European perspective

Date and time: 27 January 2021, 16:00 – 17:30 CET
Format: online only
Academic host: Chalmers University

European digital communication infrastructure: How do global trends influence the aim of strategic autonomy?

The year 2020 will be known as the year the Covid pandemic changed our lives and livelihoods. Up to date, more than 60 million people have been infected and 1,4 million people have died. We can expect a wave of bankruptcies, unemployment and a big pile of additional public debt that will have to be shouldered by next generations. And we have seen tremendous disruption of supply chains, further escalation of the conflict between the US and China (and further focus of these rivals on each-other), spectacular growth of the digital economy and a huge push towards a digitalized society.

These developments have increased the focus of European policymakers on a few lessons they had already started to learn. First, that Europe must become less dependent from the US and China. Second, that close cooperation and trade with these two countries remains essential for the EU economy. The third lesson is that security - a multi-layered concept ranging from political, military defense and economic to zoonotic diseases and not in the least cyber - cannot be taken for granted and must be redefined.

When the virus arrived in Europe, the discussion on European strategic autonomy had already started. In his recent speech at Brueghel, European Council President Charles Michel called strategic autonomy "*the aim of our generation*".[1] And EU leaders stressed after their meeting in October that this is a key objective, while maintaining an open economy.

Open strategic autonomy. What does this concept mean for European digital sovereignty? What needs to be done to achieve that objective?

If one looks at the European digital communication infrastructure or indeed enterprise cloud services, on the one hand it is a question of sufficient choice of suppliers and competition among them.[2] And on the other hand, it is a question of information and network security and the (political) reliability of suppliers. In this context, one could argue that Europe needs a strong, long-term industrial policy to create the necessary capabilities to increase European resilience, cyber security and independence.

Remaining open at the same time could mean seeking strategic partnerships with like-minded states and possibly involving private actors to render the most critical technologies and systems more resilient to build a secure digital infrastructure. This could be supplemented by

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[1] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/l-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-au-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/
[2] https://www.serentschy.com/mobile-operators-in-the-vendor-dilemma/

strategic partnerships with other, not necessarily like-minded states in the form of specific cooperation between equals. This would create mutual economic and technological dependence in the respective areas of cooperation – and hence indirectly add to security.

A year after the pandemic hit, this webinar looks at the background and the fundamental questions involved in the building of the next phase in the digital communication infrastructure that is key to the recovery of the European economy.

Opening remarks: Professor Erik Bohlin (Chalmers University and member of the ITS Board of Directors)[3]
Moderator: Dr. Georg Serentschy (Serentschy Advisory Services GmbH and ITS Corporate Board Member)[4]
Academic Host: Professor Erik Bohlin.

Confirmed speakers:
- **Thibaut Kleiner,** Director Policy Strategy & Outreach, European Commission[5]
- **Dr. Paul Timmers,** visiting research fellow at Oxford University and former European Commission director. Paul is one of the leading academic experts in the field of strategic autonomy[6]
- **Derk Oldenburg,** Foreign and EU Digital Policy Expert[7]
- **Carmen Gonsalves,** Head of international Cyber Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands[8]
- **Jonathan Sage,** Government and Regulatory Affairs Executive, IBM.[9]

Issues to be discussed in this context:

- What means Open Strategic Autonomy (OSA) and how can it be achieved? How does OSA differentiate itself from autarky and digital sovereignty?
- How does OSA fit with policy of the geopolitical powers US and China?
- The advent of a new European trade policy[10] and what can be expected from it?
- How can the New EU-US Agenda for Global Change of 2 Dec 2020[11] be put into joint policy and action, such as in the telecoms sector, standards, next-gen technology? In this context, *…the EU will also propose to the US to build on Europe's technological leadership to press for secure 5G infrastructure across the globe and open a dialogue on 6G. This should be part of <u>wider cooperation on digital supply chain security done through objective risk-based assessments</u>.*

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[3] https://www.chalmers.se/en/staff/Pages/erik-bohlin.aspx
[4] https://www.serentschy.com/
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/organisation_charts/organisation-chart-dg-connect_en.pdf
[6] https://eucyberdirect.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/paul-timmers-strategic-autonomy-may-2019-eucyberdirect.pdf
[7] https://www.linkedin.com/in/derkoldenburg/
[8] https://www.globalfemaleleaders.com/speaker/carmen-gonsalves/
[9] https://www.ibm.com/blogs/cloud-computing/author/jonathansage/
[10] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/hogan/announcements/speech-commissioner-phil-hogan-launch-public-consultation-eu-trade-policy-review-hosted-eui-florence_en
[11] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/joint-communication-eu-us-agenda_en.pdf

- The scope of the discussion will include not only telecommunication services but also enterprise cloud, digital sovereignty initiatives such as GAIA-X, and also the role of over-the-top services (OTTs).
- Industrial players are faced with a multitude of different challenges at the intersection between tech and politics, such as:

  - Managing simultaneously technical issues and the political layer with many interdependencies
  - Securing a global supply chain against the background of volatile and constantly changing restrictions
  - How can industry manage the stretch between technical requirements/limitations and political influence?

About ITS:

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