



# **Geo-tech Politics: How Europe Should Use Technology to Shape and Bolster its Place on the Global Stage**



### Author

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Almost seven years have passed since the Juncker Commission first put forward a package of measures to establish the digital single market, with a view to extending the principles of the single market to the digital space.

Seven years later we need to reach far beyond that goal. Over the last decade numerous geopolitical changes, combined with economic and health crises, have reshuffled power and competitiveness standings. The highly competitive geopolitical environment has undoubtedly affected the EU too.

The Von der Leyen Commission considers itself to be geopolitical in orientation. Geostrategy, nonetheless, is still not seen as a horizontal task. It rather appears only during some particular decision-making processes. Technology, for example, is key to Europe's geopolitical interests. Nevertheless, most EU measures and proposals are confined to internal market mechanisms. The digital single market, which is now inseparable from the concept of the single market, is only plausible, however, if decision-makers heed its implications for the EU as a global player.

Throughout history, technology has transformed economies and societies, redistributed power among states, empowered new actors, and shaped international relations. Nonetheless, the EU, for all its pathbreaking work on regulation, does not appear to have recognized the geopolitical impact of contemporary technology.

The need for digital sovereignty has been one of the priorities of the Von der Leyen Commission from the outset. The Commission has also devised numerous ambitious proposals to make 2020-2030 a real Digital Decade for Europe, not just enabling the EU to remain competitive but to further enhance competitiveness in the digital age.

Yet in the current geopolitical environment, it is not enough for Europe to be merely tech-compatible. The EU needs to further strive to be a tech leader on the global stage. Leveraging access is not sufficient over the long term. A change in approach is rather needed to elevate the tech ambitions,

capabilities and capacities of European economic actors to the highest level.

Tech policy is always geopolitical. Breaking up US technology companies at a moment the US finds itself battling for supremacy with China is a geopolitical act and so too is excluding Chinese telecommunication firms from European networks. Europe's actions engender geopolitical consequences that extend beyond the Union. In the policymaking process, however, this is often overlooked, with little space provided for anticipating impacts on external actors.

To pursue a geopolitically sound digital policy, the European Union must create a regulatory and policy environment for EU economic operators that favour these institutions over economic actors outside the EU – at least to the same extent that global competitors do for their own market players. But certain conditions must be met to foster progress herein. The tech gap within the Union, for one, needs to be narrowed through the development of digital capabilities. Rather than digital aptitude, the digital efficiency of economic players should be fostered. And as opposed to digital sovereignty, digital autonomy, including the technological means for this autonomy, must be developed first and foremost. Artificial intelligence governance within the EU, moreover, should be directed towards European geopolitical purposes. The bloc, finally, must strive to develop effective digital partnerships in both intra-EU and extra-EU contexts.

# 1. Capacity building in the field of technology through digital efficiency

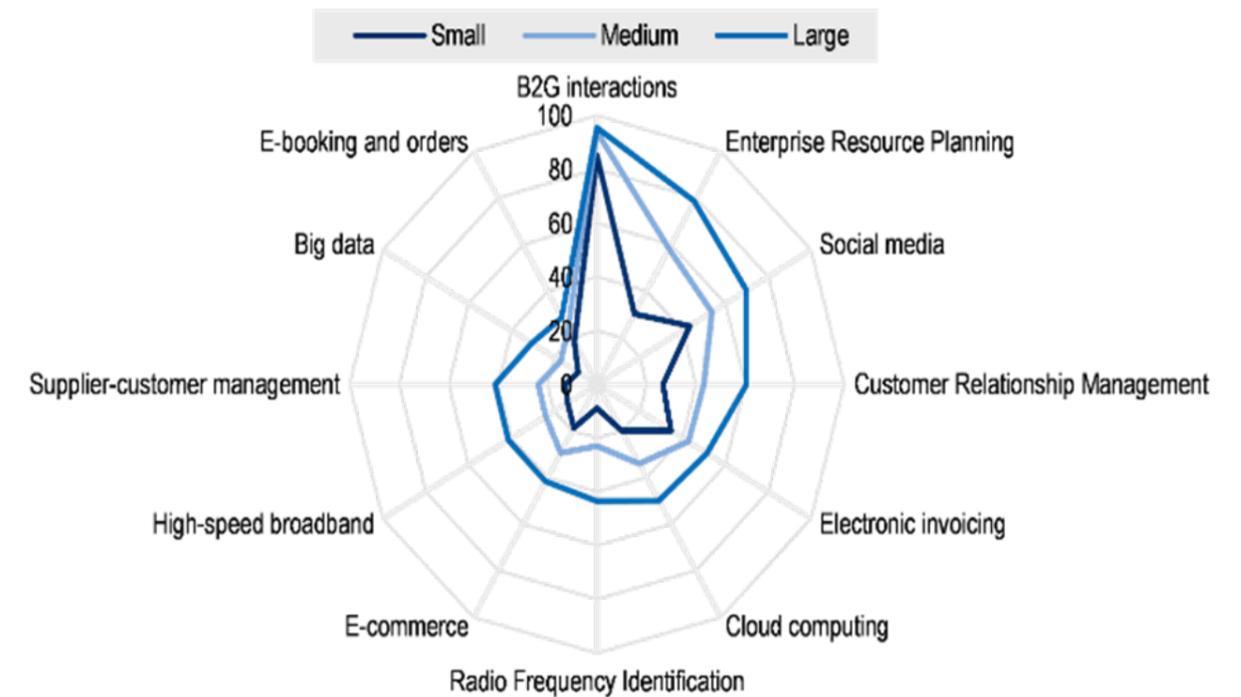
Europe's tech divide is still present. While certain countries have made significant progress, some regions, even in technologically developed Member States, lag in terms of their digital investments, capacities and performance. Weaknesses in tech diffusion, in fact, explain a large part of Europe's sluggish aggregate productivity growth. A substantial share of EU companies are not implementing any digital technology strategy and hold no plans to invest in their digital transformation. By 2020, 37% of European companies had still not adopted any advanced digital technologies compared to 27% in the United States<sup>1</sup>. Most of these European companies are concentrated in certain infrastructurally neglected, disadvantaged areas.

The Commission's Communication "2030 Digital Compass: the European Way for the Digital Decade"<sup>2</sup> presents the vision for Europe's digital transformation that is to occur by 2030. This platform is based on digital leadership and technological excellence in Europe and abroad and seeks to empower all EU citizens and businesses to access and use the infrastructures, technologies and data they need. The strategy emphasizes the importance of secure, resilient and sustainable digital infrastructures, digital skills and the need for the digital transformation of businesses. The strategy further aims to reduce the percentage of late digital adopters with more than 90% of European SMEs reaching at least a basic level of digital intensity. The plan, however, refrains from addressing the need to teach businesses about digital efficiency.

<sup>1</sup> Desperate for digital, European Investment Bank, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022 <<https://www.eib.org/de/essays/european-digitalisation-study.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022 <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en)>

Figure 1: SMEs have been lagging in the race to digital - the smaller, the more at risk of getting lost in transition (source: OECD)



The digital transformation is also essential to increasing the resilience of the European economy. Digitalisation was critically important to SMEs in weathering the Covid-19 pandemic. SMEs in the narrow digital sector only saw their value-added fall by 0.5% whereas non-digital SMEs experienced 8% drops in value added in 2020<sup>3</sup>.

**Given that digital transformation is not an ease of process, it does not necessarily make processes within and between companies cheaper but it rather makes them more effective. The reason is that technological transformation does not reduce the resource needs of companies - it only transforms them. Without demonstrable digital efficiency, the technological switchover will never be attractive enough for European companies. In the US, meanwhile, an applied forecasting and measurement tool on digital efficiency is operated for companies. An EU framework, therefore, is needed to create equal standards to make the effects of the digital transition predictable and measurable.**

<sup>3</sup> Report of the SME Envoy Network to the Competitiveness Council, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022 <<https://ec.europa.eu/growth/system/files/2021-11/2021%20Annual%20Report%20SME%20Envoy%20Network%20Final.pdf>>

## 2. Supporting innovation for Europe's digital leadership

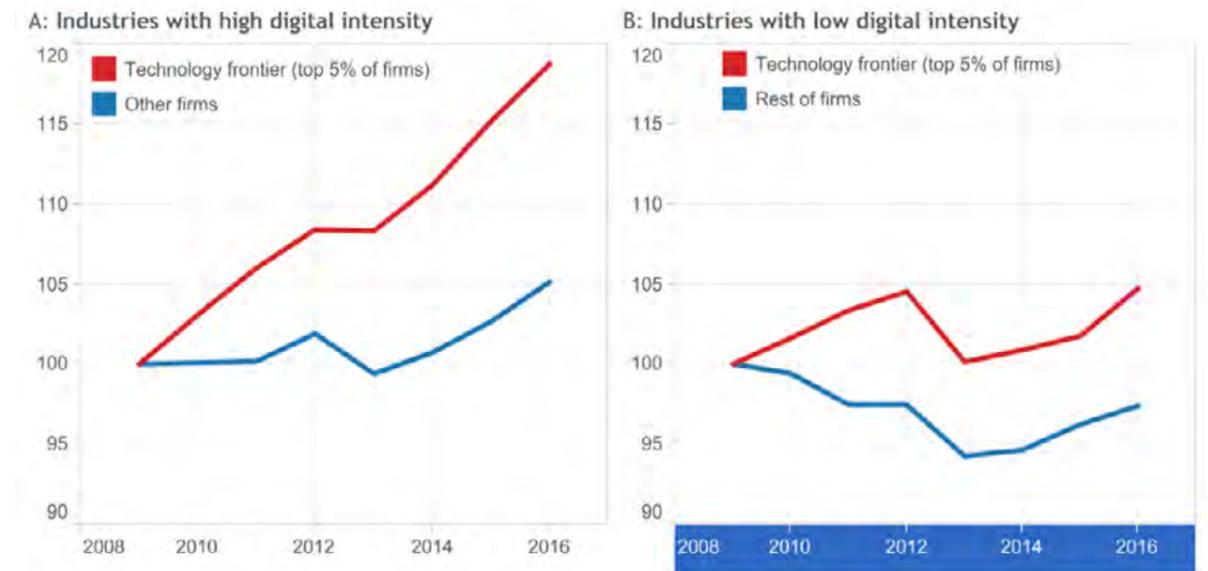
Preconditions for the application of digitalisation include support for research and innovation and the establishment of cooperation between sectors in this field. Linking research, business and civil society in interactive processes should help to drive more effective innovation policy and swiftly exploit research outputs. The aim should be to improve productivity and respond to the increasing impetus for the development of domestic technologies that cannot easily be imported or acquired through foreign direct investment.

The pandemic has affected the ability and willingness of European businesses to invest. Revenues for many companies waned as closures severely limited their operations. These businesses adapted by focusing on short-term survival strategies and withdrew investment plans, especially in terms of research and innovation. Failure to invest further hampers the capacity of companies to create, transfer and adopt new technologies and ultimately impairs their competitiveness. Strengthening Europe's digital infrastructure, conversely, could significantly encourage companies to invest more.

China, as one illustration to this point, has rapidly increased both public and private investments in research and development over the last decade. As a result, Chinese firms exhibit higher research and development expenditures as a proportion of GDP than their EU counterparts and are, in fact, seen to be catching up with the US. The output of the Chinese research and innovation system has grown exponentially - the impressive rate of patents and high-impact publications released by Chinese researchers and firms underscores this development.

China's technological advancements tend to focus on the natural sciences including information and communication technology, micro-electronics, quantum technologies and genomics. The Chinese government is vigorously promoting technological developments that boast the greatest market potential and key strategic applications. The focused high-tech – and authoritarian - nature of the 'Made in China' 2025 strategy, which refrains from distinguishing innovation policy and digital policy from one another, is therefore yielding results that may lead China to achieve its goal of becoming an innovation leader by 2049, if not before, in specific areas<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 2: Productivity dispersion across companies (source: OECD)



**Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion<sup>5</sup>. It facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges. Synergies should be created between the European Innovation Council element of the programme and the significantly more modestly funded Digital Europe Programme (€7.59 billion)<sup>6</sup> so that innovation and research related to European digital infrastructure can be financed under both strands by keeping 70% of the budget earmarked for SMEs. Synergies should be also created between these strands and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, a minimum of 20% of which will be dedicated to support the digital transition and help forge Europe's Digital Decade<sup>7</sup>.**

<sup>5</sup> Horizon Europe, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022  
<[https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en)>  
<sup>6</sup> The Digital Europe Programme, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022  
<<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>>  
<sup>7</sup> The Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022  
<[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/qanda\\_21\\_481](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/qanda_21_481)>

<sup>4</sup> China: Challenges and Prospects from an Industrial and Innovation Powerhouse. EUR 29737 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019

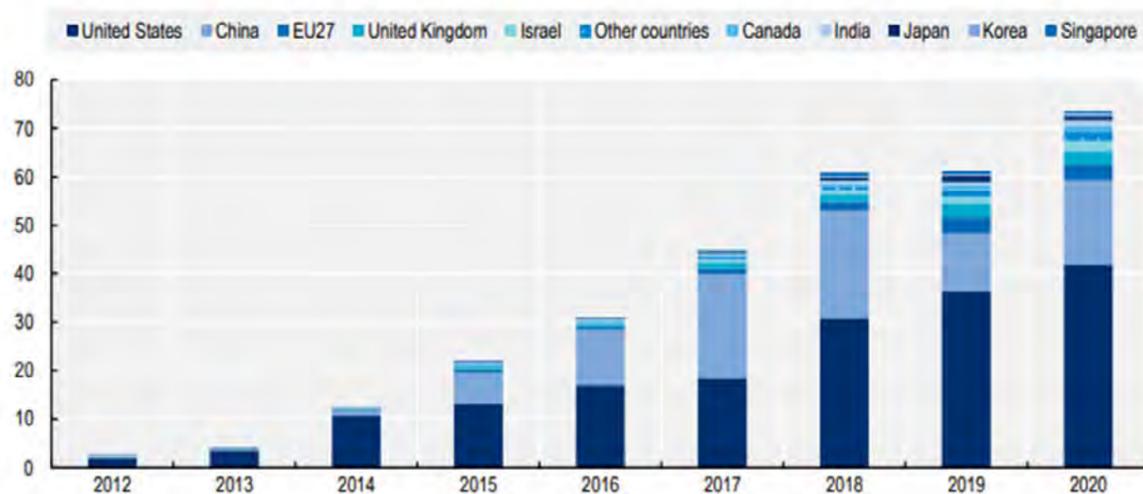
## 3. European digital autonomy for resilience

China has become a major industrial competitor in several key sectors. While the EU continues to lead in genomics research, for instance, China has been filing more patents, which stands in as an indicator for innovation. And though China boasts fewer robots per employee than the EU, around one in three industrial robots (and rising) are now sold in China.

In addition to Beijing's investments in research and development, in an approach called digital authoritarianism, it also provides an uneven playing field to European companies through protectionism and forced technology transfers. Chinese companies use a variety of methods to acquire valuable technology, intellectual property and know-how, often targeting technologies such as artificial intelligence or virtual reality.

The number of startups in the EU and US are nearly the same but the high venture investment capacity differs. Once European startups reach a certain scale of growth, they tend to relocate themselves to the transatlantic market to further secure their growth potential. Until 2015, US-based start-ups were the only ones to raise significant amounts of venture capital investments in AI. Since 2015, however, China has seen a dramatic upsurge in investments in AI startups. Though Chinese firms attracted less than 6% of the worldwide value of VC investments in AI start-ups in 2014, these figures climbed to 30% in 2015, 40% in 2016 and 50% in 2017. In 2018, VC investments in Chinese AI firms peaked at \$22 billion but decreased in relative terms to represent 37% of the worldwide value of VC investments in AI start-ups.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 3: Estimated venture capital investments in AI start-ups By year and country of start-up from 2012 to 2020, in USD billions (Source: OECD.AI 2021)



The global annual value of VC investments in AI firms has surged dramatically. Start-up firms based in the United States and China absorbed more than 80% of investments in 2020. The European Union ranked third at 4% followed by the United Kingdom and Israel both at 3%. Within the EU, AI firms based in Germany and France accounted for about two thirds of VC investments between 2012 and 2020. VC investment in AI was distributed across more firms in the US than in China.

Digital sovereignty stood at the heart of the agenda of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January - 30 June 2022)<sup>9</sup>. But to be competitive, we must preserve the digital autonomy of the European Union and that goes beyond digital sovereignty. Digital autonomy and fair competition are the two pillars on which the European tech sector must rely. Data and legal certainty about data are key to both.

### 3.1. Data governance for the digital autonomy

Over the years, the EU has become more and more sensitive to the importance of data. We are living in a connected world that considers data to be the new fuel of the economy. Business to business data is especially an opportunity for the EU to catch up to other regions of the world and to maintain its competitive advantage once the right policies are put in place. About 33 zettabytes of data was produced in the world in 2018 – this figure is expected to increase to the enormous volume of 175 zettabytes by 2025<sup>10</sup>.

**The European Union therefore needs an ambitious cybersecurity certification that would guarantee both data security and legal protections against the transfer of such data outside the European Union.**

It is, additionally, necessary to heed the fact that data indisputably possesses financial value through both its market demand that continues to grow ever clearer and the strenuous efforts required to record, normalise and otherwise produce it. This investment in data production, as well as the nature of certain data to pertain to certain persons, requires that data be construed as the object of a legal relationship between data and persons that is not unlike that of classic ownership. When seeking to define data as a legal commodity, that said, by using classic legal constructs such as property or trade secrets, these definitions fail to grasp the immanent nature of data (i.e. data is not singular in its occurrence as corporeal beings as the objects of classical ownership are).

**One of the immanent conditions for establishing and maintaining digital autonomy is a definition of data appropriate to the legal environment. Thus, to enable and establish the legal framework of a digital economy, the European definition of data should be proposed as a legal commodity of its own, a sui generis institution, that is both able to address the nature of data and be integrated into the European system of civil and commercial law on its existing terms. Appropriate legal guarantees can be provided for European businesses and economic operators linked to the definition.**

<sup>8</sup> Tricot, R. (2021), "Venture capital investments in artificial intelligence: Analysing trends in VC in AI companies from 2012 through 2020", OECD Digital Economy Papers, No. 319, OECD Publishing, Paris

<sup>9</sup> Programme of the French Presidency, Council of the European Union, 2022, accessed 1 March, 2022 <<https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/programme-of-the-presidency/>>

<sup>10</sup> Speech by Commissioner Thierry Breton at Hannover Messe Digital Days, press release, European Commission 15 July 2020, accessed 1 March, 2022 <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_20\\_1362](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1362)>

### 3.2. Addressing supply shortages

The acute supply shortages experienced during the pandemic and the first months of the recovery made more apparent a series of structural dependencies related to products, services and technologies.

Apart from the dearth of Covid-19 related medical supplies in the first half of 2020, shortages emerged throughout 2020 and 2021 concerning a broader range of products including some vital to the digital transition (e.g. semiconductors, lithium, rare earths).

The US administration will establish a Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force to address near-term supply chain challenges and supply/demand mismatches. The White House also recommended Congress to enact a Supply Chain Resilience Program to monitor and address supply chain challenges, with \$50 billion to be allocated to make transformative investments to strengthen supply chains across a range of critical products<sup>11</sup>.

Semiconductor chips are essential building blocks of digital and digitised products. From smartphones and cars to critical applications and infrastructure for healthcare, energy, communications and industrial automation, chips are central to the modern digital economy. While Europe plays a key role in the development of the most advanced chipmaking technologies, it only has a 9% share of global semiconductor production. This makes it vulnerable to chip shortages like the one the world has recently experienced. To ensure the EU's security of supply, resilience and technological leadership in semiconductor technologies and applications, the Commission recently unveiled a comprehensive set of measures in a European Chips Act<sup>12</sup>.

Europe is home to world-leading research and technology organisations, universities and institutes, which are pioneering the technologies behind the production of some of the world's most advanced chips. It is also particularly well positioned in terms

of the materials and equipment needed to run large chip manufacturing plants - several European companies indeed play essential roles in the semiconductor supply chain.

**The new legislation on EU semiconductor chips is consequently an important step towards Europe's digital autonomy. It is necessary, however, to consider that the semiconductor industry is one of the most resource-intensive in the world when it comes to energy-efficiency. The question concerning the energy footprint of semiconductor production, therefore, should be addressed by supporting technological solutions that seek to reduce it. Further to this, the EU should offer transformative investments to strengthen supply chains across a range of products and raw materials critically important for technological development by creating synergies between digital and trade policy tools.**

### 3.3. Cybersecurity

In the area of cybersecurity, investment needs are estimated to be around €27 billion over the period 2022-2030. EU funding in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework envisaged for cybersecurity under the Digital Europe Programme and Horizon Europe for research and innovation, with a special focus concentrated on support for SMEs, stands at €2 billion overall. This contribution should complement industry investments by Member States and other public bodies<sup>13</sup>. Many Member States, though not all, have included substantial investments in their Recovery and Resilience Plans towards modernising cloud infrastructure and supporting businesses in cloudification.

Among the key instruments and tools in this area, under the Digital Europe Programme, the EU has committed to invest €1.6 billion in cybersecurity capacity and the wide deployment of cybersecurity infrastructures (e.g. for public administrations, businesses, and individuals) and best practices. A specific work programme focused on funding in the area of cybersecurity has been allocated a budget of €269 million until the end of 2022 and will invest in areas such as security operations centres and cyber threat intelligence, cybersecurity upgrades in SMEs and in the health sector, cybersecured hardware and operating systems, and training and skills.

**The European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre<sup>14</sup>, supported by the Horizon Europe and Digital Europe Programmes, provides an example to follow. It will facilitate coordinated and joint investment between the EU, Member States and industry including the academic community and other stakeholders to build a common agenda for investments in cybersecurity and decide on funding priorities for research, development and the roll-out of cybersecurity solutions. Cross-sectoral coalitions need to be established and supported by the EU and involve education institutions to ensure that training is a priority in cybersecurity priorities.**

<sup>11</sup> Biden-Harris Administration Announces Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force to Address Short-Term Supply Chain Discontinuities, The White House, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022 <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/08/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-supply-chain-disruptions-task-force-to-address-short-term-supply-chain-discontinuities/>>

<sup>12</sup> European Chips Act, European Commission, 2022, accessed 1 March, 2022, <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-chips-act-communication-regulation-joint-undertaking-and-recommendation>>

<sup>13</sup> Cybersecurity Policies, European Commission, 2022, accessed 1 March, 2022, <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity-policies#ecl-inpage-kmq7iavv>>

<sup>14</sup> European Cybersecurity Competence Network and Centre, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022, <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity-competence-centre>>

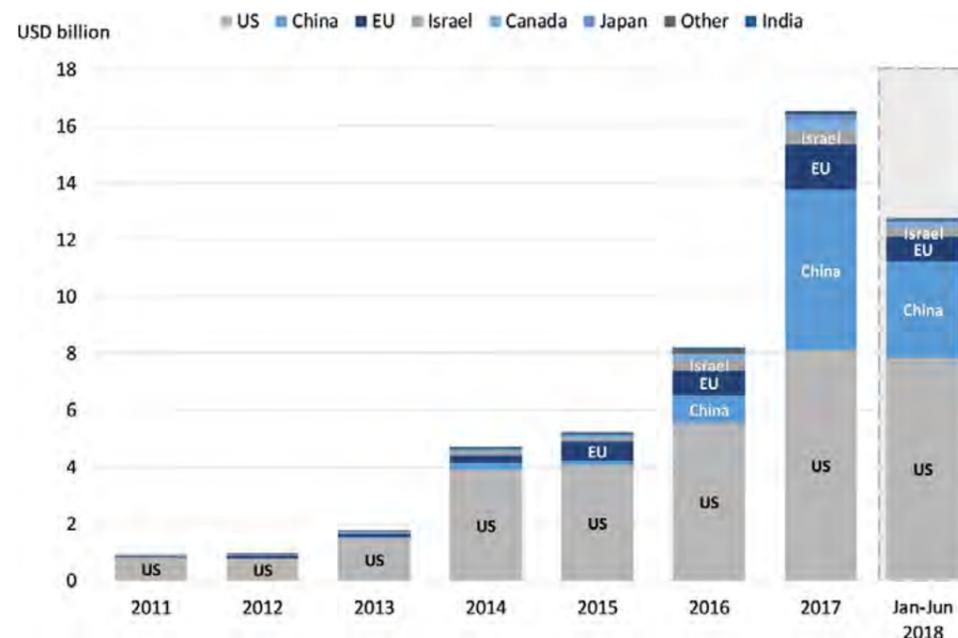
## 4. Artificial intelligence governance as a tool of geostrategy

Artificial intelligence has become a crucial element of the present geopolitical power competition. AI will soon influence the global balance of power and geopolitics more generally. The EU needs to prioritize this pressing situation and consider the external dimension of its actions. It is past time for Europe to invest more time, effort and financial resources towards guaranteeing that Europe benefits from the international challenges that AI is introducing.

The competition between major countries to lead in AI is growing. All global players, consequently, are seeking to support their AI ecosystems and markets through, among other mechanisms, investments, tax breaks and the creation of platforms for knowledge exchange, thereby leading to so-called technological protectionism<sup>15</sup>.

On 21 April 2021, the European Commission presented the Artificial Intelligence Act<sup>16</sup>. This new legislative proposal sets out horizontal rules for the development, commodification and use of AI-driven products, services and systems within the territory of the EU. The draft regulation provides core artificial intelligence rules that apply to all industries. However, negotiations with Member States have already revealed a number of trends that indicate that EU countries would prefer to define the rules for artificial intelligence themselves. This development has led to a large dilution of the EU definition of artificial intelligence among other effects. It must be borne in mind, however, that, in the current context of geopolitical competition, the EU cannot afford any fragmentation of the internal market in this area.

Figure 4: Total estimated investments in AI start-ups, 2011-17 and first semester 2018, by start-up location (source: OECD)



<sup>15</sup> Franke U., Artificial intelligence diplomacy, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, June 2021

<sup>16</sup> Proposal for a Regulation laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022 <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/proposal-regulation-laying-down-harmonised-rules-artificial-intelligence>>

Normative principles and regulations alone are not enough for the EU to become a global AI leader. What is also required is a reevaluation of European competitiveness in this field in a way that leverages its comparative advantages and preserves its interests in a world where technology is increasingly emerging as a key driver of great-power rivalry. Amid concerns that Europe is losing ground to the United States and China, EU Member States should acknowledge that the amount of resources required to keep up with the latest AI developments cannot be met by going it alone. There is a clear rationale for a stronger EU-level role and a more coherent European-wide approach to AI that complements member states' own actions.

Europe can establish its own leadership in this area from the user perspective by creating a regulatory environment that gives both private and business users the most appropriate and complete rights and the widest possible protection. Central to the EU's efforts in the field of AI is the notion of paying attention to ethical and human-centric considerations, core human rights, values and democratic principles. A strong focus is also required on protecting the rule of law and fundamental rights in the digital environment by extending EU leadership on data protection and privacy. Designed to alleviate potential harm as well as to permit accountability and oversight, this vision for AI-enabled technologies could provide Europe competitive advantage against its global competitors and serve as a key component of increasing the EU's digital autonomy by ensuring European users more choice and control.

Specific consumer rights need to still be proposed in terms of AI products and services such as:

- right to transparency;
- right to accountability and control;
- right to fairness;
- right to non-discrimination;
- right to safety and security;
- right to access to justice;

right to reliability or right to remedies, including an effective complaints procedure and collective redress actions.

These rights should be specifically mentioned because they are not inherently derived from national civil rights in the context of artificial intelligence services. In this manner, the EU will be able to ensure a considerably more favourable legal environment for consumers and create legal certainty for service providers and thereby make the European market more attractive.

At this stage, industry self-assessment in the field of AI is not an adequate approach considering the complexity of assessments related to high-risk uses of AI technology that must also heed its impact on people's rights and freedoms. Companies must put in place appropriate measures to guarantee compliance and allow adequate regulatory oversight. These efforts, however, need to be motivated by normative support and the introduction of benchmarks, such as AI excellency, that boost user confidence.

As far as enforcement is concerned, lessons must be drawn from the implementation of GDPR regulations overseen at the Member State level that suffer from a lack of uniformly vigorous compliance. Enforcement bottlenecks, notably, should be avoided. And given that compliance with European AI regulations must be viewed against a geopolitical backdrop, it is necessary to ensure that its scope extends to third-country undertakings wishing to provide artificial intelligence services in the Union. The solution to this quandary may lie in the reform of private international law including clauses related to the scope of regulations or provisions about companies providing AI related services being subject to company registration laws within the EU.

## 5. The role of digital partnerships

As it pertains to capacity building goals, the need for a global digital and technological partnership is clear. Perhaps even more important is the united cooperation of EU Member States for digital development. Without this partnership, individual Member States cannot compete with the US and China.

Progress has been forged on building global partnerships on several fronts in 2021 including the establishment of the EU-US Trade & Technology Council (TTC), which serves as a forum for the EU and US to coordinate approaches to key global trade and economic and technological issues. This arrangement was necessary because the total US investment in the EU stood at three times higher than all of Asia. EU investment in the US, meanwhile, ranks at around eight times the amount of EU investment in India and China combined.<sup>17</sup>

In turning to other continents, Latin America's data flows to Europe was inaugurated with co-funding from the BELLA Programme by facilitating digital transformation and inclusion between the two continents. The idea for a digital data highway had been initially put forward in 2014 and by 2021 the EllaLink transatlantic cable connected the regions. Apart from these initiatives, the EU presented the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021, just one year after launching the D4D Hub for Africa. The aim is to translate the digital transformation into action in accordance with the EU's Global Gateway Strategy. To further strengthen relations, the EU-Latin America and the Caribbean Digital Alliance is expected to be established in 2022.

Positive indications that cooperation between Member States is strengthening also exist, be that the European Digital Innovation Hubs initiative, the Digital Transformation Accelerator, the EU Startup

Nation Standard or the European Startup Nations Alliance. These initiatives are important because mutual cooperation between Member States is essential for Europe's strategic autonomy - national sovereignty, however, must be taken into account.

As it relates to digital developments, it is crucial to highlight areas where the EU is more concerned with its historical and cultural traditions, namely ethical principles and legal certainty. The principles should not be over-regulatory, nor too soft, as Europe's digital transformation must always be human-centered. Reasonable barriers for technological development are needed even as values and principles being put into practice may conflict with the interests of large, mostly US-based tech companies. The Union's new Standardization Strategy puts standards in focus within EU policy – this is essential for the digital economy and to ensure that new technologies reflect democratic values. At the same time, standards are also becoming a crucial aspect of strengthening Europe's open strategic autonomy. The EU wants to lead in such efforts, especially when it comes to strategic areas related to the green and digital twin transitions.

The pursuit of a global partnership must go hand in hand with the protection of strategic autonomy, just as pan-European digital initiatives must not ignore national sovereignty. When we talk about digitalisation, we also have to talk about sovereignty, whether it is the autonomy of the whole of Europe or of the individual Member States of the Union. To participate in the digital future of Europe while avoiding conflicts of interest, more conciliation forums are needed that involve not only the political but also the private, academic and social sectors. However, digitalisation also bears the risk of deepening existing inequalities and

misuse that undermines democracies and social cohesion and infringes on human rights.

With the EU Digital Strategy and new digital partnerships, the EU strives to foster a human-centric vision for the digital economy and society across the globe.<sup>18</sup> The EU seeks to ensure responsive people-centered technology, fair and inclusive digital economies, and open, democratic and sustainable societies.

All endeavours indeed direct the EU towards its aspirations to build strategic international partnerships and lead international negotiations by strengthening its digital autonomy as a geopolitical priority.

<sup>17</sup> Investments between the EU and the US, European Commission, 2021, accessed 1 March, 2022  
<<https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/united-states/>>

<sup>18</sup> Global digital partnerships, European Commission, accessed 1 March, 2022  
<[https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/digital-partnerships\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/digital-partnerships_en)>



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