

Is “Open Strategic Autonomy” ... “artificial” or “intelligent”?



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for Europe should
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By Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou

At the 2020 State of the Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has unveiled her ambitious goal to make this decade “Europe’s Digital Decade”.

The debate over digital developments is becoming more and more lively in Europe, and the acceleration of the pace of digitization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is shaping the “new normal”. The urgent need to analyze vast amounts of health data to understand and control the virus has prompted us to invest more heavily in artificial intelligence and data management.

The pandemic has also brought to light Europe’s overdependence in several critical and strategic sectors. Thus, the EU institutions were “forced” to revisit Europe’s industrial strategy in order to offer greater resilience and diversification of supply chains in strategic areas such as health supplies and medicine. As a result, Europe is today, more committed to becoming “strategically autonomous”.

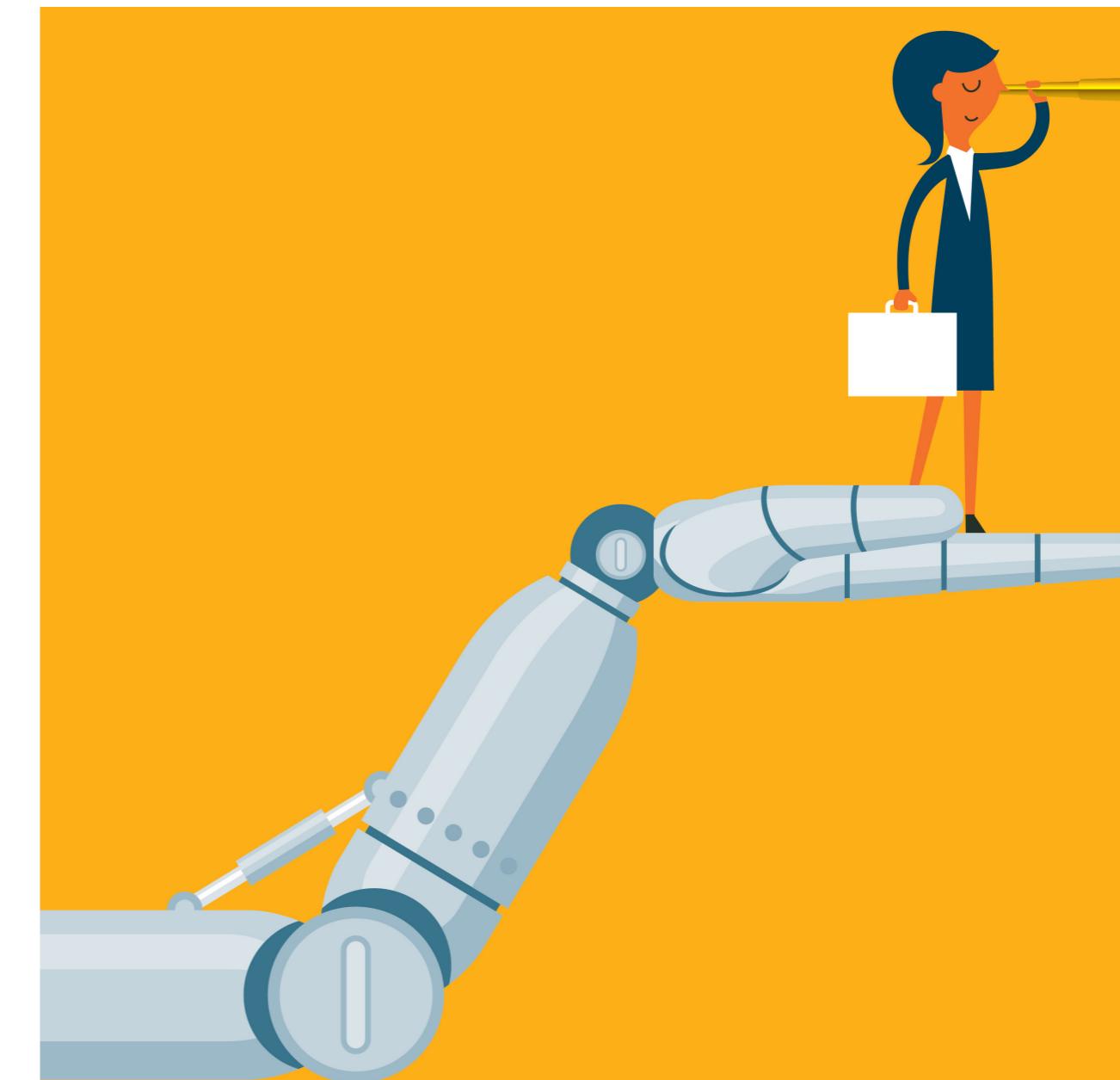
Artificial Intelligence is at the forefront of the digital power race. The debate over Artificial Intelligence encompasses technological, ethical, legal, socio-economic as well as geopolitical aspects. The OECD, the Council of Europe, the EU, the US, China and many other countries have developed their own strategies and guidelines on Artificial Intelligence. In addition to the many standing committees dealing with AI in the European Parliament, the Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in

the Digital Age (AIDA) was created to take a horizontal approach in setting a long-term roadmap for AI in Europe.

Europe is working hard to be at the forefront of the technology revolution and to ensure the competitiveness of its technology businesses. It strives to find the right balance, which promotes innovation and competitiveness, builds trust and protects our rights, values and principles. Europe aims to provide a trustworthy digital environment to our citizens and businesses to shape the conditions for the development and use of AI. This is one of the main objectives of the European Strategy for Data and the Regulation on Data Governance recently proposed by the European Commission, building upon existing regulations such as personal data protection (GDPR), consumer protection and competition rules.

Meanwhile, China is investing billions in AI, 5G, quantum computing and chip fabrication, as part of a strategy, launched in July 2017, to establish itself as the world’s AI leader. By the year 2030, it expects to have a domestic AI industry worth at least \$150 billion. It steals IPR, tries to dominate international standard setting bodies and lures countries into its techno orbit through the “digital silk road” initiative. China has 1,4 bn people to produce data, and its’ own robust technology giants which it subsidizes with state aid and uses their products in the Party’s surveillance state.

This potential of new “dependencies” namely on holders



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of certain critical technologies who use them in an “autocratic” manner, as well as on those controlling large volumes of data is why, Europe is striving to create its’ own “open yet sovereign Single Market for Data” which is crucial for AI development. Therefore, AI can be considered as a “key” to achieving European “digital sovereignty” as part of the overall strategy of “Open Strategic Autonomy.” As Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic emphasized “we can make Europe more resilient by boosting our open strategic autonomy and building a fairer, climate-neutral and digitally sovereign future.”

There is much discussion about what the meaning of “Open Strategic Autonomy” actually is. Is it legitimate protection or undue and covert “protectionism?” “Autonomy”, or “autovopia” in Greek, comes from the words αὐτός (autós, “self”) and νόμος (nómos, “law”). It literally means being free to make your own rules. Actually, it is your right to be able to make your own rules. Making these rules in Europe has produced our commonly shared values: democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Paving the digital path for Europe should involve a human centric,

transparent, trustworthy and inclusive artificial intelligence strategy. One that protects citizens and businesses in Europe and fosters innovation and competitiveness. Becoming “protectionist” would not only be “artificial” it would also be untenable. A digitally sovereign or strategically autonomous Europe, must be open to the world. It must create practical alliances with like-minded partners to set international standards, and create rules based on commonly shared values. This is not only the “intelligent” choice, it is also the only democratic one.