



 euritas

European Association of Public IT Service Providers

WE MAKE IT POSSIBLE. **TOGETHER.**

EURITAS POSITION PAPER DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

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1. Introduction

EURITAS is a European network of public IT service providers, which aims to create better IT services for public administrations, businesses and citizens in European society.

This position paper of EURITAS is about our understanding of Digital Sovereignty, which is the common baseline of all our IT efforts.

In Europe, where things are becoming ‘digital by default’, we must ensure that digital government services match public needs and expectations. Digital services should be human centric, secure and trustworthy, as well as being widely accessible and comprehensible for everyone. The Tallinn Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment¹ and Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government², remain in force as common guidance for EU member states and EU institutions. The need for digital services has become dramatically clear in light of multiple global challenges and crisis faced by European governments. The recent COVID pandemic demonstrated the absolute need for resilience in our countries – resilience not only in the health sector or the economy but also in the ability to work for the public, as a public service and public administration. From this perspective, digital sovereignty is an essential part of becoming more resilient in response to present and future crises.

The European Commission has published the strategies "Europe fit for the digital age³" and "Shaping Europe’s Digital Future⁴", which prove that digitalisation in Europe has top priority for the Commission. This European approach aims at giving citizens, businesses and governments control over the digital transformation. Euritas considers digital sovereignty as crucial for realising this vision. This paper proposes guiding principles for preserving the digital sovereignty of public administrations and citizens and highlights the fields in which Euritas is actively working to achieve this goal.

¹ ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm?doc_id=47559

² [Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government | Shaping Europe’s digital future \(europa.eu\)](https://eur01.safelinks.https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en)

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/shaping-europe-digital-future_en

2. Euritas Guiding Principles on Digital Sovereignty

EURITAS understanding of Digital Sovereignty:

EURITAS understands Digital Sovereignty as being the possibility of the public administration and the citizens whose data it stores and processes to act independently in the digital realm in a self-determined manner. To preserve the possibility of self-determination, it is necessary for the public administration and also its IT service providers to keep full control over citizens' data, so they can ensure their availability and security.

Public IT service providers have the responsibility to secure the Digital Sovereignty of the public administration and thereby of the citizens.

Therefore, they must have the ability to control and regulate their own infrastructure and technology without dependence on foreign companies or governments.

Ownership and control over data and digital identities:

Public administrations and their IT service providers have to guarantee that citizens' data will not be transferred or processed without their knowledge or consent. Besides the necessity to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), this is also an important factor for preserving citizens' trust in the public institutions that store and process their data. Furthermore, public administrations must ensure that citizens have full sovereignty over their own data with safe and user-friendly use of data points by various parties, also across borders when they act as providers of identity solutions as well as when they grant access to services.

Access to own data must be secured:

The availability of IT infrastructures and data has become crucial for a functioning public administration capable of providing services to citizens and enterprises. With the system of global free trade under threat, storing data outside the European Economic Area has become a risk for public administration, because access to cloud services could be cut off to pressure the EU and its member states, e.g. in trade disputes.

Independence from monopolistic vendors:

Many public administrations have become heavily reliant on a small number of large software suppliers who have gained monopolistic market positions. This often means that public administrations find themselves in lock-in situations, lacking the alternatives and leverage needed to negotiate with vendors.

The aim of the EURITAS members is to reduce dependence on monopolistic vendors and find or create alternatives with open standards, preferably open-source solutions.

Co-operation and cross border interoperability:

Digital government should serve citizens and businesses alike and support their freedom of movement within the European Economic Area. In line with the once-only principle, data should be reused in a responsible way. When citizens expect personalised and comprehensible digital services, traditional boundaries between government, private organisations and civil society may become more hybrid in nature. At the same time, privacy must be guaranteed. When it comes to interacting with public and private organisations, citizens and businesses must be in control over who they share their data with.

3. Current Fields of Action for EURITAS

In order to comply with the guiding principles on Digital Sovereignty, Euritas considers the following fields of action as necessary to focus on:

- > Negotiations over terms and conditions with existing external technology suppliers. In order to gain more leverage together with other European public institutions, Euritas members engage in
 - Fostering knowledge exchange with other European public institutions
 - Exchange between national institutions about negotiations with software suppliers

- > EURITAS members cooperate in searching, designing and implementing alternative software solutions and services to break vendor lock-in and also strengthen their position against big software suppliers:
 - Open-source desktop solutions and Open-source solutions, which can be run "on-premises" and in private cloud infrastructures.

 - Private Cloud solutions, which can be run within own datacentres

- > Handling and maintenance of digital identities by public IT providers
 - Provision of secure and reliable identity services

 - Enable citizens to manage their own digital identities, including determining which data they want to share

4. Conclusion

The EURITAS community is ready to develop and realise the goals laid out here and is offering a discourse with all relevant stakeholders on initial questions such as:

- > What is your understanding of Digital Sovereignty?
- > Are you already "digitally sovereign" enough?

- > What are your guiding principles, action fields and conclusions for coping with Digital Sovereignty?
- > What have you achieved so far to act with Digital Sovereignty?

EURITAS members are developing and implementing solutions towards strengthening digital sovereignty. We are ready to discuss ideas and cooperate with EU institutions, representatives and digital stakeholders, national contact points and policy makers within European countries and other public IT service providers or external suppliers in order to implement them.

To conclude the statements made thus far: EURITAS is committed to shaping the digital sovereign ecosystem within Europe. If you are interested in a cooperation with EURITAS, please contact us.

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