

France's Digital Sovereignty: Building Independence

MOVE PRINCIPLES to action

In the face of rising cyber risks, technological dependencies, and legal constraints linked to extraterritorial legislation, the issue of digital sovereignty is taking center stage at the heart of public policy. Christopher Potter, President and Founder of **CEO-Vision**, the publisher of the sovereign, open-source GoFAST platform, calls for a shift from declarative sovereignty to operational and committed choices.



Christopher Potter
Founder and President of CEO-Vision

What specific needs do you observe among public sector actors regarding digital sovereignty?

Since 2015, the public sector has shown increasing interest in GoFAST, particularly after our selection by AIFE for key projects for the State and local governments. The initial needs involved replacing file servers—which were too vulnerable to cyberattacks and functionally limited—with more secure document management solutions. Starting in 2021, we observed an acceleration in migrations away from Microsoft SharePoint (as in the case of the Haute-Savoie Department), driven by security, cost, and data control concerns. The choice of an on-premises solution, rather than the all-SaaS model imposed by Microsoft 365, has become central to

sensitive data. The health crisis has accelerated the digital maturity of public officials, while the

“Cloud at the Center” of July 2021 reinforced the need to avoid solutions subject to extraterritorial laws, such as the Cloud Act. More recently, the continued rise in Microsoft pricing and certain policies of the new U.S. administration posing operational risks to

U.S. solutions have led several government agencies and local authorities, such as the City of Nanterre, to initiate full migrations out of the Microsoft ecosystem.

Among the organizations that also place their trust in us, particularly regarding the sovereignty aspect, are the National Police (Police Academy), EUDA – Portugal (European Union Drugs Agency), the University of Le Mans, the Occitanie Region, and many others...

How do you specifically support these transitions to sovereign solutions?

We step in once the decision has been made, supporting the operational implementation. Our expertise is based on real, comprehensive migrations away from Microsoft, particularly from SharePoint, file servers, and soon Exchange, which hold the most sensitive data. We help organizations structure their document repositories, classify data according to its sensitivity, and define phased plans for phasing out technologies subject to extraterritorial legislation. Without going as far as a complete replacement, some government agencies also choose

an intermediate approach, using GoFAST for their critical data or as a backup solution.

What is the difference between declarative digital sovereignty and actual sovereignty?

The difference boils down to one word: action. Many talk about sovereignty without translating it into their information systems security policy. Clearly incorporating these requirements into the PSSI, particularly the prohibition (unless an exemption applies) of solutions subject to extraterritorial laws, is the first step. Next, we must select coherent solutions and deploy them, with a “pilot” (PoC) serving as a first step. Sovereignty cannot remain an abstract principle.

What message do you have for public sector executives and alumni of ENA and INSP?

We are at a strategic juncture. Digital decisions now directly involve senior management, beyond just the IT departments. The risks associated with non-sovereign cloud services and certain AI solutions are real, but alternatives exist. We must not be afraid to act: complete migrations have been successfully carried out in just a few months. These decisions are essential for France's strategic autonomy, but also for employment and the state's capacity to act. Time is running out, and the responsibility is now collective.

