

BRICS for the First Time Commits to Digital Sovereignty - and Brazil Could Lead the Way

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*Earlier this month Brazil's Supreme Court lifted its ban on X (formerly Twitter) after **Elon Musk** finally complied with the court orders. It was the end of a months-long standoff between **Justice Alexandre de Moraes** and Musk (X was suspended on August 31). The matter has often been addressed as an issue of "free speech", but with the recent BRICS Summit Declaration on digital sovereignty, one can clearly see that the discussion here should not be just about "censorship". The BRICS Summit in Kazan, held from October 22 to 24 (2024), for the first time held a meeting with its expanded format, now including new member states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Ethiopia.*

As I [wrote](#) before, it is true, as many critics and analysts have highlighted, that Moraes has weaponized the war against the so-called Brazilian far-right and the alleged defense of democracy as a way to expand the power of the court and arguably his own powers. Already in 2023 a New York Times piece [pointed out](#) that Moraes "jailed people without trial for posting threats on social media; helped sentence a sitting congressman to nearly nine years in prison for threatening the court; ordered raids on businessmen with little evidence of wrongdoing; suspended an elected governor from his job; and unilaterally blocked dozens of accounts and thousands of posts on social media, with virtually no transparency or room for appeal."

However, if Moraes controversial measures may be used to cast doubts on, say, Brazil's "sécurité juridique", Musk's failure to comply with court orders local laws could indeed also cast doubts on the billionaire and his companies, not to mention on the political role they may play. It goes beyond Musk, of course. In countries such as the US there is an ongoing conversation about how social media such as Facebook and Instagram - not to mention their algorithms - influence people's politics and elections. Controversy aside, Brazil has shown that it is possible to force Big Tech into compliance. Moreover, the topic has prompted a larger conversation in Brazil on having a national social media platform - or, for that matter, a national engine search. To this day Brazil in fact has to rely on US products such as Google. It doesn't have to be this way. Now that [economic nationalism is back](#), it is only natural that one questions this state of affairs.

This is a strategic matter, and it extends even way beyond social media - ultimately it is about digital sovereignty, a concept which surpasses the traditional geoeconomic and geopolitical realms. Digital services today encompass sectors such as transportation, energy, public administration, digital IDs, healthcare, payment systems and much more.

In Europe there is an ongoing debate about developing what some call a #EuroStack, a digital public infrastructure relying on European technology and investments. As Cristina

Caffarra puts it (she is the co-founder and Vice Chair of the Competition Research Policy Network, Centre for Economic Policy Research – CEPR):

“Europe has done digital regulation and is in the process of implementing it. But this is ultimately only reliant on beating Big Tech into a compliance game which is hard and will take a long time.”

On September 24, a multi-party group of Members of the European Parliament took part in the “[Towards European Digital Independence](#)” conference in Brussels. According to Francesca Bria (a fellow at Stiftung Mercator), it is about investing in “public goods and infrastructures that protect citizens’ rights, ensure European autonomy and security, support the growth of European businesses, and serve the public interest.” Bria highlights the fact that Big Tech companies “dominate the entire technology stack—from chips and cloud infrastructure to operating systems... —solidifying their market position through network effects and economies of scale... This stifles innovation, limits opportunities for European businesses, and undermines Europe’s economic security and industrial competitiveness.”

Nowadays, so much is talked about de-dollarization and about the topic of [a currency for BRICS](#). On Tuesday, **former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff** (currently the President of the BRICS bank), met with Russian **President Vladimir Putin** in Kazan and discussed BRICS expansion and the use of local currencies, replacing the dollar. There has been however yet another new development that has thus far been quite underreported: the BRICS group has for the first time, in its [Kazan Declaration](#), committed itself to “the design of a fair and equitable global framework for data governance, including cross-border data flows, to... ensure the interoperability of data regulatory frameworks at all levels.”

Reliance on external AI capabilities and external cloud services makes strategic assets and all kinds of sensitive data vulnerable to foreign frameworks, such as the US CLOUD Act (this is true [even for Europe](#) as well). As mentioned Europeans, albeit a bit slowly, are now more and more concerning themselves with the issue

One may recall that, in 2013, then Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff proposed to route internet traffic away from Washington, as part of a strategy to counter American National Security Agency (NSA) espionage: the daring plan involved developing an undersea fiber-optic cable system that would funnel all internet traffic between the South American continent and Europe, thereby bypassing entirely the US, but it did not follow through. It has been brought to light that, at that same time, both [Rousseff](#) and **then German Chancellor Angela Merkel** were the targets of NSA espionage.

It is about time emerging powers such as Brazil boldly address the issue of social networks and the larger matter of digital sovereignty, AI, [digital currencies](#) and cybersecurity. And this is a conversation that now has finally started to take place within the scope of the BRICS group as well – together with [energy](#) and [industry](#) (which are of course all connected topics), this could very well be one of the most pressing issues for the 21st century.

Next year, Brazil will be hosting the BRICS Summit – it will also be hosting the 2025 Climate Summit (COP30). Being at the center stage in G20, Brazil now has the opportunity to use the coming months to champion digital sovereignty for the Global South in the emerging polycentric global order. It should use the opportunity to call for the development of not just legal frameworks but also of a digital industry and a digital infrastructure which fosters

sovereignty. BRICS needs a #BricsStack too – and Brazil could point the way to that.

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