![David Heinemeier Hansson]

DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON

June 3, 2025

Denmark gets more serious about digital sovereignty

The recent [disconnection of the ICC's chief prosecutor](#), at [the behest](#) of the American administration, could not have come at a worse time for Microsoft. Just a month prior, the folks from Redmond [tried to assure Europe](#) that all was well. That any speculation Europeans could get cut off from critical digital infrastructure was just fear, doubt, and uncertainty. Then everything Europeans worried could happen happened in Hague. Oops!

Microsoft's assurances met reality and reality won.

That reality is that all American administrations have the power to disconnect any individual, company, or foreign government from digital infrastructure provided by American Big Tech. So in that sense, it's pointless to blame Microsoft for the sanctioning power vested in the Oval Office. But we certainly can blame them for gaslighting Europe about the risk.

What's more important than apportioning blame, though, is getting out of the bind that Europe is in. The continent is hopelessly dependent on American Big Tech for even the most basic of digital infrastructure. If this American administration, or the next, decides to use its sanctioning power again, Europe is in a real pickle. And with the actions taken against the ICC in Haag, Europe would be negligent to ignore the threat.

Denmark even more so. It's no secret that tensions between Denmark and the US are at a historic high. Trump keeps repeating [a desire to take over Greenland](#) by fuzzy means possible. The American intelligence services have been [directed to increase their spying](#) on Denmark and Greenland. Naturally, the Danes are spooked. They should be!

Regardless of what happens with Greenland, trade negotiations, or geopolitical disagreements, though, it would suit Europe well to become digitally sovereign. That doesn't mean cutting off all American tech, but it does mean rejecting any services that can be turned off from Washington. So in terms of Microsoft, it means no more Microsoft 365, no more Teams, no more Azure.

And that's exactly what the two biggest counties in Denmark have announced plans to do. Copenhagen and Aarhus just declared that [they're going to get rid of Microsoft products](#) for all their workers. The Copenhagen county is the largest employer in Denmark with over 40,000 employees. So this is a big deal!

The chairman of the Copenhagen committee who pushed this forward made this comment to Danish media:

> *If, theoretically, the relationship to the US gets worse, we could fear that Microsoft would be forced to shut everything down. That possibility exists. And if we suddenly can't access our emails or communicate via our systems, we'll be challenged.*

That's an understatement. Denmark is one of the most highly digitalized countries in the world. It's also one of the most Microsoft dependent. In fact, Microsoft is by far and away the single biggest dependency, so it makes perfect sense to start the quest for digital sovereignty there.

But Denmark is also full of unambitious, defeatist bureaucrats who can't imagine a world without Microsoft. Just today, the IT director for The Capital Region [declared it to utopian to think Denmark could ever achieve digital sovereignty or meaningfully replace Microsoft](#). Not even a decade would make a dent, says the director, while recognizing that if we'd done something 15 years ago, we wouldn't be in this pickle. A remarkable illustration of cognitive dissonance!

Sadly, this is not an uncommon conclusion from people who work inside the belly of bureaucracies for too long. Whatever has always done too often seems like the only thing that ever could be done. But, as Mandela said, it always seems impossible until it's done.

So let's get it done. Digital sovereignty isn't easy, but neither was securing a sovereign energy supply. Nor will it be to rebuild a credible defensive military. Europe needs all of it, yesterday. The bureaucrats who aren't interested in making it happen should find employment elsewhere.

ABOUT DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON

Made Basecamp and HEY for the underdogs as co-owner and CTO of 37signals. Created Ruby on Rails. Wrote REWORK, It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work, and REMOTE. Won at Le Mans as a racing driver. Invested in Danish startups.

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