

## Severin Naudet's keynote address

at the

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Madame la Vice-presidente,  
Mesdames et Messieurs les membres du Parlement European,  
Monsieur le Chef Economiste,  
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Internet and its applications have jolted our old democracies, calling for their renewal. Ignoring the reality of digital networks, of their new found wealth and might, would disconnect governments from the deep evolution of our societies. We must tend to the permanent adaptation of our States and their structures to this worldwide revolution.

Millennia of gradual but relentless technological progress prepared the rise of the new information economy. Internet ushered in an era of instant global connectivity. Of universal access to knowledge. Of accelerating information flows enabling new applications and behaviours.

Internet is the root of a historical turning point. It removed traditional knowledge intermediaries. It transformed how we relate to information and public debate. It brought heightened expectations of transparency to our paper-based societies.

Online communities now heavily contribute to the expression of democracy. Today, it is our social network that relays and recommends, approves or disapproves of information. Through this virtual intimacy, networked individuals collectively reclaim their role as central opinion leaders.

This was made blindingly obvious with the recent Arab Springs. Facebook, Twitter and Dailymotion relayed the popular revolt. These networks gave an unprecedented echo to this powerful aspiration the Group of 8 described as a "*legitimate call for democratic, open societies*". Inside the European Union itself, the recent referendum vote in Italy was largely determined by Internet. You summed this up with a bold vision three months ago, Madame la Vice-presidente: "*The internet will change our world [ . . . ]. Europe needs to connect to this force of change*".

Of course, this evolution did upset traditional economic models and social norms. New on line behaviours and the issues they raised prompted us to reaffirm the rule of law and the fundamental values of our societies.

France's unyielding commitment to freedom of information and freedom of speech, to the protection of privacy and personal data, the protection of individuals, especially of children, the protection of intellectual property, is unwavering. This was front and center, this past May, on the agenda of the e- G8 Forum, which President Sarkozy had called for.

However, we must not lose sight of the founding principles of Internet: decentralised production of information, collaborative and open governance, freedom to create and innovate. The traditional organization of States has actually too often collided with the open, horizontal and decentralized architecture of the digital society.

"*Internet has strengthened the expectation of transparency that citizens rightly demand from their elected leaders [ ... ]. We must embrace it, and, from my standpoint, there is no coming back*" said President Sarkozy in April.

To meet these renewed expectations, government must rethink its structures and its missions. It must endeavour to find a new model better suited to our times: a more open, a more transparent, a more collaborative governance.

A democracy that stands still is a democracy that stands to fall. Failing to renew the trust citizens place in our institutions would pave the way for populism and for extremisms of all kinds at a time of great challenges.

France measures the importance of opening public data by the yardstick of this historical turning point. We have embarked on an ambitious Open Data policy, as have the United State, Great-Britain - Nigel Shadbolt was here last year to exchange with you about it - and other European countries, from Spain to Greece and Denmark, or our Norwegian neighbours.

President Obama reaffirmed this past Tuesday at the United Nations General Assembly that "*the strongest foundation for human progress lies in open economies, open societies, and open governments.*"

Open data will grant citizens access to core information on our nations - from public finances, to the quality of our air, and the performance of our jobs market.

The decision to open public data will generate substantial savings for public finances. By enabling private initiative to develop the services that government has yet to create. And because transparency increases the accountability of our public services.

Direct evaluation by citizens helps reinforce government efficiency and effectiveness. It opens a conversation between public bodies and the citizens to which they're accountable.

Transparency does not imply finger-pointing. Rather, it means seeking improvement through constructive criticism - accepting it, preparing for it, learning from it. Openness focuses efforts. Precise measurement enables lasting progress.

Transparency reinforces the trust in which we hold our public institutions. Access to public data helps bring government closer to citizens. It sheds light on the accomplishments of our public services and civil servants.

Open Data can also nourish and reshape public debate. Remove it from the shaky grounds of ideology. Rebuild it on the solid foundations of informed analysis. Root everyone's choices in the virtuous circle of objective, established facts.

Universal access to information furthermore helps promote equal opportunities for all.

But as essential as it may be, renewing this trust through reinforced transparency is more than a democratic imperative. Returns to transparency are also economic in nature.

Prime Minister Fillon reaffirmed last week that "*broadening free access to data held by the government strengthens entrepreneurs' trust in public institutions, an essential factor of economic development.*"

Trust in our institutions, confidence in our nation's economic outlook, faith in the stability of our public finances: these are the key elements of economic growth. Granting broad access to government economic, budgetary and financial information reinforces the confidence of investors.

These efforts, if I may, should not be exclusive to the public sector. Access to corporate information is an element of economic democracy. A customer will better trust a company if he knows its financials, its debtors, its suppliers, the quality of its products, or the ecological footprint of its operations. Regulation through disclosure can inform consumer choices.

This is highly relevant for online and digital services. Data portability could help users discover which personal data is collected about them, correct or erase information linked to their accounts, or transfer them to other competing services.

This openness would streamline economic exchanges and spur competition - and improve quality of service for all.

Public as well as private transparency encourages entrepreneurs to take bold risks to create the new models which will power our growth. Against the advocates of no-growth economics, we believe in growth - stemming from openness, from innovation and from entrepreneurship.

Easy and free reuse of open government data is crucially important for the competitiveness of Europe's businesses.

It opens new fields of possibilities with no limit other than that of human genius. The creative potential embodied in public data hinges on its re-users - developers, entrepreneurs, and start-up founders. Inventing a second life for public data will fuel the rise of new online services, new innovative products, new useful applications that benefit everyone.

The science of data has considerably improved these past few years. "*Information rules*", as Professor Varian wrote. Algorithms and their applications play a central role in the information society and the digital economy. Opening government data will feed new Semantic Web technologies and hasten the coming of Internet's future.

Beyond the digital economy, Open Data can support scientific research. Synthetic biology or studies on the medical impact of chemicals builds to a large extent on shared experimental data and results.

Sustainable development and the resilience of our societies must largely benefit from the applications built on Open Data. Multimodal information could spur smart transportation usage. Access to precise geophysical data could catalyze the development of clean energy. Public data, mashed up with and enriched by real-time crowd-sourced by citizens, already helps coordinate relief efforts during natural catastrophes.

My conviction is that opening public data is a democratic imperative, at the root of an economic virtuous circle. Its economic model must be broad access and free reuse.

It is time to rethink the model of data as an asset to be monetized. For too long, it was thought that using public data to its full potential meant selling it. That the first step to maximize its value was to shield, to limit, and to exclude.

It is nevertheless reuse - and reuse alone - that gives value to data. What truly matters is not what it is, but what is done with it, what citizens and what entrepreneurs build and invent with it.

Public data reuse is thought to be a potent market. According to the Commission it could reach tens of billions of euros every year. But projections would be much higher if we tore down artificial roadblocks that bridle data reuse and thus innovation.

The real impact of Open Data will be structural and systemic. Its success won't be measured by the amount raised by charging schemes nor by additional tax revenue stemming from new public data reuse. Its true measure is that of the practical benefits society will draw from its applications.

In order for this wealth of new services to bloom and provide useful, practical benefits to Europe's citizens, Member States must exercise careful stewardship of data - this essential facility of the digital economy. They must see that it be not captured - neither by the private sector, which could create the conditions of *de facto* exclusivity, nor by the public sector which could open its data under discriminatory and monopolistic conditions.

A model where most or all data production costs would be borne by its reusers is akin to a monopoly- for a given administration is frequently the only entity able to produce certain datasets, which it collects to conduct the public services it's entrusted with.

This model is of course highly inefficient for society. Economic science leaves no doubt about it: in order to maximise social welfare, prices must match marginal cost of supply - meaning essentially zero in the case of data, a public, non-rival, non-excludable good, infinitely reproducible at no cost.

Not only is the free reuse principle more efficient from an economic and social standpoint. It also leads to more efficient public management: potential revenue shortfalls stemming from a switch to free reuse can be compensated several times over by the savings such a switch enables. Above all, no other model than free reuse could be understood if one keeps in mind that public data production is financed by taxpayers as an instrument or by-product of public services.

The economic models of public services, some of which rely on charging for data reuse, should not be jeopardized when they are based on necessary trade-offs. I think about the case of culture, or the necessary independence of national statistics bodies, the financial means of which must be entrusted to them. We are all attached to the quality of these public services.

A charging scheme for data reuse, when a public body provides a specific service requiring a special investment, should not be forbidden - but it must stay the lonely exception rather than the rule.

Benefits society can draw from diffusion and reuse of public datasets hinge, however, on the ability of citizens and businesses to invent new uses for them.

The new economy, the models of which are often still under construction, is built on the notion of discovery. Young, inexperienced, literally excluded from their universities, the founders of Microsoft, of Google, of Facebook, had at their start no other asset than their knowledge and their ideas - and their unyielding will to put them to the test.

If, before even starting to work on their products, they had had to gather thousands and thousands of dollars on the strength of their ideas alone, they would have failed - and millions of highly qualified jobs would not exist today, let alone the transformative impact these three examples have had on society and the economy

It is up to governments to embrace this paradigm shift and to evolve accordingly.

Democracies initiating Open Data policies have all chosen broad access to, and free reuse of public data.

Sheltering economic models built on direct monetization by the public sector could hurt European companies: it may tilt the playing field in international competition against fast-growing companies from countries that have embraced free reuse.

We have adopted a principle for public sector information reuse: broad access and free reuse, as widely as possible. The Prime Minister sent an executive order to that effect on May 26th to all Ministers of the French Government.

A decree, which he released on the same day, now strictly restricts the possibility of creating any new charging scheme for data reuse. While still possible, it is now dependent on the Prime Minister's agreeing to its creation due to exceptional circumstances. All charging schemes that exist to date will be listed and published transparently online. In a few months' time, everyone will be able to know precisely the amount and the object for these charging schemes.

Since February 21<sup>st</sup> this year, I have had the honour of heading, under Prime Minister Fillon's direct authority, Etalab, the mission tasked with enabling Open Data in France and coordinating online publication of government data from all ministerial departments. Etalab builds "data.gouv.fr", the French Open Data platform.

Since then, one coordinator has been appointed in each and every ministerial department, in order to collect and publish government data these departments hold. A lot rests on these high-level civil servants, for a pragmatic approach is needed to fulfil our goal to publish data as extensively as possible, in raw, machine-readable formats.

During August's last Council of Ministers, Valerie Pécresse, the French Government's spokeswoman, reminded all the Ministers of the importance of Open Data, and called the administrations under their direction to "*widen the use of free and open formats so as to encourage public data reuse*".

I've chosen an open, transparent and collaborative governance for Etalab.

On line publication of Open government data is a public service which can find meaning only in an exchange with the community of developers and entrepreneurs, in a relationship based on mutual trust and openness.

I organized a first open steering committee this past June, which was open to all and gathered 200 attendees. Its goals were to present the technical partners who collaborate to the development of "data.gouv.fr", to report on the data collection process, and to explain the framework created by the Prime Minister's executive order under which ministerial departments collect and publish their data.

My aim is to make "data.gouv.fr" perpetually and steadily improve to meet the expectations of data producers and reusers. We organize frequent workshops open to all. The first two workshops allowed us to leverage the community's expertise to generate new ideas on the platform's user experience and its collaboration modules.

The third workshop gathered representatives of on-going Open Data initiatives, locally and abroad. Generally speaking, we seek inspiration from other States who have launched Open Data programs abroad, and new product development methods of startups.

Among the themes of upcoming workshops, we will focus on data journalism, and the application of data visualization techniques to digital media and online press. We will organize the last workshop of the year in December, at the Le Web conference in Paris.

The Open Data platform for France, "data.gouv.fr", will be released on the first week of December as a first beta version. It will then evolve in somehow "perpetual beta" with continuous, incremental iterations, always gathering early feedback from the community along the way. The long-term vision is that "data.gouv.fr" should eventually become a real semantic data store. Publishing PSI in raw, open, machine-readable format is a first step towards linked open data.

We've adopted the principles of Agile Development, in order to start off the development of data.gouv.fr on the basis of a simple first version, which will be frequently updated through successive iterations. The platform must tend toward an efficient application for data supply which lowers the barriers to experimentation for the actors of innovation.

We focus our efforts and those of the administrations on raw, machine-readable, numerical or structured data. Free and open formats will make it easily reusable, to encourage new applications.

We are at this very moment coordinating the work of all governmental administrations, in order to collect datasets that will be listed on "data.gouv.fr" when it launches on the first week of December.

All datasets that are collected will be listed online - because restricting Open Data to only those datasets deemed interesting could cause one to forgo opportunities to enable the development of useful applications.

Publishing data online by default, to the largest extent possible, is crucial, for it is through comparison and combination that researchers can gain knowledge and developers invent new applications.

History testifies to this. It is thanks to what could go down in history as the first mash-up, a superposition of cholera outbreak points over a map of water pumps in London in 1854, that a British medical doctor discovered it is a water-borne disease.

I believe, in this case, in the encounter of randomness and contingency, and in serendipitous discovery. Selecting data based on how profitable we imagine its reuses to be would be a major roadblock to other, less predictable but potentially even more useful applications.

Lowering barriers to data reuse also means creating conditions of legal safety for producers and re-users. I have chosen to offer all data re-users a free, open, interoperable licence.

We have been conducting, since this past June, a consultation with all stakeholders, from the private as well as the public sector. The French licence will be published in the next few days.

We have made a point to establish a licence that is compatible with the United Kingdom's Open Government Licence, and the Open Data Commons "By" licence.

It will encourage all types of public data reuse, commercial and non-commercial alike. It will provide re-users with all the rights and the reassurances needed to spark their innovation and creativity.

Here are, ladies and gentlemen, the main points I wanted to share with you today.

This is why open data has emerged as a powerful policy instrument at the hands of society and elected leaders, and will play a role in meeting tomorrow's overarching challenges - from facing climate change to regulating the international financial system and igniting sustainable development.

This is why broad access to, and free reuse of public data will contribute to the renewal of our democracies and the growth of our economies.