Why does Europe have no Google?

Because a European startup launches into 27 legal systems and 24 languages; an American one gets 330 million customers and Wall Street on day one.

It is not talent – Europeans keep inventing the things the world later calls American. Trace where the path breaks, and the answer stops being a mystery.

Invented here, scaled there

In 2007 the world's dominant phone maker was European: Nokia, with roughly forty percent of the global market. Skype invented consumer internet calling in Tallinn – sold to eBay, then Microsoft. DeepMind, the most famous AI laboratory of its era, was founded in London – sold to Google. ARM, the British firm whose chip designs sit in nearly every phone on the planet, chose New York's Nasdaq for its 2023 listing. Spotify trades in New York. So does BioNTech, the German company behind the covid vaccine.

One of these stories is an anecdote. Six are a pattern: Europe conceives, America scales and harvests.

Where the path breaks

The market. An American founder ships one product, in one language, under one legal system, to 330 million people. A European founder theoretically has 450 million customers – and practically expands country by country: new language, new law, new licensing, new VAT regime. The IMF has priced the EU's internal barriers as equivalent to a 44 % tariff on goods and roughly 110 % on services. The single market works beautifully for cheese; software is a service.

The capital. European venture funds invest around a fifth of American volumes, and the continent's vast savings sit in bank deposits while US pension funds buy equity. When a European company reaches the size where it needs billions, it discovers no European exchange can reliably supply them – and moves. The Draghi report's totals: about €800 billion a year of missing investment, and not one EU company founded in the past fifty years worth over €100 billion. The United States produced six worth more than a trillion in the same window.

The price of failure. In California, a founder with a bankruptcy is a founder with experience. In much of Europe, bankruptcy means years of personal liability and a scarred record. Where falling costs more, fewer people jump.

The honest caveat

Yes, European regulation is a real burden, and it lands hardest on the small firms it was not aimed at. But "Brussels overregulates" cannot carry the whole story – America is no libertarian paradise, and Europe's most-regulated era produced Nokia. The variable that actually separates the two systems is the size of the playing field: one market, one capital pool, one runway.

What this has to do with unity

All three breaks share a shape: they are the costs of running one continent as twenty-seven medium-sized markets. A genuine single market for services, one capital market deep enough to fund a giant, one exchange where a European ARM would list at home – none of this is technically hard. It is politically hard, because it means integrating things countries still hold separately. Which is why "why does Europe have no Google?" is not really a technology question. It is the continent's unity question, wearing a hoodie.

All questions →

FREQUENTLY ASKED

Has Europe ever led in technology?
Repeatedly. Nokia held about 40 % of the world's phone market in 2007, Skype invented internet calling in Tallinn, DeepMind defined modern AI in London, and ARM designs the chips in most phones on Earth.

Why do European tech companies sell out or leave?
Capital and market size. American funds invest several times more, and US exchanges absorb listings European markets cannot – ARM, Spotify and BioNTech all listed in New York. Companies follow money and customers.

Isn't EU regulation the real problem?
It is a real cost, especially for small firms – but not the core story. America regulates too. The decisive difference is a unified market of 330 million customers and the world's deepest capital pool.

How much investment is Europe missing?
The Draghi report puts the gap at roughly €800 billion a year across the economy. In venture capital specifically, Europe invests about a fifth of American levels.

Could a European Google still emerge?
The talent demonstrably exists – ASML and Mistral prove world-class firms can grow in Europe. What would change the odds systemically: one market for services and one capital market. Both are political decisions.

SOURCES

- Draghi report (2024): no EU company founded in the last 50 years above €100bn; ~€800bn/yr gap
- Nokia market share 2007 (~40 %); Skype, DeepMind, ARM, Spotify, BioNTech corporate histories
- Invest Europe / PitchBook: EU vs US venture capital volumes
- IMF: internal EU barriers ≈ 44 % tariff-equivalent on goods, 110 % on services
- EU Savings and Investments Union package (December 2025)