



THE EUROPEAN DOCTRINE OF COGNITIVE SOVEREIGNTY

Executive Summary

Europe increasingly speaks of strategic sovereignty as one of its principal political objectives. Yet strategic sovereignty cannot exist without cognitive sovereignty. A democratic society that progressively loses the capacity to understand reality independently inevitably loses the ability to define its own priorities, values and long-term interests. Cognitive sovereignty has therefore become the foundation of strategic sovereignty in the twenty-first century.

This document argues that Europe's greatest strategic vulnerability is no longer primarily military, economic or technological. It is cognitive. Modern power increasingly operates through the shaping of perception, interpretation and judgement before political decisions are made. Cognitive engineering—the systematic and often non-transparent influence on how individuals and societies perceive reality—has become one of the defining instruments of contemporary strategic competition.

The document introduces the concepts of **cognitive dependency**, **cognitive engineering** and **cognitive sovereignty** as a coherent framework for understanding Europe's evolving strategic environment. It argues that strategic dependency is rarely the starting point of decline. It is usually preceded by cognitive dependency, as societies gradually lose confidence in their own judgement and increasingly adopt externally generated narratives, conceptual frameworks and political priorities.

Europe's renewal therefore cannot begin with defence budgets, industrial policy or institutional reform alone. These measures remain necessary, but they primarily address the consequences of dependency rather than its underlying causes. Lasting strategic sovereignty requires the restoration of Europe's capacity to think independently, produce its own knowledge, critically evaluate competing ideas and define its long-term priorities according to its own democratic choices, historical experience and civilizational interests.

The doctrine proposes that cognitive sovereignty rests upon four mutually reinforcing foundations: **cognitive security**, **epistemological sovereignty**, **resilient European technological and informational infrastructures**, and **confidence in Europe's shared civilizational foundations and national identities**. Together, these create the intellectual conditions upon which democratic sovereignty, ethical responsibility, technological leadership, strategic resilience and lasting peace ultimately depend.

Rather than advocating intellectual isolation or limiting democratic debate, the document promotes greater transparency, independent knowledge production, media and digital resilience, technological sovereignty, civic education and continuous strategic reflection. Genuine international cooperation requires intellectually independent partners; dependence produces conformity, while sovereignty enables cooperation by free choice.



As the third volume of the **European Strategic Doctrine Series**, this document provides the cognitive foundations for the broader European framework developed throughout the series. It complements **Democratic Sovereignty**, **Integrated Democracy**, **Information Integrity**, **Financial Sovereignty** and the future **Constitutional Framework for a New Europe**, demonstrating that independent judgement is an indispensable precondition for every other form of sovereignty.

Europe's future will ultimately depend not only on its economic strength, technological capabilities or military power, but on its ability to understand reality independently, define its own strategic priorities and act according to its own civilizational interests. Cognitive sovereignty is therefore not simply one dimension of sovereignty; it is the condition upon which every other form of sovereignty ultimately depends.

Within this architecture, **Cognitive Sovereignty** protects the conditions for independent judgement; **Democratic Sovereignty** identifies the demos as the original holder of political authority; **Integrated Democracy** translates that sovereignty into institutional practice; and **Path to Integrated Democracy** defines the transition from present representative systems towards its fuller realization.

The Foundation of Strategic Sovereignty in the Twenty-First Century

Europe increasingly speaks of strategic sovereignty as one of its principal political objectives. Yet strategic sovereignty cannot exist without cognitive sovereignty. A political community that progressively loses the capacity to determine how reality is understood inevitably loses the capacity to define its priorities, values and long-term objectives. Europe's principal strategic vulnerability is therefore no longer primarily military or economic. It is cognitive. Restoring cognitive sovereignty is consequently not one policy objective among many; it has become the precondition for Europe's long-term strategic sovereignty.

1. Sovereignty Has Changed

Every civilization defines sovereignty according to the nature of power of its age. For centuries sovereignty meant the ability to defend territory, govern a population and control economic resources. Military strength, political authority and economic capacity were regarded as the principal foundations of independent statehood. These dimensions remain indispensable, yet they no longer explain power completely.

The digital revolution has transformed not only the instruments through which power is exercised but the nature of power itself. Throughout history political authority depended upon the ability to influence human behaviour. Today it increasingly depends upon the ability to shape how reality is perceived before political decisions are even made. Information no longer merely supports decision-making; it increasingly determines the framework within which decisions are formed. The decisive strategic resource of the twenty-first century is therefore no longer territory alone, nor military superiority or economic wealth, but the capacity to influence perception, interpretation and judgement.

This transformation fundamentally changes the meaning of sovereignty. Autonomy is the ability to operate effectively within an existing framework. Sovereignty is the ability to define that framework according to one's own interests, values and long-term objectives. A political



community may therefore possess democratic institutions, economic strength and military capability while gradually losing sovereignty if the assumptions upon which its decisions rest are increasingly established outside its own civilizational space. This distinction increasingly defines the strategic condition of today's European Union.

Power has not disappeared. It has migrated from the control of territory towards the control of cognition.

The defining strategic question of the twenty-first century is therefore no longer simply whether a nation possesses sufficient military or economic power. It is whether it still possesses the intellectual independence necessary to understand reality through its own experience, evaluate competing influences according to its own interests and determine its own future.

2. Europe's Cognitive Dependence

Europe's greatest strategic challenge is commonly described in terms of military competition, economic decline, migration, demographic ageing or technological dependence. These developments are undoubtedly serious, yet they are primarily consequences rather than causes. The deeper challenge is that Europe is progressively losing the capacity to define reality according to its own historical experience, civilizational traditions and strategic interests.

This condition may be described as **cognitive dependence**.

Cognitive dependence is not the absence of information, nor simply the existence of foreign influence, both of which have accompanied human societies throughout history. It is the gradual loss of the capacity to evaluate information, ideas and political priorities according to one's own civilizational experience, historical memory and strategic interests. A cognitively dependent society progressively adopts externally generated narratives, conceptual frameworks and value priorities without sufficiently questioning whether they genuinely correspond to its own long-term interests.

This transformation is difficult to recognise because it does not abolish democracy or suspend political freedom. Elections continue to take place, governments continue to change, universities continue to educate and media continue to inform. Democratic institutions remain formally intact. What gradually changes is the cognitive environment within which democratic judgement is formed. Citizens continue to enjoy the freedom to choose, yet progressively lose the capacity to determine independently what deserves to be chosen.

The European situation is historically unique. Following the Second World War, Western Europe became part of a broader Atlantic security, economic, technological and cultural architecture. This process brought unprecedented peace, reconstruction, prosperity and institutional stability. At the same time, however, it created long-term structural dependencies extending far beyond defence and economics. As globalization accelerated and digital technologies transformed communication, these dependencies gradually expanded into the informational, technological, cultural and cognitive domains.

Today a substantial part of Europe's digital infrastructure, technological ecosystem, informational environment, financial architecture, popular culture, strategic analysis and increasingly even normative discourse originates outside Europe. These structural



dependencies are empirically observable and well documented. Their existence neither implies hostile intent nor diminishes the importance of international cooperation. It demonstrates, however, that Europe has not yet achieved full cognitive sovereignty. The problem is not external influence itself but Europe's diminishing capacity to distinguish independently between cooperation and dependence, between shared interests and adopted priorities.

Strategic dependence is therefore preceded by cognitive dependence. Civilizations rarely lose sovereignty through military defeat alone. More often they first lose confidence in their own judgement. Before civilizations lose the ability to act independently, they first lose the confidence to judge independently.

3. Cognitive Engineering

If cognitive dependence is the condition, **cognitive engineering** is the process through which it develops.

Cognitive engineering may be defined as the intentional, systematic and non-transparent shaping of perception, interpretation and decision-making through communication, education, media, politics, culture, technology and institutional influence for the purpose of obtaining political, economic, ideological or strategic advantage.

Unlike classical propaganda, cognitive engineering is neither episodic nor dependent upon a single institution. It operates continuously through multiple, mutually reinforcing systems that together shape the cognitive environment within which democratic societies function.

Educational institutions influence the conceptual categories through which reality is understood. Universities determine which forms of knowledge acquire intellectual legitimacy. Media shape visibility, credibility and public attention. Digital platforms regulate access to information through algorithms that prioritise, personalise and amplify selected content. Cultural industries influence behavioural norms and social aspirations. Political communication frames acceptable narratives and establishes public priorities. Think tanks, advocacy organisations, sections of the non-governmental sector and international networks contribute to shaping political agendas, while states themselves employ strategic communication, public diplomacy and intelligence capabilities to advance their geopolitical interests. Financial institutions and major corporate actors likewise influence the economic assumptions upon which political decisions increasingly depend.

These actors neither require central coordination nor necessarily pursue identical objectives. Their significance lies in their cumulative effect. Acting simultaneously through different channels, they gradually construct a common cognitive environment within which certain interpretations of reality become accepted as objective truth, certain values become perceived as moral imperatives and certain political options come to appear as the only legitimate choices.

The objective of cognitive engineering is therefore not simply to persuade. It is to structure the intellectual framework within which persuasion itself becomes possible. Its success is measured not by changing individual opinions, but by redefining the boundaries of what societies consider normal, legitimate and politically conceivable.



This is the defining transformation of political power in the twenty-first century. Military coercion can influence behaviour. Economic pressure can influence decisions. Cognitive engineering influences perception itself. That distinction explains why cognitive dependence represents a deeper and more durable form of strategic vulnerability than any traditional form of external pressure.

4. From Cognitive Dependence to Strategic Dependence

Cognitive dependence is not an isolated phenomenon. It is the beginning of a broader process that gradually affects every dimension of sovereignty. When a society no longer determines independently how reality is understood, it inevitably loses the capacity to determine which values deserve public priority, which knowledge should guide political decisions and, ultimately, which strategic objectives should define its future.

For this reason, cognitive dependence gradually develops into ethical dependence. Public debate shifts from asking what best serves society to asking what has already become internationally acceptable. The distinction between universal human rights and political preferences becomes increasingly blurred, while the difference between tolerance and public promotion progressively disappears. Individual rights remain an essential foundation of European democracy, yet the ability to distinguish between protecting rights and establishing public priorities gradually weakens. Questions fundamental to Europe's long-term future—demographic renewal, family stability, scientific excellence, technological leadership, educational quality and cultural continuity—risk becoming secondary to symbolic or identity-centred political agendas.

The process extends further into the sphere of knowledge. Universities, research institutions and educational systems increasingly reproduce conceptual frameworks developed elsewhere instead of generating interpretations rooted in Europe's own intellectual traditions and strategic interests. This represents a gradual loss of **epistemological sovereignty**—the capacity of a civilization to create, validate and transmit knowledge according to its own scientific standards, cultural heritage and democratic priorities. A civilization that no longer produces independent knowledge eventually loses the capacity to formulate genuinely independent policies.

Ethical dependence, epistemological dependence and strategic dependence should therefore not be understood as separate phenomena. They represent successive expressions of an increasingly dependent cognitive environment.

The consequences are already visible throughout Europe. Technological dependence grows as critical digital infrastructures remain controlled outside European jurisdiction. Public debate becomes increasingly fragmented under the influence of global information platforms. Trust in democratic institutions declines as citizens perceive that essential decisions are defined elsewhere. Political discourse becomes increasingly reactive, responding to externally established agendas instead of defining long-term European priorities. Demographic decline, weakening civilizational confidence and growing political polarization further reduce Europe's capacity for coherent strategic action.

These developments should not be regarded as separate crises. They represent successive stages of the same process through which cognitive dependence gradually evolves into strategic dependence. Strategic sovereignty is not the starting point of independence but its final expression. Without epistemological sovereignty there can be no cognitive sovereignty, and



without cognitive sovereignty there can be no strategic sovereignty. No amount of military expenditure, technological investment or institutional reform can compensate for the gradual erosion of a civilization's capacity to think independently.

5. The European Doctrine of Cognitive Sovereignty

Restoring cognitive sovereignty requires more than awareness. It requires institutions capable of protecting the cognitive conditions upon which democratic self-government depends.

Cognitive sovereignty cannot be achieved once and for all. Like democracy itself, it requires continuous institutional protection, civic responsibility and intellectual renewal.

If cognitive dependence has become Europe's principal strategic vulnerability, then cognitive sovereignty must become its principal strategic objective. Restoring sovereignty cannot begin with defence budgets, industrial policy or institutional reform alone. These measures remain necessary, but they address the consequences rather than the source of the problem. Europe must first recover the capacity to think independently before it can consistently act independently.

Cognitive sovereignty is the capacity of individuals, a demos and a political community to perceive, interpret and evaluate reality with sufficient independence to form authentic political judgement and transform that judgement into autonomous democratic choice. At the European level, it also includes the capacity to assess competing ideas through Europe's own historical experience, cultural traditions and strategic interests. It should not be confused with censorship, intellectual isolation or ideological conformity. Democratic societies become stronger not by restricting ideas but by preserving the capacity to evaluate competing ideas independently. Genuine international cooperation presupposes intellectually independent partners. Dependence produces conformity; sovereignty makes cooperation a matter of free choice.

5.1 Cognitive Sovereignty and Democratic Legitimacy

Cognitive sovereignty operates at three connected levels. At the **individual** level, it is the capacity to form sufficiently independent judgement. At the level of the **demos**, it is the capacity to deliberate among genuinely competing interpretations and determine common priorities without opaque external control. At the European level, it is the capacity of Europe's political communities to produce knowledge, preserve national intellectual traditions and define shared priorities without dissolving the diversity of their constituent demoi.

Institutions can protect these conditions, but they cannot manufacture political truth. Cognitive sovereignty therefore requires **pluralism**, access to competing sources and interpretations, transparency of significant influence and funding, and the practical possibility to challenge official as well as dominant narratives. Foreign, minority or dissenting viewpoints must not be excluded merely because of their origin or disagreement with prevailing policy. The democratic problem is covert manipulation, structural dependency, concentrated gatekeeping power and the suppression of meaningful alternatives.

The information standard should rise with the consequence and irreversibility of a decision. Ordinary democratic decisions require transparent sources and meaningful alternatives. Decisions of exceptional constitutional, existential or long-term significance require a stronger



standard: the principal official argument, credible alternatives, counter-evidence, foreseeable costs and benefits, significant uncertainties, and disclosure of material interests and influence. Cognitive sovereignty therefore functions as a **condition of democratic legitimacy**, not as an instrument of content control.

Protecting cognitive sovereignty requires **cognitive security**. Cognitive security is the capacity of democratic institutions to preserve the integrity of the cognitive environment against systematic, non-transparent manipulation while protecting freedom of thought, freedom of expression and open democratic debate. Just as national security protects territorial integrity and cyber security protects digital infrastructure, cognitive security protects the conditions under which democratic judgement remains genuinely independent.

The first step must therefore be legal recognition. Europe should explicitly recognise systematic cognitive engineering as a strategic challenge to democratic governance. Democratic societies have long accepted legal frameworks protecting citizens against physical violence, corruption, financial fraud and cyberattacks because these undermine public trust and democratic stability. Systematic, non-transparent manipulation of perception deserves comparable recognition. This legal framework should encompass coordinated influence operations targeting public opinion, political decision-making, academic independence and media integrity, regardless of whether they originate from state or non-state actors.

Recognition must be accompanied by transparency. Democratic legitimacy depends upon informed consent, and informed consent requires citizens to understand who shapes the information upon which political decisions are based. Full transparency of foreign funding for political organisations, media outlets, academic institutions, advocacy organisations and non-governmental structures participating in the formation of public policy should therefore become a democratic standard. Citizens have the right to know who finances organisations that seek to influence their political judgement.

Transparency alone, however, is insufficient. Democratic societies have long prohibited covert financing of political parties because hidden influence undermines democratic legitimacy. The same principle should apply to covert foreign influence operations designed to manipulate democratic processes through concealed strategic communication, coordinated narrative campaigns or systematic cognitive engineering. The objective is not to prohibit international cooperation but to ensure that political influence remains visible, accountable and subject to democratic scrutiny.

Europe must also strengthen its own technological and informational foundations. Genuine cognitive sovereignty cannot exist while the principal digital platforms, strategic communication channels, data infrastructures and increasingly artificial intelligence systems remain structurally dependent upon actors operating outside Europe's legal and political jurisdiction. Developing European digital infrastructure, research capabilities, media ecosystems and technological capacities is therefore not merely an economic objective. It has become an essential requirement of sovereignty itself.

Equally important is the restoration of **epistemological sovereignty**. No civilization remains strategically independent if it gradually ceases to produce its own knowledge. European universities should once again become centres of independent inquiry rather than passive transmitters of conceptual paradigms developed elsewhere. Scientific excellence must be measured by intellectual quality, methodological rigour and openness to critical debate rather



than ideological conformity. Education should cultivate historical understanding, scientific curiosity, media literacy, critical thinking and civic responsibility, because citizens capable of independent judgement constitute the strongest defence against cognitive dependence.

Finally, Europe must regain confidence in its own civilizational foundations. Every civilization interprets universal principles through its own historical experience. Europe has been shaped by Greek philosophy, Roman law, the Judeo-Christian ethical tradition, Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment rationality and constitutional democracy. These traditions created Europe's understanding of human dignity, freedom, responsibility, scientific inquiry and the rule of law. Renewing confidence in this inheritance is not an exercise in isolationism or cultural superiority. It is the recognition that values can only be genuinely defended when they are genuinely understood, consciously chosen and continuously renewed by each generation.

The objective is not cultural uniformity and not a single prescribed European identity. Europe's civilizational unity should rest on a limited set of shared foundations while preserving the languages, historical memories, cultural traditions and political identities of its nations. National diversity is therefore not an obstacle to European cognitive sovereignty but one of its constitutive elements. Europe must be capable of thinking together without requiring its nations to think alike, balancing individual freedom with responsibility, human rights with the public interest, democratic pluralism with cultural continuity, and common European interests with legitimate national self-government.

Cognitive sovereignty therefore rests upon four mutually reinforcing foundations: **cognitive security, epistemological sovereignty, resilient European technological and informational infrastructures, and confidence in Europe's shared civilizational foundations and national identities**. Together they create the intellectual conditions upon which genuine democratic and strategic sovereignty can be built.

6. Why This Matters

The defining strategic competition of the twenty-first century will not be determined primarily by military conquest or economic domination. It will increasingly be determined by the capacity to shape how societies understand reality, define their interests and establish their political priorities.

Europe therefore faces a choice that extends far beyond any individual policy debate. It may continue adapting to strategic realities largely defined by others, or it may recover the intellectual confidence to define those realities according to its own democratic choices, historical experience and civilizational interests.

This is not primarily a question of external threats. It is a question of civilizational survival.

No civilization survives because of economic strength alone. History repeatedly demonstrates that civilizations begin to decline long before they lose their territory, institutions or military capabilities. They decline when they gradually lose confidence in their own judgement, their own knowledge and their own capacity to determine the direction of their future. Strategic decline is therefore almost always preceded by cognitive dependence.



For this reason, cognitive sovereignty is not simply another dimension of sovereignty. It is the condition upon which every other form of sovereignty ultimately depends. A civilization capable of understanding reality through its own intellectual traditions will also be capable of defining its own ethical priorities, producing its own knowledge, developing its own strategies and protecting its own long-term interests.

Europe's renewal will therefore begin neither with military power nor with economic reform. It will begin when Europe regains the confidence to think independently. Only a civilization capable of preserving its cognitive sovereignty can preserve its strategic sovereignty. Only a strategically sovereign Europe will remain capable of protecting its democratic institutions, its cultural identity and its freedom.

Europe's future will not ultimately depend on the size of its economy, the sophistication of its technologies or even the strength of its armed forces. It will depend on whether Europe retains the capacity to understand reality through its own intellectual traditions, define its own strategic priorities and act according to its own civilizational interests. Cognitive sovereignty is therefore not merely one dimension of sovereignty. It is the condition upon which every other form of sovereignty ultimately depends.

The decisive struggle of the twenty-first century will not be fought primarily over territory. It will be fought over the human capacity to perceive reality independently. Civilizations that preserve cognitive sovereignty will preserve strategic sovereignty. Those that lose it will ultimately lose the ability to determine their own future, regardless of their economic wealth or military power.

The broader democratic architecture can therefore be expressed simply: **Cognitive Sovereignty** protects the conditions of independent judgement; **Democratic Sovereignty** determines where legitimate political authority resides; **Integrated Democracy** provides the mature institutional model; and **Path to Integrated Democracy** provides the practical transition towards it. None substitutes for the others. Together they connect independent judgement, sovereign citizenship and accountable political power.

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