The Dutch 'Smart Resilience' Model: A Pragmatic Blueprint for EU Digital Sovereignty."

Executive Summary

The European Union’s 2025 "Declaration for European Digital Sovereignty" established a vital political ambition: to secure the bloc’s ability to act autonomously in the digital age without falling into protectionism. However, it created a critical **implementation puzzle**, revealing a gap between high-level goals and executable strategy.

This report argues that solving this puzzle requires a fundamental synthesis of the divergent **national, corporate, and technical perspectives** on sovereignty. It analyzes how the Declaration’s **"clash of perspectives"** leads to a stalemate, where state security goals conflict with market logic.

In response, the Netherlands is pioneering a pragmatic alternative: the **"smart resilience" model**. This approach, grounded in Dutch applied research, redefines sovereignty not as technological autarky but as **strategic relevance and control**. It is designed to build competitive European capacity across five interdependent components: Technology, Policy, Investment, Talent, and Societal Adoption.

The model finds its most concrete expression in the **Wennink Report**, an independent advisory blueprint that translates "smart resilience" into a €126 billion investment plan for strategic domains like AI and biotechnology. Crucially, the report underscores that success depends on first fixing systemic **"enabling conditions,"** such as slow permitting and talent shortages.

Ultimately, this report concludes that the **Dutch "Smart Resilience" model offers a pragmatic blueprint for the EU**. It demonstrates that digital sovereignty must be engineered through integrated action, not just declared. The future of Europe’s digital autonomy now hinges on the political will to execute such a comprehensive, non-ideological strategy.

The Declaration for EU Digital Sovereignty: Ambition versus Ambiguity

The "Declaration for European Digital Sovereignty," adopted by all 27 EU member states in November 2025, represents a pivotal attempt to forge a common position [1]. It introduces a nuanced definition, framing digital sovereignty as **“the EU and its Member States’ ability to act autonomously and to freely choose their own solutions, while reaping the benefits of collaboration with global partners, when possible.”** [1]

This language is a deliberate departure from isolationist rhetoric. The Declaration explicitly states that **“digital sovereignty does not mean isolation or protectionism,”** aiming instead for a confident autonomy that remains open to cooperation [1]. The

stated goal is not self-sufficiency but achieving **"the ability to act with confidence and autonomy where it matters most."** [1]

However, this carefully balanced ambition is immediately tested by the mechanics of its implementation. Franco-German leadership at the summit championed concrete measures such as scrutinizing U.S. cloud "hyperscalers" and advocating for **"Buy European" procurement policies** [6]. Consequently, while the Declaration successfully elevates sovereignty as an existential issue for Europe's **"future viability,"** it creates a critical puzzle: it establishes the sophisticated political 'what' but leaves a formidable 'how' gap [1]. The core challenge becomes how to build genuine, market-competitive autonomy without resorting to the protectionism it publicly rejects.

The Clash of Perspectives: Why the Declaration's Path is Contested

To solve this puzzle, one must deconstruct digital sovereignty itself. It rests not on a single pillar but on five interdependent components:

- control over **Technology & Infrastructure**
- effective **Policy & Governance**
- strategic **Investment & De-risking**
- robust **Talent & Workforce**; and
- broad **Digital Literacy & Societal Adoption**.

A weakness in any one compromises the whole [2].

The Declaration's implementation tension stems from a fundamental complexity: **the emphasis and interpretation of each component vary drastically depending on whether one adopts a national, corporate, or technical perspective.** This clash of viewpoints explains the gap between the Declaration's collaborative philosophy and the charges of protectionism aimed at its concrete actions [1, 2].

Core Component	The National/State Perspective (Informing Declaration Goals)	The Corporate/Business Perspective (Reacting to Implementation)	The Resulting Tension
Policy & Governance	A **tool to shape the market** and ensure strategic autonomy (e.g., "Buy European" rules) [1].	A **framework to navigate**, often seen as a compliance cost or market barrier [2].	Strategic tool vs. market distortion.
Technology & Infrastructure	A **strategic asset** to control for security; reducing dependence is key [1, 2].	An **operational backbone** where scale, cost, and reliability are paramount [2].	Security goal vs. efficiency logic.
Investment & De-risking	A **matter of public strategy** to build long-term capacity in critical tech [1, 4].	Driven by **ROI and market dynamics**; sovereign alternatives may lack scale [2, 4].	Public priority vs. private calculation.

This analytical framework reveals that the Declaration's contradiction is not accidental but structural. Its **national-perspective** goals of control and security inevitably collide with the **corporate-perspective** imperatives of competition, efficiency, and global operation [1, 2]. Bridging this divergent view of the problem is the unspoken prerequisite for moving from declaration to reality.

The Dutch Model: 'Smart Resilience' as an Operational Blueprint

This fundamental clash of perspectives between declaratory ambition and implementable strategy is precisely where the Dutch model of **‘smart resilience’** enters the European arena. Rather than remaining at the level of political principle, the Netherlands' state and corporate perspectives are converging on an operational philosophy that seeks to synthesize the national security imperative with corporate pragmatism: Smart Resiliency.

Forging a path between declaratory ambition and practical implementation, the Dutch model of **“smart resilience”** operates as an active synthesis of the national, corporate, and technical perspectives. This approach is grounded in a definition of digital sovereignty as **“control over the design and use of (business) critical digital systems, algorithms, and the data”** [2]—a concept central to Dutch applied research, which frames the goal as achieving strategic autonomy through relevance rather than isolation. It translates this into action through a pragmatic state philosophy that **“seduction beats coercion,”** focusing on building compelling sovereign alternatives rather than imposing blunt mandates [3].

Critically, this extends to mobilizing investment, where research advocates for rethinking procurement to **act as a launch customer for deep-tech start-ups**, providing the vital early market validation they need to scale into competitive European champions [7]. This holistic strategy—leveraging procurement, de-risking innovation, and treating talent and societal participation as foundational—ensures **“smart resilience” offers a multidisciplinary blueprint to navigate Europe's implementation puzzle** [6].

Wennink Report: Moving from Declarations to Execution

The caretaker Schoof cabinet commissioned former ASML CEO Peter Wennink to draft an independent advisory report on the Netherlands' future earning capacity [4]. The report's release in December 2025, though not a direct response to the November Berlin Declaration, provides a substantive blueprint that directly addresses the implementation gap it reveals [1, 4]. More importantly, the Wennink Report operationalizes the core tenets of **"smart resilience"** by offering a pragmatic, investment-led path out of the strategic dependencies identified in earlier sections.

From Abstract Philosophy to Concrete Action

The report is essentially a master plan for executing "smart resilience." It moves from diagnosing vulnerabilities to prescribing a detailed course of action across the five interdependent components of sovereignty:

- **Technology & Infrastructure**: It identifies four strategic, high-productivity domains for concentrated investment: **digitalization & AI, security & resilience, energy & climate technology, and life sciences & biotechnology.** It catalogs **51 concrete investment propositions** in these areas, representing a potential **€126 billion**, primarily from private capital [4].

- **Investment & De-risking**: To mobilize this capital, the report proposes new public instruments like a **National Investment Bank (NIB)** and a **DARPA-like National Agency for Breakthrough Innovation (NABI)**, where the government acts as a strategic "launch customer" to de-risk private investment [4].

- **Policy & Governance**: It prescribes a governance revolution, arguing that future prosperity must be a **"chief's matter"** led by the Prime Minister, supported by an independent **Commissioner for Future Prosperity** with the power to break bureaucratic deadlocks [4].

- **Talent & Workforce**: It calls for a renewed focus on **excellence, STEM education, and lifelong learning**, and stresses the need to attract international knowledge workers [4].

- **Societal Legitimacy**: While focused on economic growth, the report's stated ultimate goal is **"enhancing our societal resilience,"** acknowledging that prosperity must serve a broad social purpose [4].

"Strategic Relevance" as the Core Principle

A key quote from Peter Wennink crystallizes the link to "smart resilience":

"Strategic autonomy is a silly term; it means you want to do everything yourself and that is impossible. It is about strategic relevance" [4].

This quote perfectly echoes the Dutch model's rejection of both protectionist isolation and passive dependency. The aim is not self-sufficiency but ensuring the Netherlands is an indispensable **"key player"** in global high-tech value chains, avoiding a future as a mere **"buyer"** of foreign technology [2, 4].

The Critical Bridge: Executing the Blueprint

The Wennink Report's power and its limitation stem from the same fact: it is an **independent advisory report, not state policy**. Its influence depends entirely on political adoption [4].

- **A Political Litmus Test**: The report has been presented as a **"wake-up call"** and a **"building block"** for the ongoing coalition negotiations. Its recommendations on spending, deregulation, and labor market reform entail significant societal trade-offs that elected officials must now debate and legitimize [4].

- **The Condition for Success: "Enabling Conditions"**: The report is unequivocal that its grand investment vision is **conditional**. It identifies four areas of **"overdue maintenance"** that must be fixed first: expediting permits and simplifying rules; securing talent; ensuring affordable, reliable energy; and strengthening economic infrastructure. The report states, **"The willingness to invest... is great. These investments will only happen if the right parameters are in place"** [4]. Thus, the first test of "smart resilience" will be whether the state can repair its own foundational governance to enable private sector action [4].

Closing Thoughts

The Berlin Declaration established the political **"what"** of European digital sovereignty [1]. In response, the Dutch model of **"smart resilience"** has provided a pragmatic operational **"how,"** focused on building strategic relevance over self-sufficiency [2, 3, 6, 7]. The Wennink Report crystallizes this shift, serving as a detailed, investment-led blueprint that bridges the philosophy's principles with concrete action [4].

Its proposals for targeted investment, governance reform, and new public-private mechanisms now present Europe's most tangible test: whether it can muster the political will to turn a sophisticated philosophy and its corresponding advisory report into an executable national and continental strategy [4].

References

[1] Council of the European Union. (2025, November 27). *15781/25: Declaration for European Digital Sovereignty*. Retrieved from https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15781-2025-INIT/en/pdf

[2] Stolwijk, C., Punter, M., Timmers, P., Rabbie, J., Regeczi, D., & Dalmolen, S. (2024, February). *Towards a sovereign digital future – the Netherlands in Europe*. TNO. Retrieved from https://publications.tno.nl/publication/34642268/o5remY/TNO-2024-R10300.pdf

[3] Dutch Government. (2024). *Versnelling van de Nederlandse Cloud*. Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties. Retrieved from https://www.digitaleoverheid.nl/overzicht-van-alle-onderwerpen/ict-beleid/digitaal-stelsel-toekomst/cloud/versnelling-van-de-nederlandse-cloud/

[4] Government of the Netherlands. (2025). *Advisory report by Peter Wennink: The route to future prosperity*. Ministerie van Algemene Zaken. Retrieved from https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/toekomst-van-nederland/documenten/rapporten/2025/12/11/adviesrapport-peter-wennink-de-route-naar-toekomstige-welvaart

[5] Rathenau Instituut. (2023). *Drie keer anders digitaliseren*. Retrieved from https://www.rathenau.nl/nl/digitalisering/drie-keer-anders-digitaliseren

[6] TNO. (2023, October 11). *How to scale EU deep-tech start-ups: Be a launch customer*. Vector. Retrieved from https://vector.tno.nl/en/articles/knowledge-eu-deeptech-start-ups/

[7] Privacy First. (2026). *Digital sovereignty is a political choice*. Retrieved from https://privacyfirst.eu/digital-sovereignty-is-a-political-choice/