world

MDPI

Article

Reconfiguring European Integration Under Geopolitical Pressure: A Framework of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration

Michal Kaššaj [1], Agneša Víghová [2], Daniela Gregušová [3] and Tomáš Peráček [1,*]

[1] Faculty of Management, Comenius University Bratislava, Odbojárov 10, 820 05 Bratislava, Slovakia; kassaj2@uniba.sk
[2] Department of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Bratislava University of Economics and Management, Furdekova 16, 851 04 Bratislava, Slovakia; agnesa.vighova@vsemba.sk
[3] Independent Researcher, 811 01 Bratislava, Slovakia; gregusova.daniela@gmail.com
* Correspondence: tomas.peracek@fm.uniba.sk

Abstract

The European Union is adapting its economic governance to an international environment shaped by geopolitical rivalry, geoeconomic competition and security challenges. Existing research has examined economic security, industrial policy, technological sovereignty and competitiveness largely as separate policy fields, while paying less attention to the common logic connecting these developments. This article addresses that gap by proposing geopolitical adaptive integration as an analytical framework for explaining how external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures influence the evolution of European economic governance. The study employs a qualitative research design combining document analysis, institutional analysis and comparative policy analysis. The empirical analysis draws on selected academic literature published primarily between 2019 and 2026, together with key European Union policy and strategic documents published between 2021 and 2026. The analysis suggests that European economic governance is no longer guided solely by market integration and regulatory coordination. It now incorporates policies designed to strengthen industrial capacity, reduce external dependencies, protect critical technologies and enhance the Union's capacity to respond to geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges. These developments preserve the institutional foundations of European integration while redefining its policy priorities. The article contributes to the academic discussion by introducing Geopolitical Adaptive Integration as an analytical framework for interpreting the evolution of European economic governance and for analysing the relationship between integration, security and geoeconomics.

Keywords: European Union; European economic governance; geopolitical adaptive integration; European integration; economic security; geoeconomics

Check for updates

Academic Editor: Manfred Max Bergman

Received: 12 August 2026
Revised: 29 September 2026
Accepted: 3 October 2026
Published: 13 October 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

1. Introduction

European integration has long been understood as a process driven by economic interdependence, market liberalisation and the gradual transfer of competences to supranational institutions. The creation of the Single Market, the Economic and Monetary Union and successive enlargements reflected the assumption that deeper integration would promote prosperity, political stability and long-term peace across the continent. This understanding shaped both the evolution of the European Union and the theoretical approaches developed to explain it. Although security considerations have never been entirely absent

from European integration, they usually remained secondary to economic objectives and institutional development.

The conditions under which the European Union operates have changed substantially over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global production networks, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine transformed the European security environment, while the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China accelerated the fragmentation of the international economic order [1]. Energy security, critical technologies, access to raw materials and the resilience of supply chains have become major political concerns [2]. Questions that were once discussed mainly within the fields of trade or industrial policy are now closely connected with national security, foreign policy and geopolitical and geoeconomic competition (Babić et al., 2022) [3]. As a result, the European Union is redefining many of its long-established policy priorities.

These developments have produced a visible shift in European policymaking. New instruments such as the European Economic Security Strategy, the European Chips Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act, together with renewed industrial policy, investment screening mechanisms and efforts to strengthen technological capabilities, indicate that economic governance is being reshaped under conditions of geopolitical competition (European Commission, 2023) [4]. Reports prepared by Enrico Letta (2024) and Mario Draghi (2024) reach similar conclusions by arguing that the future competitiveness of the European economy depends not only on market efficiency but equally on resilience, innovation, investment capacity and the ability to respond to external geopolitical pressures [5,6]. The Union continues to pursue economic openness, but this objective is now balanced against concerns related to security, technological dependence and geopolitical uncertainty [7].

Although these developments are well documented, their theoretical implications for the theory of European integration remain less clear. Much of the existing literature analyses individual policy areas such as industrial policy, economic security, enlargement or external trade. Other studies examine the geopolitical turn of the European Union or revisit classical theories of integration in light of crises. Less attention has been devoted to explaining whether these developments represent separate policy adjustments or indicate a more fundamental transformation in the logic of European integration itself. This question becomes particularly important if geopolitical pressures are no longer external constraints but now shape the internal dynamics of integration.

This article addresses that gap by examining how geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures are transforming the foundations of European integration. It asks the following research question: How have geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures transformed the logic of European integration, and what do these changes reveal about the future development of the European Union? The analysis is based on qualitative research combining document analysis, institutional analysis and comparative policy analysis. It draws upon European Union policy documents, policy reports and academic literature to examine changes in the Union's policy orientation and institutional development.

The main argument advanced in this article is that the European Union is moving beyond a model of integration driven primarily by market efficiency towards one in which security, resilience, competitiveness and geopolitical considerations now influence both policy choices and the direction of integration. The article interprets these developments as part of a fundamental shift that redefines the rationale of European integration.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the principal theoretical approaches to European integration and discusses contributions on the geopolitical transformation of the European Union. Section 2 presents the research design and methodological approach. The empirical part of the article analyses the principal drivers of the Union's transformation and examines how they are reshaping its economic governance,

industrial policy, competitiveness and enlargement agenda. The discussion relates these findings to existing theories of European integration, while Section 6 summarises the main contributions of the study, identifies its limitations and outlines possible directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The transformation of the European Union has generated renewed interest in the theoretical foundations of European integration. Classical integration theories continue to provide valuable explanations for many aspects of the European project, including institutional development, market integration and the distribution of competences between supranational and national levels. However, the geopolitical and geoeconomic environment in which the European Union operates differs substantially from the conditions under which these theories were formulated. Intensifying geopolitical rivalry, economic coercion, technological competition and the securitisation of economic policy have introduced new drivers of integration that cannot always be fully captured by traditional theoretical approaches. This section first revisits the principal theories of European integration before examining how scholarship interprets the Union's geopolitical and geoeconomic transformation. It subsequently proposes an analytical framework designed to explain the evolution of European integration under changing international conditions.

2.1. Classical Theories of European Integration

The development of the European Union has traditionally been interpreted through three principal theoretical perspectives: neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism. Although these approaches differ in their assumptions concerning the driving forces of integration, each offers important insights into particular phases of the European project while exhibiting limitations when applied to the Union's transformation.

Originally developed by Haas, neofunctionalism explains integration as a gradual process driven by functional interdependence and spill-over effects. According to this perspective, cooperation established in one policy area creates incentives for further integration in related sectors, leading to the progressive expansion of supranational governance [8]. Neofunctionalism successfully explains many historical stages of European integration, including the development of the Single Market and the extension of European Union competences. Its explanatory power is strongest where integration emerges from shared economic interests and institutional dynamics.

Developed primarily by Moravcsik, liberal intergovernmentalism offers a different interpretation by emphasising the central role of Member States. Integration results from negotiations among national governments pursuing domestic economic and political preferences, while supranational institutions primarily facilitate agreements reached through interstate bargaining [9]. Liberal intergovernmentalism provides convincing explanations for major treaty reforms, enlargement decisions and institutional compromises that require unanimous political consent.

Postfunctionalism, developed by Hooghe and Marks, shifts attention from economic efficiency towards political contestation and societal preferences. It argues that European integration is now more closely tied to questions of identity, public opinion and domestic political mobilisation [10]. As European issues become politicised, governments face stronger electoral constraints, making integration more contested and differentiated across policy domains. Postfunctionalism has proved particularly valuable in explaining developments such as Brexit, migration debates and rising Euroscepticism.

Together, these theoretical perspectives continue to explain important dimensions of European integration. Nevertheless, they were primarily developed to interpret integration

as a response to internal economic interdependence, institutional evolution or domestic political preferences. They devote comparatively less attention to situations in which integration becomes a response to external geopolitical pressures, geoeconomic competition or systemic changes in the international order [11]. The emergence of economic security, industrial policy, technological sovereignty and resilience as major priorities suggests that additional analytical perspectives are required to explain the Union's development.

2.2. The Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Transformation of European Integration

Scholarship indicates that the European Union is undergoing a significant shift in both its policy orientation and its understanding of integration. Attention has shifted from market efficiency and regulatory harmonisation towards security, competitiveness, industrial capacity and the protection of critical economic assets [12]. These developments reflect changes in the external environment that have fundamentally altered the conditions under which European integration takes place.

McNamara argues that the return of industrial policy represents one of the clearest manifestations of the European Union's geopolitical turn. Industrial policy is no longer viewed solely as an instrument for supporting economic growth but as a means of strengthening technological capabilities, reducing critical dependencies and enhancing Europe's position within a highly competitive international environment [13]. The return of industrial policy illustrates how economic governance has become closely linked with geopolitical objectives.

A similar interpretation emerges from the work of Dür, Mateo and Visart, who analyse the increased importance of economic security within European policymaking. Their research demonstrates that trade policy, investment regulation and external economic relations are now influenced by concerns over geopolitical rivalry and economic coercion [14]. Economic openness still remains an important objective, but it is now balanced against considerations of resilience, strategic autonomy and supply-chain security.

The geopolitical dimension of European integration is equally visible in studies examining enlargement and external boundary formation. Demirci, Freudlsperger and Schimmelfennig show that enlargement policy and relations with neighbouring states are increasingly shaped by geopolitical considerations alongside traditional accession criteria [15]. Anghel likewise argues that the European Union has gradually evolved into a geopolitical actor whose external policies can no longer be understood solely through the logic of economic integration or regulatory influence [16].

The conclusions reached by policy reports reinforce these academic findings. Both the Letta Report on the future of the Single Market and the Draghi Report on European competitiveness argue that maintaining prosperity now depends upon strengthening innovation, technological leadership, investment capacity, energy security and economic resilience [5,6]. These reports place competitiveness within a geopolitical and geoeconomic context, indicating that economic performance and security have become closely interconnected.

European integration is no longer driven exclusively by internal market dynamics or institutional spill-over. External geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures influence both the priorities and the direction of integration [17]. While scholarship provides valuable granular accounts of individual policy domains, these accounts frequently remain compartmentalised within specific subfields (e.g., trade, defence, or technology policy). As a result, theoretical debates have not fully accounted for how cross-domain policy convergence creates a unified, adaptive trajectory of integration.

2.3. An Analytical Framework of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration

To address this analytical gap, this article proposes Geopolitical Adaptive Integration as an analytical framework for interpreting the current phase of European integration. The framework is not intended to replace established theories of European integration or to constitute a new grand theory. It focuses on how external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures are translated into changes in policy priorities across several areas of European governance. The main analytical interest is not the emergence of a new institutional model, but the way in which existing integration mechanisms are used to respond to external pressures that affect several policy domains.

The framework is based on the assumption that European integration is shaped, but not mechanically determined, by external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures. These pressures become relevant for integration when they expose economic, technological, security or supply-related vulnerabilities. Such vulnerabilities can lead to a re-prioritisation of European policies and to stronger coordination across policy domains. Where this coordination is organised at the European level and is incorporated into existing integration mechanisms, it can produce a form of adaptive integration. The proposed mechanism can be described as a sequence from external pressure, through perceived vulnerability and policy re-prioritisation, to cross-sectoral coordination and institutional adaptation.

Six analytical dimensions are used to examine this process: security, economic security, industrial policy, competitiveness, technological sovereignty and resilience. They are treated as distinct but related areas of policy adaptation. The dimensions do not represent separate stages of integration, nor are they assumed to produce integration independently. Their analytical value lies in showing where geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures are translated into changes in European policy priorities and where links between policy areas become visible.

The six dimensions address different analytical objects. Security concerns refer primarily to protection against external threats and the capacity to act in the security domain. Economic security concerns exposure to external dependencies in trade, investment, energy and supply chains. Industrial policy concerns the capacity to maintain or develop production in sectors considered important for European economic security and competitiveness. Competitiveness refers to productivity, innovation and investment conditions that shape the performance of European firms and the wider economy. Technological sovereignty concerns the capacity to maintain access to, develop and control critical technologies. Resilience concerns the ability of European institutions and economies to absorb, adjust to and recover from external disruption. The dimensions may overlap in individual policy measures, but such overlap concerns the instruments through which policy objectives are pursued, not the analytical object of the dimension itself. For example, economic security concerns exposure to external dependencies, whereas competitiveness concerns the conditions shaping productivity, innovation and investment; similarly, industrial policy concerns production capacity, while technological sovereignty concerns access to, development of and control over critical technologies.

The selection of six dimensions follows a substantive criterion: each dimension captures a recurrent policy objective that cannot be reduced to the object of another dimension without losing an important part of the observed policy change. Operationally, a dimension was retained as distinct where it combined a specific policy objective with a distinguishable analytical object and identifiable policy responses that could not be fully captured by another dimension. The framework does not treat the number six as fixed for all future applications. It reflects the policy configuration examined in this study and can be adjusted in other empirical settings where different patterns of geopolitical adaptation are observed.

The interaction among these dimensions generates what this article conceptualises as Geopolitical Adaptive Integration. In this understanding, adaptation is not treated as an additional policy objective but as the process through which the European Union reorients its integration logic in response to evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions. The outcome is a form of integration in which market efficiency remains important but is complemented by security, resilience and long-term strategic capacity [18].

This analytical framework provides the basis for the empirical analysis presented in the following sections. The empirical analysis is organised around the six analytical dimensions specified above, which are used as deductive categories for examining how geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures are reflected in European policy responses.

The subsequent analysis examines these dimensions across policy sectors and identifies how external pressures are reflected in specific policy responses, using the distinguishing analytical objects specified in Table 1. The dimensions are not treated as independent policy fields. The analysis focuses on their points of connection, particularly where a policy response addresses more than one type of vulnerability or requires coordination across different areas of European governance. The distinction between ordinary policy adjustment and geopolitical adaptation is made by examining whether external pressures, identified vulnerabilities and cross-sectoral policy responses are connected within the European policy process.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration.

Analytical Dimension	Primary Policy Objective	Distinguishing Analytical Object	Representative EU Policy Instruments/Documents
Security	Protection against external threats	Defence capacity and ability to act in the security domain	Strategic Compass; CSDP
Economic Security	Reduction in external dependencies	Exposure to trade, investment, energy and supply-chain dependencies	European Economic Security Strategy
Industrial Policy	Strengthening production capacity	Domestic productive capacity in strategically relevant sectors	Net-Zero Industry Act
Competitiveness	Improving economic performance	Productivity, innovation and investment conditions	Draghi Report; Letta Report
Technological Sovereignty	Securing critical technological capabilities	Access to, development and control of critical technologies	European Chips Act
Resilience	Reducing vulnerability to external disruption	Capacity to absorb, adjust to and recover from external shocks	Critical Raw Materials Act

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

For analytical purposes, adaptation is identified where three elements occur together: an identifiable external geopolitical or geoeconomic pressure, a policy response addressing a related vulnerability, and coordination across more than one policy domain or through an existing European integration mechanism. Policy changes that cannot be linked to these elements are treated as ordinary sector-specific adjustment. Conversely, evidence would be inconsistent with the adaptive interpretation where external geopolitical or geoeconomic pressure is followed predominantly by unilateral national measures, without sustained cross-sectoral coordination or a policy response addressing the identified vulnerability.

Policy developments can therefore be interpreted as interconnected components of a transformation in the logic of European integration. Such an approach facilitates a

more comprehensive interpretation of the Union's evolving role within a more contested international order.

Figure 1 summarises the analytical framework developed in this article. It shows the proposed mechanism through which external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures may be translated into policy re-prioritisation, cross-sectoral coordination and institutional adaptation. The mechanism is relational, not deterministic: external pressure becomes relevant for integration when it is translated into a recognised vulnerability, followed by policy re-prioritisation and coordination across domains. The framework does not assume that these stages follow automatically from one another; it identifies the conditions under which they can become connected within the European policy process. The six analytical dimensions are presented as the areas through which this adaptive process is examined.

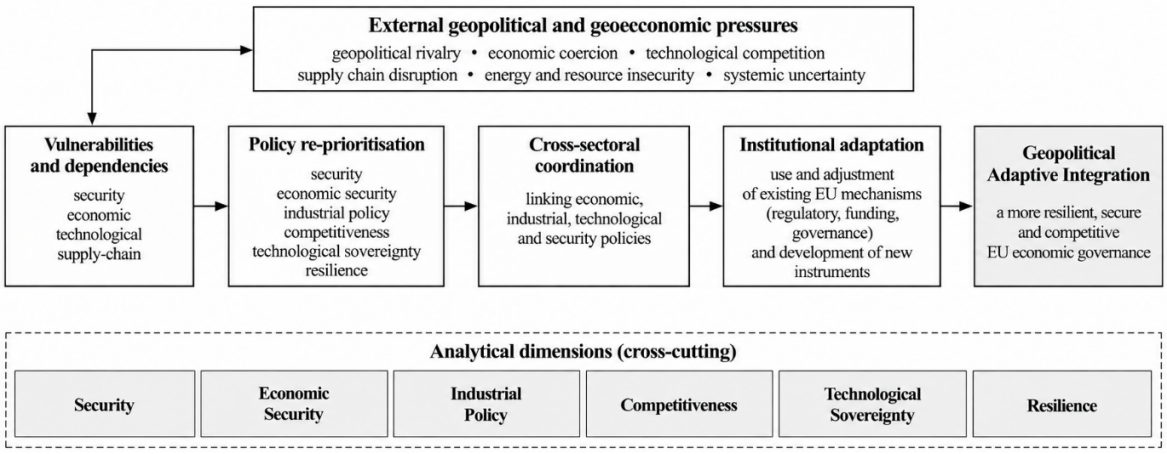


Figure 1. Analytical Framework and Mechanism of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The framework does not imply a linear institutional transformation of the European Union. The sequence shown in Figure 1 represents an analytical mechanism, not a fixed causal chain in which every external pressure produces the same policy response. The framework assumes that external pressures become relevant for integration when they expose vulnerabilities, contribute to policy re-prioritisation and generate coordination across policy sectors. Institutional adaptation may then occur through existing European Union mechanisms. The following Section 3 explains how this framework is operationalised in the empirical analysis.

While Figure 1 presents the proposed adaptive mechanism, Figure 2 provides an evidence-based mapping of the selected European Union policy frameworks across the six analytical dimensions.

EU policy framework / document	Security	Economic Security	Industrial Policy	Competitiveness	Technological Sovereignty	Resilience
Strategic Compass (2022)	●					
European Economic Security Strategy (2023)		●			●	●
European Chips Act (2023)			●	●	●	
Critical Raw Materials Act (2024)		●	●			●
Net-Zero Industry Act (2024)			●	●		●
European Defence Industrial Strategy (2024)	●		●		●	●
Draghi Report (2024)		●	●	●	●	●
Letta Report (2024)		●	●	●		●

Figure 2. Documentary Mapping of Selected EU Policy Frameworks across the Six Analytical Dimensions. Source: Authors' own coding based on the selected EU policy documents analysed in this study [4–6,19–22].

The mapping is derived from the documentary coding described in Section 3 and shows how the selected policy frameworks provide evidence for the six analytical dimensions. It is intended as an empirical mapping of the documentary corpus, not as a frequency measure of policy importance.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine how geopolitical and geoeconomic developments are reshaping the logic of European integration. Given the conceptual nature of the research question, the study does not seek to measure causal relationships through quantitative indicators. It focuses on explaining institutional and policy changes by analysing how the European Union has adapted its strategic priorities and governance mechanisms in response to a changing international environment.

The research combines three complementary qualitative methods: document analysis, institutional analysis and comparative policy analysis. Document analysis constitutes the principal methodological approach and examines both academic literature and official European Union policy documents relevant to the Union's evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic agenda. Institutional analysis is used to assess changes in policy objectives, institutional priorities and governance instruments, while comparative policy analysis identifies common patterns across different policy domains.

The documentary material was organised into three complementary source groups. The first consisted of peer-reviewed academic publications addressing European integration, geopolitics, geoeconomics, economic security and industrial policy, published primarily between 2019 and 2026. These sources provided the theoretical and interpretive basis for the analysis. The second comprised selected policy and research outputs used where they provided relevant empirical or institutional evidence. The third, which constituted the core documentary corpus for the cross-document analysis, consisted of major European Union policy frameworks and institutional reports addressing the geopolitical adaptation of European governance. The core corpus included the Strategic Compass, the European Economic Security Strategy, the European Chips Act, the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Net-Zero Industry Act, the European Defence Industrial Strategy, the Draghi Report and the Letta Report [5,6,19–22].

The selection of these documents was purposive, not based on a systematic literature-review protocol. Documents were included where they met three substantive criteria: direct relevance to the research question, importance for the Union's evolving policy orientation, and analytical relevance for examining links between external geopolitical or geoeconomic pressures and European policy responses. The academic literature and additional policy outputs were used to contextualise and interpret the core documentary corpus, while official European Union documents were used as primary evidence of institutional and policy responses.

Because the study was designed as a qualitative conceptual and documentary analysis, not as a systematic literature review, the corpus was not generated through a predefined database search string or a formal screening protocol. Accordingly, database hit counts and search-term frequencies are not treated as methodological indicators in this study. The purpose of source selection was to identify analytically relevant academic and institutional material capable of documenting the relationship between external pressures, policy responses and changes in European integration. This approach means that the coding procedure was used as an analytical organising device, not as a quantitative measurement of document frequency. The coding matrix served to structure the interpretation of recurring policy objectives, vulnerabilities, institutional responses and cross-sectoral connections.

The coding was conducted manually using the structured coding matrix; no qualitative data analysis software was used.

The empirical material combines academic interpretations with selected policy and research outputs and official European Union policy documents. The academic literature provides the theoretical basis for analysing the changing drivers of European integration, drawing on the classical contributions of Haas (2004), Moravcsik (2013), and Hooghe and Marks (2019), together with work by McNamara (2024), Dür, Mateo and Visart (2026), Demirci, Freudlsperger and Schimmelfennig (2026), and Anghel (2025) [8–11,13–16]. The policy documents complement this perspective by capturing the European Union's policy priorities in areas such as competitiveness, industrial policy, economic security, technological development and the future of the Single Market. The analysis examines these documents as individual policy initiatives and for recurring connections between policy objectives, external vulnerabilities and institutional responses.

The analytical procedure followed four consecutive stages. The first stage identified the principal geopolitical and geoeconomic developments discussed across the selected academic and policy literature. The second examined how these developments were reflected in the European Union's evolving policy priorities and institutional responses. During the third stage, the documentary corpus was analysed through iterative qualitative coding using a structured coding matrix that combined deductive categories derived from the research question and the analytical framework with inductive coding allowing additional recurring themes to emerge from the examined sources. Each document in the core documentary corpus was examined in relation to the same analytical categories, while individual documents could contribute evidence to more than one dimension where their policy content addressed different types of vulnerability or policy objective. The coding focused on recurring references to policy objectives, external vulnerabilities, institutional responses and links between policy domains. The six analytical dimensions specified in Section 2.3—security, economic security, industrial policy, competitiveness, technological sovereignty and resilience—were used as the principal deductive categories, while inductive coding was used to identify additional recurring themes and connections within these dimensions. In the final stage, the coded material was synthesised within the proposed framework of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration to support the interpretation of the empirical findings presented in the following sections.

Comparative policy analysis was applied across policy sectors, not across Member States. It examined similarities and differences in the ways security, industrial, technological, trade and enlargement policies responded to common geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures. This cross-sectoral comparison made it possible to identify common patterns of institutional adaptation extending beyond individual policy areas.

The methodological approach has two principal strengths. First, combining academic literature with official European Union strategic documents makes it possible to compare theoretical interpretations with policy developments. Second, the combination of complementary qualitative methods enables the analysis to move beyond the description of individual policy initiatives and identify recurring patterns of institutional adaptation across different policy domains. The six analytical dimensions specified in Section 2.3 served as deductive analytical categories through which the empirical evidence was organised and interpreted throughout the Section 4, while inductive coding was used to identify additional recurring themes and connections within these categories.

The study has certain limitations. As a qualitative conceptual analysis, it does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of individual European Union policies or establish statistical relationships between geopolitical developments and specific policy outcomes. Its objective is to provide a theoretically informed explanation of how geopolitical and geoeconomic

pressures have influenced the evolving logic of European integration. This focus is consistent with the article's analytical purpose and provides the foundation for the empirical analysis presented in the following Section 4.

Table 2 summarises the research design and analytical procedure applied in this study. It presents the sequential stages of the research process, the corresponding methodological procedures and the principal analytical outputs generated at each stage. Together, these stages illustrate how the theoretical framework was operationalised and subsequently applied in the empirical analysis.

Table 2. Research Design and Operationalisation of the Analytical Framework.

Stage	Procedure	Output
Literature review	Academic literature	Theoretical concepts
Document analysis	EU strategic documents	Policy priorities
Qualitative coding	Deductive and inductive coding using the coding matrix	Organised empirical evidence across the six analytical dimensions
Analytical synthesis	Integration and interpretation of empirical findings	Geopolitical Adaptive Integration framework

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

4. Results

The empirical analysis is organised around the six analytical dimensions specified in the framework: security, economic security, industrial policy, competitiveness, technological sovereignty and resilience. These dimensions are not examined as isolated policy fields. Economic security and competitiveness are examined together in Section 4.1, industrial policy and technological sovereignty in Section 4.2, while security is examined through enlargement in Section 4.3. Resilience is treated as a cross-cutting dimension where policy responses address vulnerability to external disruption across these areas.

Table 1 specifies the analytical objects and policy objectives associated with these dimensions, while Table 3 presents selected empirical indicators and policy targets used to illustrate their operationalisation. The evidentiary basis is not identical across the six dimensions: security and economic security are illustrated partly through observed developments, competitiveness through an investment estimate, while industrial policy, technological sovereignty and resilience are examined mainly through policy targets and institutional measures.

Table 3. Empirical Indicators and Strategic Commitments across the Analytical Dimensions.

Analytical Dimension	Primary Strategic Focus	Key EU Legislative & Policy Framework	Evidence Type and Illustrative Indicator, Target or Estimate
Security	Territorial defence & strategic autonomy	Strategic Compass; CSDP	Observed outcome: €418 bn defence spending in 2025, equivalent to 2.2% of EU GDP [23]
Economic Security	De-risking & reducing unilateral dependencies	EU Economic Security Strategy; REPowerEU	Observed outcome: Russia's share of EU gas imports fell from approximately 45% in 2021 to approximately 13% in 2025 [24]

Table 3. *Cont.*

Analytical Dimension	Primary Strategic Focus	Key EU Legislative & Policy Framework	Evidence Type and Illustrative Indicator, Target or Estimate
Industrial Policy	Domestic production capacity building	Net-Zero Industry Act	Policy target: clean-tech manufacturing capacity approaching at least 40% of annual deployment needs by 2030 [22]
Competitiveness	Innovation, investment & capital integration	Draghi & Letta Reports; Single Market Strategy	Estimated additional annual investment requirement: €750–800 bn (around 4–5% of EU GDP) [6] (Draghi, 2024)
Technological Sovereignty	Control over critical digital/industrial tech	European Chips Act	Policy target: increasing the EU share of global semiconductor production towards 20% by 2030 [19]
Resilience	Strategic raw materials & supply chain robustness	Critical Raw Materials Act	Policy target: no more than 65% of EU annual consumption of any strategic raw material from a single third country by 2030 [20]

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the sources individually identified in each table entry.

The following sections examine the six analytical dimensions through selected policy sectors and empirical indicators. Although presented in distinct subsections, the dimensions interact across the European Union's policy framework. The analysis considers changes within individual policy areas and how external pressures, identified vulnerabilities and policy responses connect across sectors within the adaptive process conceptualised in this article as Geopolitical Adaptive Integration.

4.1. Economic Security and Competitiveness as New Drivers of Integration

The analysis indicates that economic security and competitiveness have become two important drivers shaping the current phase of European integration. Although both concepts have long been present in European policymaking, their role has changed substantially. They are no longer treated primarily as objectives of economic policy but serve as instruments through which the European Union responds to geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges. The change reflects a fundamental redefinition of integration priorities, where economic performance is closely linked with the Union's capacity to protect critical interests and preserve its strategic position in a highly competitive international environment.

This development is particularly evident in the European Union's approach to economic security. Traditionally, European integration was based on the assumption that greater economic openness would strengthen prosperity and political stability. Experience has exposed the limitations of this assumption. These vulnerabilities are further reflected in quantitative evidence. According to the European Commission, the European Union depends on imports for more than 90% of several strategic raw materials. China supplies approximately 100% of the Union's heavy rare earth elements, around 97% of its magnesium and about 63% of its natural graphite, illustrating the extent of external dependencies in sectors essential for the green and digital transitions [20].

Within the analytical framework, the Critical Raw Materials Act is mapped primarily to resilience because its principal analytical object is the reduction in vulnerability to external supply disruption. Its relevance to industrial policy and technological sovereignty is cross-cutting, reflecting the fact that the same policy instrument can address more than one type of vulnerability.

Disruptions to global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic, intensifying technological rivalry between the United States and China, Russia's use of energy exports as a political instrument and the increasing use of economic coercion have demonstrated that external economic interdependence may generate serious vulnerabilities (Newman et al., 2021) [25]. As a consequence, the European Union has expanded its understanding of security beyond the military domain to include trade, investment, technology, energy and access to critical raw materials [26]. This expanded interpretation is reflected in the European Economic Security Strategy and related policy initiatives, which seek to reduce excessive critical dependencies while preserving the benefits of an open economy [27].

The transformation of the Union's approach to economic security is illustrated by the experience of Russian natural gas imports. Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European Union relied on Russia for approximately 45% of its natural gas imports. By 2025, Russia's share of EU gas imports had fallen to approximately 13%, reflecting diversification measures, increased LNG imports and reduced dependence on Russian gas [24]. The change in import patterns illustrates how geopolitical developments became reflected in European energy policy, with supply diversification moving from an economic consideration towards a policy priority.

Competitiveness has undergone a similar conceptual transformation. The Draghi Report argues that Europe's long-term prosperity depends not only on productivity and innovation but also on its ability to maintain technological leadership, mobilise investment and strengthen industrial capabilities in key sectors. The report estimates that maintaining Europe's long-term competitiveness will require additional annual investment of approximately EUR 750–800 billion, equivalent to around 4–5% of the European Union's GDP. This scale of investment illustrates that competitiveness is now regarded as an essential requirement, not merely an economic objective [6].

Competitiveness depends on differences in export specialisation and the identification of realistic export opportunities across countries and sectors. Evidence from the Southern Euro Area shows that export opportunities vary substantially across countries and product groups, highlighting the importance of sectoral specialisation for understanding competitiveness (Konstantakopoulou & Tsionas, 2024) [28].

Competitiveness is presented as a prerequisite for economic resilience and geopolitical influence, not merely as an indicator of market performance. The Letta Report reaches comparable conclusions by emphasising that the future development of the Single Market requires deeper integration in areas such as energy, digital infrastructure, finance and research, where fragmentation weakens the Union's ability to compete globally [5]. Together, these reports treat competitiveness as a key asset connected with the European Union's economic security and long-term capacity to act autonomously.

The relationship between economic security and competitiveness illustrates how external vulnerabilities can influence the priorities of European integration. Earlier stages of integration primarily sought to remove barriers within the internal market and improve the allocation of economic resources. Current policies continue to pursue these objectives, but they address vulnerabilities arising from external dependencies and geopolitical pressures. Measures supporting innovation, diversification of supply chains, protection of critical technologies and investment in key sectors perform a dual function [29]. They support economic performance while reducing vulnerabilities that may constrain the Union's capacity to act.

From the perspective of the analytical framework proposed in this article, these developments represent more than an adjustment of economic policy. They indicate how external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures reorient the integration process by connecting market governance with security objectives. Economic security and competitiveness thus

emerge as mutually reinforcing dimensions of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration, illustrating how the European Union adapts its integration process to a changing international environment without abandoning the principles of an open market economy.

4.2. Industrial Policy and Technological Sovereignty

Industrial policy has re-emerged as one of the defining features of the European Union's response to geopolitical and geoeconomic change. For much of the integration process, industrial policy occupied a relatively limited place within the Union's economic model, which relied primarily on market competition, regulatory harmonisation and external openness [30]. That balance has changed. The objective is no longer confined to improving industrial performance but extends to securing production capacities, reducing critical dependencies and strengthening Europe's position in sectors that shape long-term economic and political influence [31].

This reorientation is visible across several initiatives. The European Chips Act, the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act all address vulnerabilities exposed by disruptions in global value chains and by the concentration of production outside Europe [32]. The European Chips Act mobilises more than EUR 43 billion in public and private investment with the objective of increasing the European Union's share of global semiconductor production from around 10% in 2020 towards 20% by 2030. These targets illustrate the increasing importance of technological capabilities within the Union's industrial strategy [19].

Although these measures operate in different policy fields, they pursue a common objective: strengthening domestic capabilities in areas where prolonged external dependence could constrain the Union's freedom of action [33]. Industrial policy has become closely connected with economic security and strategic planning, no longer functioning as a separate area of economic [13,34].

These initiatives illustrate a significant change in the Union's approach to industrial governance. Their significance lies in the individual policy instruments adopted and in the way they combine regulatory measures, investment support and closer coordination within a common framework. This suggests that industrial policy is conceived as an instrument for strengthening the Union's long-term capacity to manage geopolitical and geoeconomic risks, not solely for improving economic performance.

This policy reorientation exposes important internal tensions within the European Union. While the Letta and Draghi reports emphasise the need for stronger industrial investment and closer coordination, they acknowledge that fragmented markets, uneven investment capacities and differences in Member States' fiscal resources may constrain the effective implementation of common industrial objectives [5,6]. Geopolitical adaptation requires balancing public intervention with the principles of fair competition and cohesion that have traditionally underpinned European integration [35].

These considerations have influenced the design of the Union's major industrial policy initiatives. The European Chips Act illustrates this institutional shift in the Union's approach to industrial policy. Beyond market regulation, the European Union has assumed a more active coordinating function by combining financial support, regulatory measures and cooperation between Member States, research institutions and private industry. This reflects a departure from the traditional emphasis on market integration towards a model in which public authorities actively facilitate the development of industrial capacities [19].

McNamara interprets this evolution as evidence of a geopolitical turn in European economic governance. Industrial policy is no longer justified solely by economic efficiency or regional development. It has become part of a wider effort to preserve technological capacity, sustain industrial production in key sectors and maintain Europe's ability to com-

pete under conditions of systemic international rivalry [13]. In this setting, the boundaries between economic policy, foreign policy and security policy become less distinct, reflecting a different understanding of the relationship between markets and state intervention.

Technological sovereignty complements this transformation. Digital infrastructure, semiconductor production, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing and access to critical technologies are now regarded as assets with direct security value [36]. Dependence on external suppliers in these sectors may expose the Union to political pressure, supply disruptions or technological constraints [37]. The Critical Raw Materials Act addresses these dependencies by strengthening European extraction, processing and recycling capacities and limiting dependence on a single third country [20].

European policy has shifted towards supporting domestic innovation, expanding research capacity and encouraging investment in technologies considered essential for long-term competitiveness and security (European Commission, 2024a) [38]. The emphasis is not on technological self-sufficiency but on ensuring that critical capabilities remain available within Europe or through trusted partnerships.

The relationship between industrial policy and technological sovereignty illustrates how external dependencies are translated into changes in European policy priorities. Earlier phases focused on creating common rules for competitive markets. Current initiatives retain this objective but add measures aimed at maintaining production and technological capabilities in areas where external dependence may create economic or security vulnerabilities. Market integration remains an important foundation of the European project, while industrial and technological policies are used to address vulnerabilities that cannot be managed through market integration alone.

Within the analytical framework proposed in this article, industrial policy and technological sovereignty represent two interconnected dimensions of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration. External geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures do not produce institutional change directly. They reshape policy priorities, encouraging forms of integration that combine market-based instruments with selective public intervention in strategically sensitive sectors. The resulting transformation does not replace the traditional economic logic of integration; it modifies it by incorporating considerations that previously occupied a more limited place in the Union's policy agenda.

4.3. Security and the Geopolitical Reorientation of European Integration Through Enlargement

Enlargement provides an additional policy field through which the security dimension identified in the analytical framework can be observed. Earlier enlargements were associated with democratic consolidation, economic modernisation and the extension of the Single Market. Candidate countries were expected to adopt the acquis communautaire, strengthen democratic institutions and align their economies with the rules of the internal market [39]. This logic remains relevant, but it no longer provides a sufficient explanation for the Union's enlargement policy. Enlargement is not treated here as an additional analytical dimension. It is examined as a policy field through which the security dimension can be observed, particularly where geopolitical developments alter the priorities attached to an established European integration instrument.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine altered the security environment in which enlargement decisions are made. The geopolitical impact of the war is reflected in defence expenditure. According to the European Defence Agency, combined defence spending by EU Member States exceeded EUR 418 billion in 2025, representing an increase of more than 95% compared with 2021. In terms of the share of defence spending in GDP, there was an increase of 0.7 percentage points, from 1.5% in 2021 to 2.2% in 2025 [23]. The increase in

defence expenditure indicates that security and defence considerations have become more prominent within the European policy environment [40].

The rapid granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, together with renewed political attention to the Western Balkans, reflected considerations extending beyond the traditional enlargement criteria [41]. Security, geopolitical stability and the Union's position within the European neighbourhood became integral elements of enlargement policy [42]. Membership is no longer viewed solely as the final stage of institutional convergence; it has become an instrument through which the European Union shapes its wider security environment [43].

Nevertheless, translating geopolitical priorities into concrete enlargement decisions remains politically demanding. Although external security considerations have strengthened support for enlargement, implementation continues to depend on unanimous agreement among Member States, whose national preferences do not always converge. This illustrates that geopolitical adaptation operates within existing institutional constraints and does not replace them.

The argument is consistent with the analysis of Demirci, Freudlsperger and Schimmelfennig, who argue that the Union's external boundaries are being redefined under the influence of geopolitical developments [15]. Their findings suggest that enlargement and neighbourhood policy cannot be understood independently of the changing international order. Decisions concerning accession, external borders and relations with neighbouring states reflect a geopolitical assessment of Europe's security environment alongside established legal and political requirements.

Anghel reaches a similar conclusion by arguing that the European Union has assumed a more pronounced geopolitical role. Enlargement forms part of that evolution because it extends the Union's legal order as well as its political influence and capacity to shape regional security [16]. Integration and geopolitics are no longer separate policy domains. They have become mutually reinforcing elements of the Union's external action.

These developments support the analytical framework proposed in this article. Enlargement continues to rely on established accession principles, but the policy is now more closely connected with security and geopolitical considerations alongside its established economic and political objectives [44]. In terms of the proposed framework, geopolitical pressures alter the priorities attached to an existing integration instrument without creating a new institutional mechanism. Enlargement illustrates how adaptation can occur through the reorientation of established instruments while the institutional foundations of European integration remain in place.

4.4. Geopolitical Adaptive Integration: Explaining the Transformation

The empirical analysis points to a common pattern that extends across the policy areas examined in this study. The analysed material suggests that these regulatory and legislative measures do not function in institutional isolation. Across sectors, they exhibit a shared operational logic: aligning internal market instruments with external security imperatives, indicating that sectoral initiatives form part of a reorientation. Considered together, they suggest a reorientation in the way European integration is conceived and implemented. Their common feature is not their institutional form but the underlying logic that underpins them.

Classical theories of European integration explain how cooperation develops through functional interdependence, interstate bargaining or domestic political preferences. These perspectives remain relevant because the institutional architecture of the European Union has not been fundamentally altered. The mechanisms through which decisions are adopted continue to reflect the established balance between supranational institutions and the Mem-

ber States. What has changed is the purpose for which these mechanisms are employed. External geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures have altered the policy priorities that integration is expected to address [11,45].

The distinction between institutional continuity and changing policy priorities is central to the analytical framework proposed in this article. Geopolitical Adaptive Integration does not describe a new institutional model of the European Union. It explains a change in the rationale guiding integration. Policies that once sought primarily to improve market efficiency now seek to reduce critical dependencies, strengthen technological capacity, secure critical supply chains and increase Europe's ability to respond to external shocks [46].

This policy shift corresponds with empirical evidence indicating that the European Commission identified more than 30 highly sensitive products for which the European Union remains exposed to significant external dependencies, particularly in advanced technologies, pharmaceuticals, batteries and critical raw materials [47]. The objective is no longer confined to maximising economic welfare. It encompasses the preservation of the Union's capacity to act under conditions of heightened international uncertainty.

The empirical examples examined in this study point in a similar direction. Changes in energy policy following the reduction in Russian gas imports, investment in semiconductor production, measures addressing critical raw materials and higher defence expenditure all emerged within different policy domains. Taken together, these examples indicate a common adaptive logic: reducing critical vulnerabilities while preserving the institutional continuity of European integration.

The empirical findings show that the six dimensions operate in combination rather than as isolated areas of policy adaptation. The same external pressure may affect several dimensions, while a single policy response may address more than one vulnerability. Their interaction can modify the rationale of integration without requiring a change in its institutional foundations.

Taken together, these findings help explain why the European Union has not abandoned its traditional economic model despite the emergence of new strategic priorities. Market integration, regulatory coordination and economic openness remain essential characteristics of the European project. They are complemented, however, by policies designed to protect critical capacities and reduce vulnerabilities in areas with direct implications for the Union's security and long-term competitiveness. Adaptation takes place through the gradual expansion of integration objectives while the existing integration model remains in place.

The concept of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration provides a coherent analytical framework for interpreting this evolution. It connects developments that are frequently analysed in isolation and helps explain how they collectively contribute to a reorientation of the rationale of European integration. The framework offers a basis for examining future policy developments, as geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures are likely to remain a defining feature of the European Union's external environment.

5. Discussion

The findings presented in this study suggest that the evolution of the European Union cannot be fully explained through a single theoretical perspective. Classical approaches remain indispensable for understanding the institutional architecture of European integration, but they offer only a partial explanation of the forces shaping its present direction. The empirical analysis indicates that external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures have become an integral part of the integration process, influencing policy priorities without fundamentally altering the institutional mechanisms through which European decisions are adopted. This distinction helps explain why the European Union displays continuity in its

governance structures while simultaneously changing the objectives that those structures are expected to achieve.

Beyond their individual sector-specific implications, the collective trajectory of these policies highlights a theoretical point: external geopolitical pressures can connect formerly distinct policy domains under shared security-related priorities without requiring formal treaty change. Economic security, industrial policy, technological sovereignty, competitiveness and enlargement are frequently examined within separate strands of literature.

Although such an approach captures developments within individual policy domains, it offers only a partial explanation of how these policies collectively influence the evolution of European integration. Examining them together reveals a common pattern: each reflects an effort to reduce vulnerabilities created by an international environment characterised by geopolitical rivalry, technological competition and economic coercion [48]. Their interaction is more informative than any individual policy instrument considered in isolation.

Viewed collectively, these empirical developments suggest that the proposed analytical framework captures a common pattern extending across multiple policy fields. The examined initiatives reveal a gradual reorientation of European integration towards objectives that combine economic openness with security, resilience and long-term institutional capacity [49]. The findings do not exclude alternative explanations such as crisis-driven policy responses, institutional path dependence or issue-specific bargaining among Member States; these mechanisms may coexist with the cross-domain adaptive pattern identified here.

The available indicators are consistent with this interpretation. International indicators show that competitiveness has become a more prominent component of European policymaking. While the European Union remains one of the world's largest economies, productivity growth and innovation performance have lagged behind major competitors over the past decade, reinforcing the policy concerns highlighted in the Letta and Draghi reports [50].

The analysis also complements contributions that describe the European Union as an emerging geopolitical actor. McNamara associates the return of industrial policy with the Union's geopolitical turn, while Dür, Mateo and Visart demonstrate how economic security has become embedded in external economic policy [13,14]. Demirci, Freudlsperger and Schimmelfennig show that geopolitical considerations influence enlargement and external boundary formation, whereas Anghel argues that the Union's external role has acquired a stronger geopolitical dimension. The present analysis does not challenge these interpretations (Anghel, 2025) [15,16]. It brings them together within a single analytical framework that explains how developments identified in different policy fields form part of a common adaptive process.

The adaptive process identified in this study, however, should not be interpreted as internally uncontested. Efforts to strengthen economic security, industrial capacity and technological sovereignty may generate trade-offs between policy objectives and established principles of market integration, fiscal equality and decision-making within the European Union. The long-term effectiveness of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration will depend not only on external pressures but also on the Union's capacity to reconcile these internal tensions without undermining the coherence of the integration process.

These internal constraints define the conditions under which Geopolitical Adaptive Integration unfolds in practice. External geopolitical pressures may encourage closer policy coordination, but they cannot eliminate differences in national political preferences, fiscal capacities or economic structures across Member States. The adaptive logic proposed in this article should not be understood as a uniform or automatic process of integration. Its

practical expression will continue to vary across policy domains and remain dependent on political agreement among the Member States.

The same external pressures may produce fragmentation or renationalisation when Member States respond primarily through national measures or when agreement on common European responses cannot be reached. The framework does not assume that geopolitical pressure necessarily produces further integration. Its analytical value lies in identifying the conditions under which external pressures are translated into cross-sectoral coordination and adaptation through existing European mechanisms. Where such coordination remains limited, the same pressures may reinforce divergent national responses.

In the material examined here, however, the evidence points more consistently towards adaptive integration than towards fragmentation or renationalisation. The selected policy responses were predominantly organised through existing European mechanisms and increasingly connected across policy domains, while national differences and implementation constraints remained present. The adaptive interpretation provides a closer explanation of the observed combination of institutional continuity, cross-sectoral coordination and changing policy priorities.

The proposed framework of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration should be understood as a conceptual tool, not as a competing theory of European integration. Its purpose is not to replace neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism or postfunctionalism. Each of these approaches continues to explain important aspects of European integration, particularly institutional development, interstate bargaining and domestic political contestation. The framework developed in this article addresses a different analytical question: how external geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions influence the evolving purpose of integration. It focuses on adaptation in policy orientation, not institutional transformation. This distinction makes it possible to reconcile continuity in the European Union's institutional architecture with substantial change in the underlying rationale of integration, avoiding the false assumption that policy adaptation necessarily requires institutional redesign.

Its added analytical value lies in linking external pressure to changes in the purpose and coordination of integration without assuming that such change must produce new competences or treaty reform. Concepts such as geopoliticisation and the geopolitical turn identify the increasing importance of geopolitical considerations in European policymaking, while open strategic autonomy captures a policy orientation towards preserving openness while reducing critical dependencies. Geopolitical Adaptive Integration addresses a different analytical question: how these external pressures and policy orientations become connected across policy domains and contribute to a reorientation of the rationale of integration. This allows developments that appear sector-specific when examined separately to be interpreted as related responses to common external pressures and vulnerabilities.

The distinction between policy adaptation and institutional transformation also has implications beyond the present study. If geopolitical competition, technological rivalry and economic security remain enduring characteristics of the international environment, adaptation is likely to become a permanent feature of European integration, not merely a temporary response to exceptional circumstances. Future integration may depend less on expanding competences than on the capacity to coordinate policies across sectors where economic performance, security and technological capability are closely interconnected. Such a trajectory would preserve the institutional foundations of the European Union while gradually redefining the strategic objectives pursued through integration [51–53].

The proposed framework has limitations. It has been developed from qualitative analysis of policy developments and is intended to explain the current phase of European integration. Its applicability should be examined through comparative research covering other periods of integration as well as empirical studies evaluating how geopolitical pres-

sures influence policy implementation across individual Member States. Such research would help determine whether the adaptive logic identified in this article represents a lasting characteristic of European integration or a response associated primarily with the present international environment.

6. Conclusions

This article examined how geopolitical and geoeconomic developments are reshaping the logic of European integration. The analysis suggests that changes in European Union policies cannot be interpreted solely as responses to individual crises or sector-specific challenges. They reflect an ongoing adaptation of the integration process to an international environment characterised by geopolitical rivalry, economic coercion, technological competition and heightened concerns over critical dependencies.

The study addressed the following research question: How have geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures transformed the logic of European integration, and what do these changes reveal about the future development of the European Union? The findings indicate that these pressures have not altered the institutional foundations of the European Union. They have changed the objectives pursued through integration. Economic security, competitiveness, industrial policy, technological sovereignty and resilience are interconnected analytical dimensions of this process, while enlargement provides a policy field through which its security dimension can be observed. Together, they form interconnected elements of a process through which the European Union adapts its integration strategy to changing external conditions.

Policy initiatives, including investment exceeding EUR 43 billion under the European Chips Act, the objective of reducing excessive dependence on individual suppliers of critical raw materials and substantially higher defence expenditure across Member States, illustrate that this transformation is reflected in policy discourse and in measurable policy commitments.

The principal contribution of this article lies in the proposed analytical framework of Geopolitical Adaptive Integration. The article does not present it as an alternative theory of European integration. It develops Geopolitical Adaptive Integration as an analytical framework for interpreting the Union's current phase of development. The framework explains how external geopolitical and geoeconomic pressures influence policy priorities and gradually reshape the rationale of integration while leaving its institutional architecture largely intact. In doing so, it complements established approaches to European integration by directing attention to a dimension that has gained particular importance in the evolving international environment.

The analysis suggests that the relationship between economic governance and security is likely to remain fundamental to the future evolution of the European Union. Questions concerning technological capacity, industrial competitiveness, institutional resilience and economic security are expected to remain closely connected with the Union's ability to protect its interests and maintain its role within the international system. Understanding these interactions will remain an important task for both researchers and policymakers.

The present study has focused on the conceptual and institutional dimensions of this transformation. Future research may extend this analysis by examining how the adaptive logic identified in this article is reflected in specific policy sectors, individual Member States or comparative regional organisations. Such studies would provide further evidence for assessing the applicability of the proposed analytical framework and its usefulness for explaining the continuing evolution of European integration.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.P. and A.V.; methodology, M.K. and D.G.; validation, T.P.; formal analysis, M.K.; investigation, T.P.; resources, T.P.; data curation, M.K.; writing—original

draft preparation, T.P.; writing—review and editing, T.P.; visualisation, T.P.; supervision, A.V. and D.G.; project administration, T.P.; funding acquisition, D.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was conducted under a scientific grant provided by the Grant Agency of the University of Economics and Management in Bratislava, No. IGA 1/2026—Tax Burden of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Its Impact on Competitiveness.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, as the research involved exclusively the analysis of publicly available strategic documents, secondary data, and existing literature, posing no risk to human subjects.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available policy documents, reports, and statistical databases of the European Union and relevant international organisations. All primary and secondary sources utilised in the analysis are cited within the bibliography.

Acknowledgments: AI-assisted language support (Gemini (the ordinary free version)) was used solely as an editorial and linguistic aid to improve the quality and clarity of English expression and the accuracy of specialised terminology. It was not used to generate scientific ideas, research results, analytical conclusions, or scientific contributions presented in the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Munkøe, M. Strategic approach to mitigating Europe's critical dependencies. *Intereconomics* **2026**, *61*, 180–188. [CrossRef]
2. Sougli, E.R. Open Strategic Autonomy: The European Union's Legal Approach to Geoeconomic Competition, Global Trade, and Digital Governance. In *Springer Studies in Law & Geoeconomics*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2026; pp. 1–22. [CrossRef]
3. Babić, M.; Dixon, A.D.; Liu, I.T. (Eds.) *The Political Economy of Geoeconomics: Europe in a Changing World Order*; Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland, 2022.
4. European Commission. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on "European Economic Security Strategy"*; JOIN(2023) 20 final; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2023. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023JC0020 (accessed on 1 August 2026).
5. Letta, E. *Much More Than Market*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
6. Draghi, M. *The Draghi Report on EU Competitiveness*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en#paragraph_47059 (accessed on 1 August 2026).
7. Höra, E.; Weiss, S. *The New Geo-Economic Instruments of the European Union*; Bertelsmann Stiftung: Gütersloh, Germany, 2024. [CrossRef]
8. Haas, E.B. *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950–1957*, 1st ed.; University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, IN, USA, 2004. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/100books/file/EN-H-BW-0038-The-uniting-of-Europe.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
9. Moravcsik, A. *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA, 2013.
10. Hooghe, L.; Marks, G. Grand theories of European integration in the twenty-first century. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2019**, *26*, 1113–1133. [CrossRef]
11. Freudlsperger, C.; Schramm, L. Assessing external pressures: European integration in the geopolitical age. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2026**, *33*, 2063–2088. [CrossRef]
12. Meunier, S.; Nicolaïdis, K. The geopoliticization of European trade and investment policy. *JCMS J. Common Mark. Stud.* **2019**, *57*, 103–113. [CrossRef]
13. McNamara, K.R. Transforming Europe? The EU's industrial policy and geopolitical turn. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2024**, *31*, 2371–2396. [CrossRef]
14. Dür, A.; Mateo, G.; Visart, L. Geopolitics meets business interests: The EU and European economic security. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2026**, *33*, 2114–2141. [CrossRef]

15. Demirci, B.B.; Freudlsperger, C.; Schimmelfennig, F. Geopolitical rebordering? External boundary formation in the European Union. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2026**, *33*, 2089–2113. [CrossRef]
16. Anghel, V. Why the EU is a geopolitical power: Wartime enlargement, integration, and reform. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2025**, *32*, 2862–2885. [CrossRef]
17. Vergouwen, R. *Europe in a World of Continental Powers: Why Institutional Reform Has Become a Geopolitical Imperativ*; European Policy Centre: Brussels, Belgium, 2026. Available online: https://www.epc.eu/publication/europe-in-a-world-of-continental-powers-why-institutional-reform-has-become-a-geopolitical-imperative/ (accessed on 1 August 2026).
18. Tocci, N. Resilience and the role of the European Union in the world. *Contemp. Secur. Policy* **2020**, *41*, 176–194. [CrossRef]
19. Council of the European Union. *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*; General Secretariat of the Council: Brussels, Belgium, 2022. Available online: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/strategic-compass/ (accessed on 1 August 2026).
20. European Commission. *European Chips Act*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2023. Available online: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-chips-act (accessed on 1 August 2026).
21. European Commission. *Net-Zero Industry Act*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/green-deal-industrial-plan/net-zero-industry-act_en (accessed on 18 September 2026).
22. European Commission. *A New European Defence Industrial Strategy: Achieving EU Readiness Through a Responsive and Resilient European Defence Industry*; JOIN(2024) 10 final; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52024JC0010 (accessed on 1 August 2026).
23. European Defence Agency. *Defence Data 2025–2026*; European Defence Agency: Brussels, Belgium, 2026. Available online: https://eda.europa.eu/publications-and-data/defence-data (accessed on 1 August 2026).
24. Council of the European Union. *Russian Gas Imports: Council Gives Final Green Light to A Stepwise Ban*; General Secretariat of the Council: Brussels, Belgium, 2026. Available online: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/01/26/russian-gas-imports-council-gives-final-greenlight-to-a-stepwise-ban/ (accessed on 29 September 2026).
25. Newman, A.L.; Drezner, D.W.; Farrell, H. *The Uses and Abuses of Weaponized Interdependence*; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham, MD, USA, 2021.
26. European Commission. *Strengthening EU Economic Security*; JOIN(2025) 977 final; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2025. Available online: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16389-2025-INIT/en/pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
27. Zuleeg, F. *Economic Security: A New EU Paradigm?* European Policy Centre: Brussels, Belgium, 2023. Available online: https://www.epc.eu/publication/Economic-security-A-new-EU-paradigm-516bc0/ (accessed on 1 August 2026).
28. Konstantakopoulou, I.; Tsionas, M. Identifying Export Opportunities: Empirical Evidence from the Southern Euro Area Countries. *Open Econ. Rev.* **2024**, *35*, 41–70. [CrossRef]
29. Scott, J.; Quaglia, L. Geoeconomics and financial statecraft in the European Union: The case of critical market infrastructures. *J. Int. Econ. Law* **2025**, *28*, 490–504. [CrossRef]
30. Tagliapietra, S. *EU Strategic Autonomy and Industrial Policy*; Bruegel: Brussels, Belgium, 2023. Available online: https://www.bruegel.org/news/eu-strategic-autonomy-and-industrial-policy (accessed on 1 August 2026).
31. Zurstrassen, D. Learning from the past? EU industrial policy challenges. *Governance* **2025**, *8*, e70068. [CrossRef]
32. Poitiers, N.; Weil, P. *Is the EU Chips Act the Right Approach?* Bruegel: Brussels, Belgium, 2022. Available online: https://www.bruegel.org/blog-post/eu-chips-act-right-approach (accessed on 1 August 2026).
33. Pohl, H. Open Strategic Autonomy and the New Geoeconomics: Consequences for EU Trade Policy. Master's Thesis, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland, 2023. Available online: https://researchportal.tuni.fi/en/publications/open-strategic-autonomy-and-the-new-geoeconomics-consequences-for/fingerprints/ (accessed on 1 August 2026).
34. Ivančík, R.; Dušek, J. Transforming European security: Industrial resilience, institutional adaptation, and strategic autonomy for sustainable development. *World* **2026**, *7*, 70. [CrossRef]
35. Draghetti, G.; Tremmel, C. The Chip War and Europe's Strategic Autonomy. Voice of Youth for Change in Europe. 2026. Available online: https://voycecommunity.eu/home/f/the-chip-war-and-europe%E2%80%99s-strategic-autonomy (accessed on 1 August 2026).
36. Chang, M.; Howarth, D. Might bigger be better? How European Union competition policy became geopolitical. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2026**, *33*, 2284–2308. [CrossRef]
37. Findeisen, F.; Wernert, Y. *Meeting the Costs of Resilience: The EU's Critical Raw Materials Strategy Must Go the Extra Kilometer*; Hertie School—Jacques Delors Centre: Berlin, Germany, 2023. Available online: https://www.delorscentre.eu/fileadmin/2_Research/1_About_our_research/2_Research_centres/6_Jacques_Delors_Centre/Publications/20230630_Findeisen_Wernert_CRMA_Final.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
38. European Commission. *European Critical Raw Materials Act*; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/green-deal-industrial-plan/european-critical-raw-materials-act_en (accessed on 1 August 2026).

39. Sál, K. *The Transformation of European Security Architecture After 2022*; Institute for Politics and Society: Prague, Czech Republic, 2026. Available online: https://www.politikaspolecnost.cz/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/3_2026_The-Transformation-of-European-Security-Architecture-after-2022_IPPS_Karel-Sal.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
40. Ivančík, R.; Andrassy, V. The geopolitisation of the European Union: Strategic adaptation in a shifting global order. *World* **2026**, *7*, 97. [CrossRef]
41. European External Action Service. *2026 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*; High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: Brussels, Belgium, 2026. Available online: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2026-annual-progress-report-implementation-strategic-compass-security-and-defence_en (accessed on 1 August 2026).
42. Youngs, R.; Panchulidze, E. *EU Strategy to Face Narratives Against Democracy—With a Focus on the External Dimension*; European Parliament—Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union: Brussels, Belgium, 2025. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2025/754484/EXPO_STU(2025)754484_EN.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
43. Anghel, V.; Jones, E. The geopolitics of EU enlargement: From club to commons. *Survival* **2024**, *66*, 101–114. [CrossRef]
44. Braun, M.; Metodieva, A.; Halás, M.; Šitera, D.; Laryš, M. *The Future of EU Enlargement in a Geopolitical Perspective*; Institute of International Relations Prague: Prague, Czech Republic, 2024. Available online: https://www.iir.cz/en/the-future-of-eu-enlargement-in-a-geopolitical-perspective-1 (accessed on 1 August 2026).
45. Ivančík, R. Geopoliticising normative power: Political adaptation and strategic transformation in EU foreign policy. *J. Comp. Polit.* **2026**, *19*, 56–72. [CrossRef]
46. Arjona, R.; Connell Garcia, W.; Herghelegiu, C. The EU's Strategic Dependencies Unveiled. VoxEU/CEPR. 2023. Available online: https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/eus-strategic-dependencies-unveiled (accessed on 1 August 2026).
47. European Commission. *Strategic Dependencies and Capacities*; Commission Staff Working Document; SWD(2021) 352 final; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2021. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0352 (accessed on 1 August 2026).
48. Joseph, J.; Juncos, A.E. Conceptual politics and resilience-at-work in the European Union. *Rev. Int. Stud.* **2024**, *50*, 373–392. [CrossRef]
49. Hollander, S.; Zweers, W.; Jansen, Q. *From Economic Giant to Geopolitical Powerhouse?* Clingendael Report; Clingendael Institute: The Hague, The Netherlands, 2026. Available online: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/From_economic_giant_to_geopolitical_powerhouse.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2026).
50. European Commission. *EU Energy in Figures: Statistical Pocketbook 2025*; Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2025.
51. Zuleeg, F. *Europe's Place in the Global Permacrisis*; European Policy Centre: Brussels, Belgium, 2026. Available online: https://www.epc.eu/publication/europes-place-in-the-global-permacrisis/ (accessed on 1 August 2026).
52. European Commission. *Advanced Materials for Industrial Leadership*; Communication from the Commission, COM(2024) 98 final; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2024. Available online: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/chemicals-and-advanced-materials/advanced-materials-industrial-leadership_en (accessed on 1 August 2026).
53. European Commission. *European Innovation Scoreboard 2025*; Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2025. Available online: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/publications/all-publications/european-innovation-scoreboard-2025_en (accessed on 1 August 2026).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.