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REINDUSTRIALIZATION AS A GEOPOLITICAL PROJECT: BUILDING EUROPEAN DEFENCE SOVEREIGNTY BETWEEN WASHINGTON, BEIJING AND MOSCOW

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Abstract: This article analyzes European war reindustrialization 2022–2025 as a geopolitical project whose strategic significance transcends a cyclical reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and whose final scope depends on the trilateral relationship with Washington, Beijing and Moscow. The research applies a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative analysis of military expenditures and industrial capacities of European NATO members, comparative institutional analysis of EU regulatory instruments (EDIS, EDIP, ASAP, EDF, PESCO, Strategic Compass), and qualitative analysis of strategic documents and reports of peer-reviewed security institutions (SIPRI, IISS, EUISS) over the 2019–2025 period. Empirical findings show that the military expenditures of European NATO members rose from approximately USD 280 billion in 2019 to over USD 454 billion in 2024, with Germany recording 28%, Poland 31% and Sweden 34% growth in 2024 alone, while at the same time deepening structural dependence on US defence technology, Chinese control of strategic raw materials and the Russian security threat as a

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mobilizer. From the findings the original concept of selective strategic autonomy (SSA) is derived — a model that differs from both the Atlanticist and the neutralist paradigms and recognizes that Europe can develop sovereignty only in clearly defined sectors and only through conscious management of reciprocal dependencies. An empirically operationalized Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index) is also proposed as an analytical tool for comparing the degree of sovereignty maturity across European states. The implications indicate that European reindustrialization represents a historical inflection point whose outcome will be determined not only by the volume of investment but by the capacity to manage the trilateral geopolitical game.

Keywords: *war reindustrialization, European defence sovereignty, strategic autonomy, defence industrial complex, geopolitical reciprocity, NATO, European Union, Washington, Beijing, Moscow.*

Introduction

European war reindustrialization represents one of the most significant geopolitical transformations of the continent in this century. The period that began with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 — and which has systematically deepened through Donald Trump's second term since January 2025 and through Chinese restrictive measures on the export of strategic raw materials in late 2025 — is not merely a cyclical response to a military crisis. What is at issue is a structural reorganization of the relationship between the state, the defence industry and defence capabilities that could reshape Europe's position in the global order for the next generation (Knežević, 2025b; SIPRI, 2025; European Commission, 2024).

The empirical dimension of this transformation is impressive and fully documented. The military expenditures of European NATO members rose from approximately USD 280 billion in 2019 to over USD 454 billion in 2024 — representing cumulative growth of more than 60 percent in less than five years (SIPRI, 2025). Of 32 NATO members, as many as 18 exceeded the threshold of 2.0 percent of GDP for defence in 2024, compared with only 11 in 2023 (SIPRI, 2025). Defence expenditures of the 27 EU member states reached a record €343

billion in 2024, an increase of 19 percent over the previous year and 1.9 percent of the Union's aggregate GDP (Council of the EU, 2024; European Commission, 2024).

But behind these impressive figures lies a far more complex strategic picture. European reindustrialization is unfolding within a trilateral geopolitical configuration that simultaneously offers opportunities and imposes structural constraints. From the west, the United States under the Trump 2.0 administration systematically pushes European partners to assume a greater share of the security burden, but simultaneously continues with technological dominance that keeps Europe in functional dependence (Posen, 2025; Meijer & Brooks, 2021). From the east, the Russian Federation represents an existential security threat that acts as the primary mobilizer of reindustrialization (Posen, 2025b; Knežević, 2025a). At the same time, from the east, the People's Republic of China controls strategic raw materials — including 90 percent of global production of rare-earth magnets and 97 percent of European magnesium imports — exposing European reindustrialization to a new type of structural vulnerability (MERICS, 2025; OSW, 2025).

The central research question posed by this article is: to what extent does contemporary European war reindustrialization represent a step toward genuine European defence sovereignty, and to what extent does it reproduce (or generate new) structural dependencies on great powers within the trilateral geopolitical space? From this question three research hypotheses are derived. The first asserts that reindustrialization since 2022 is not a cyclical reaction but a structural geopolitical transformation signaling a shift toward European defence sovereignty, but that its scope differs across sectors and across national contexts. The second hypothesis asserts that the trilateral configuration of great powers (US–China–Russia) generates a specific form of strategic autonomy that differs both from the classical Atlanticist model and from the neutralist model — a model that this article names selective strategic autonomy (SSA). The third hypothesis asserts that the structural challenges of reindustrialization — fragmentation of national policies, dependence on US weapons systems, technology gaps in semiconductors and artificial intelligence, demographic pressure on the defence industrial workforce — produce a specific paradox: the

more Europe invests in autonomy, the more it discovers structural reciprocities that bind it inextricably to other actors in the system.

The original contribution of this article consists in a twofold analytical innovation. The first original element is the conceptualization of selective strategic autonomy (SSA) as a type of strategic position derived from the analysis of contemporary European policies, and one that can be distinguished from both full strategic autonomy and complete strategic dependence, as well as from neutralism. SSA recognizes that Europe can develop sovereignty only in clearly defined sectors and only through conscious management of reciprocal dependencies. The second original element is the construction of the Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index) as a quantitative analytical tool that allows comparison of European states by the degree of sovereignty maturity of their defence industries. The Index integrates three components — fiscal autonomy, industrial self-sufficiency and technological dependence — and is applied on a comparative basis for the first time in this article.

The structure of the article follows the standard logic of social-scientific research at the SCOPUS level. After the literature review and methodological discussion, the empirical results of the research are presented and organized according to the three research hypotheses, including a graphical presentation of military expenditure growth and a tabular presentation of the GRR Index for seven key European states. Four analytical sections then follow: the first analyzes the Atlantic axis — the relationship with Washington as both ally and structural constraint; the second analyzes Chinese techno-industrial dependence and its strategic implications; the third analyzes the Russian security threat as a catalyst of reindustrialization; and the fourth analyzes selective strategic autonomy as a new geopolitical model. The article concludes with a recapitulation of the hypothesis tests, an explicit statement of the original contribution and an indication of directions for future research.

The geographical and analytical framework of the article is centered on seven key European states — Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Poland, Sweden and Spain — which together account for over 80 percent of total European NATO defence spending and the entire structure of the European defence industrial base (SIPRI, 2025). The 2019–2025 timeframe deliberately encompasses the pre-war period (2019–2021), the period of escalation (2022–2023) and the period of

institutional consolidation of the reindustrialization effort (2024–2025), allowing analytical differentiation between cyclical and structural dynamics. The methodological decision not to focus exclusively on the 27 EU member states, but to include the UK as an important European defence actor that is formally outside the EU framework but structurally integrated into the European industrial base, represents a deliberate analytical choice reflecting the reality of contemporary European security architecture (IISS, 2025).

Conceptually, the article builds on broader theoretical debates about the nature of sovereignty under conditions of global interdependence. Selective strategic autonomy (SSA), as the central concept introduced, differs from classical Westphalian conceptions of sovereignty by explicitly acknowledging the inevitability of reciprocal dependencies and focusing on the capacity to manage them rather than eliminate them. This analytical position has implications that go beyond the security-industrial sector alone and can be applied to understanding contemporary strategies of middle powers in a multipolar order.

Literature Review and Methodology

Literature Review

The academic literature on European defence reindustrialization has developed in recognizable theoretical layers that are central to the topic of this article. The first layer is research on European strategic autonomy as a programmatic objective of the European Union. Howorth (2018), in his influential article published in the Journal of European Integration, analyzed the relationship between the concept of strategic autonomy and EU cooperation with NATO, laying the foundation for understanding the tension that pervades the entire project. Howorth's question — whether strategic autonomy is a threat or an opportunity for transatlantic defence relations — remains the central analytical axis of contemporary literature as well.

The second layer of the literature, intensified after 2022, focuses on the resilience and limitations of the European defence project under contemporary conditions. Meijer and Brooks (2021), in their influential article published in International Security, argued that Europe cannot provide for its own security if

the US were to strategically pull back, identifying two mutually reinforcing constraints: "strategic cacophony" of deeply different threat perceptions and severe shortfalls in military capabilities. Their study set the analytical framework that, under the conditions of Trump 2.0, has acquired additional relevance — Posen (2025) continued this line in the Survival journal, arguing that European military autonomy must first solve the question of extracting maximum combat power from existing structures before institutional arrangements can be discussed.

The third layer of the literature is devoted to the analysis of concrete institutional instruments through which the EU is trying to realize its defence project. Calcara (2020), in the Journal of European Integration, analyzed why European states sometimes cooperate and sometimes do not cooperate in defence procurement — a fundamental question that strikes at the heart of the problem of fragmentation of the European defence market. More recent work on this topic continued in the same journal through analysis of the establishment of binding commitments and supranational governance in European security and defence (A 'Europe of defence'?, 2024). Defence and Peace Economics published a study on defence partnerships and economic dynamics in PESCO countries (Defence Partnerships and Economic Dynamics, 2024) which applies a panel vector autoregressive approach to data from 25 PESCO countries in the period 1994–2022, demonstrating a statistically significant relationship between military expenditure, investment and economic growth.

The fourth layer of the literature analyzes the EU's newer initiatives in the field of defence industry. A recent article in the European Security journal ("Navigating the storm", 2025) analyzes the impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy, while an article in the same journal ("(Not) Coming of age?", 2024) unpacks the conceptual dimensions of strategic autonomy. One of the most ambitious synthetic efforts has been undertaken by the IISS Strategic Dossier on progress and shortfalls in European defence (IISS, 2025), which systematically reviews the efforts of European NATO countries to build more sovereign defence capabilities under conditions of uncertainty about US commitment.

The fifth layer of the literature comes from the framework of broader geopolitical considerations. Knežević (2025a) in his monograph on the imperial

overstretch of the United States and the Special Military Operation in Ukraine analyzed the broader geopolitical context in which European reindustrialization unfolds, advancing the thesis that the war in Ukraine is a catalyst for structural reordering of the global system. The same author developed in the Military Studies journal an analysis of European war reindustrialization as a pillar of strategic autonomy (Knežević, 2025b), a thesis on which this article builds with an extended trilateral framework.

The sixth layer of the literature comes from the analysis of specific operational and legal dimensions of the contemporary defence sector. Parthasarathy (2023) in the same journal (Military Studies) analyzed the resilience of critical port infrastructure to hybrid threats through comparative analysis of Baltic ports, identifying specific vulnerabilities directly relevant to the security dimension of reindustrialization. Mićunović (2023a) in the same issue of Military Studies analyzed the legal framework for the engagement of private military companies in armed conflicts and their compliance with the Geneva Conventions — a question that has gained additional salience with the appearance of the Russian Wagner group and the reform of private military companies in Ukraine and Africa. Yaseen (2023) developed an application of soft set theory to the resource allocation problem in military logistics, with a retrospective analysis of ISAF operations in Afghanistan — a methodological contribution relevant to contemporary planning of reindustrialization capacities.

The seventh layer of the literature comes from the field of social and cultural analysis of contemporary geopolitics. Mićunović (2023b) in the journal Critical Reflections developed Esposito's paradigm of immunization as an analytical framework for understanding post-pandemic vaccination policy in the Western Balkans, identifying a phenomenon the author calls the "inverse immunitary paradox" — a concept that provides a valuable theoretical instrument for understanding contemporary security anxieties. Risojević (2026) in his recent monograph renewed the analysis of West and East through the theory of the clash of civilizations, providing a conceptual framework that places European reindustrialization within the broader narrative of global civilizational dynamics.

Finally, the eighth layer of the literature comes from institutional documents and reports that represent the primary sources for this article. The

SIPRI Yearbook (2024) and the SIPRI Fact Sheet on military expenditure 2024 (SIPRI, 2025) represent authoritative sources of quantitative data. The EU Strategic Compass (Council of the EU, 2022), the European Defence Industrial Strategy (European Commission, 2024), the Regulation reinforcing European defence industry through common procurement (EDIRPA), the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP, 2025) form the institutional framework through which the Union realizes its reindustrialization project. The Atlantic Council (2025), EUISS (2025) and Bruegel have published thematic analyses that complete the picture.

Beyond these basic layers, particular value lies in critical evaluations of European reindustrialization efforts that have appeared in recent issues of specialized journals. Studies published in European Security, Defence and Peace Economics and the Journal of European Integration during 2024 and 2025 show that the academic community has recognized the importance of the moment and is intensively working on conceptualizing what is happening. Particularly indicative is recent work in the Journal of European Integration on the establishment of a "European iron network" as a remaking of the political economy of European defence production after the Ukraine war, which argues that a new industrial architecture is being established whose complete contours are yet to be understood. The analytical synthesis offered by this article builds on this literature but extends it by introducing the trilateral geopolitical framework as the central organizing axis.

Research Methodology

The research applies a mixed-methods approach that integrates three mutually complementary analytical techniques. The first methodological layer consists of quantitative analysis of military expenditures and industrial capacities of major European NATO members for the 2019–2024 period. The primary dataset used is the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (version updated in April 2025) and the SIPRI Top 100 Arms-producing Companies (2024 version). Indicators include total military expenditures in current prices (USD), annual growth rates, share of GDP and combined position on the SIPRI Top 100 list of arms producers.

The second methodological layer consists of comparative institutional analysis of the EU's regulatory instruments. The following documents have been systematically analyzed: the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (Council of the EU, 2022), the European Defence Industrial Strategy (European Commission, 2024), the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP, 2025), the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), the Regulation for reinforcing European defence industry through common procurement (EDIRPA), and the NATO Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022). The analysis is organized along three analytical dimensions: ambition (declared objectives), instruments (concrete realization mechanisms) and resources (allocated fiscal and institutional capacities).

The third methodological layer is qualitative analysis of recent literature and reports of peer-reviewed security institutions. Reports of the SIPRI Yearbook (2024), the IISS Strategic Dossier on European defence (IISS, 2025), EUISS briefs on EU-NATO cooperation under Trump 2.0 (EUISS, 2025), and thematic reports of the ECFR, Bruegel, MERICS and OSW have been used. The analytical technique is thematic synthesis that proceeds through three phases: extraction of key claims, classification according to dimensions (Atlantic, Chinese, Russian, autonomist), and synthesis into coherent argumentation blocks.

The original analytical tool — the Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index) — was constructed by integrating three components, each with a weight of 0.33: (a) fiscal autonomy, measured by the share of domestic financing sources in the total defence budget; (b) industrial self-sufficiency, measured by the share of domestic industrial production in total national procurement of defence equipment; (c) technological dependence (inverse), measured by the inverse share of critical components that the state must import from foreign suppliers. The index ranges from 0 to 100, where a higher value denotes a greater degree of sovereignty maturity.

The limitations of the research are fourfold. First, the quantitative part of the research relies on publicly available aggregate data (SIPRI, NATO, EDA), which do not enable analysis of classified procurement and development programmes. Second, the GRR Index represents a heuristic tool whose weighting components require further empirical validation in future research. Third, the 2019–2024 period is relatively short for deriving definitive long-term trends,

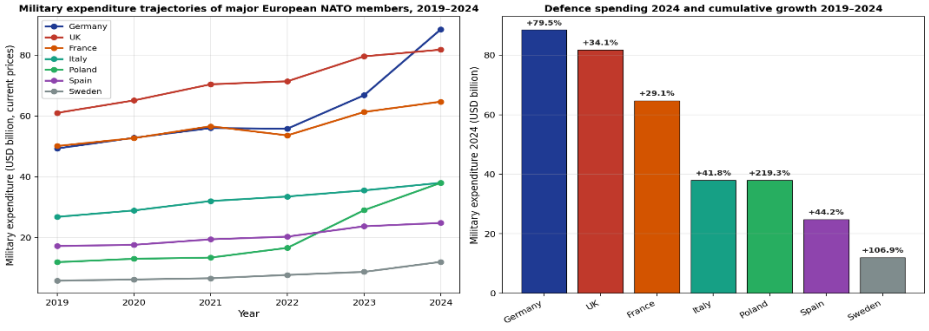
especially in the context of structural industrial changes that require decadal cycles. Fourth, the analysis is geographically concentrated on Western European NATO members and Poland, which leaves room for subsequent extension to South European, Baltic and Eastern European contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Empirical analysis of the collected data has generated findings that can be organized into three main blocks, corresponding to the three research hypotheses, which together document the quantitative, institutional and strategic-positional dimensions of European war reindustrialization.

The first block of findings concerns the fiscal and industrial dimension of reindustrialization. The military expenditures of European NATO members rose from approximately USD 280 billion in 2019 to USD 454 billion in 2024, representing cumulative growth of 62 percent in current prices (SIPRI, 2025). Figure 1 shows the trajectories of seven key European states over this period as well as their cumulative growth. The year 2024 is particularly indicative, as it brought leaps unseen in the previous three decades: Germany increased its military expenditure by 28 percent to USD 88.5 billion and became the world's fourth largest military spender (SIPRI, 2025); Poland increased its expenditure by 31 percent to USD 38.0 billion, reaching 4.2 percent of GDP — the highest share within NATO; Sweden increased its expenditure by 34 percent in its first year of NATO membership and crossed the 2.0 percent of GDP threshold (SIPRI, 2025).

Figure 1. Geographic distribution of European war reindustrialization, 2019–2024



Source: author's calculation based on SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (2025) and SIPRI Yearbook (2024).

The distribution of growth is not even and reveals a specific geographic structure of European reindustrialization. The states geographically closest to the Russian threat (Poland, Sweden, the Baltic states) record the strongest relative growth, which is consistent with theoretical expectations that reindustrialization first manifests itself where the threat is most tangible (Posen, 2025; IISS, 2025). Western European economies with larger absolute budgets (Germany, France, Italy) record slower but fiscally more significant growth in absolute amounts. In total, the EU-27 allocated €343 billion for defence in 2024, representing a 19 percent increase over 2023 and 1.9 percent of the Union's aggregate GDP (Council of the EU, 2024).

The industrial dimension of reindustrialization is equally significant. According to the SIPRI Top 100 list of arms producers (SIPRI, 2025), the combined revenues of the world's top 100 arms producers in 2024 grew significantly, with European companies (BAE Systems, Airbus, Leonardo, Thales, Rheinmetall, Saab) recording particularly strong growth in orders. Rheinmetall, as a paradigmatic case, saw its market capitalization grow by more than 600 percent between February 2022 and the end of 2024, which is a structural signal of investor perception of long-term reindustrialization (Bruegel, 2024).

The second block of findings concerns the institutional dimension — the EU's capacity to transform the reindustrialization impulse into coherent policies. The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, adopted in March 2022, represents the first comprehensive document of EU security and defence strategy; of 81 deliverables in the document, 51 were to be implemented by the end of 2022 (Council of the EU, 2022). The European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), presented on 5 March 2024, sets the goal of transforming the European defence industry into "war economy mode" by 2035 (European Commission, 2024). The European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), with a fiscal package of €1.5 billion for the 2025–2027 period, was finally approved by the EU Council on 16 December 2025 (Council of the EU, 2025).

The Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), as a direct response to the European Council's call in March 2023 to urgently deliver ammunition to Ukraine and to help Member States refill their stocks, represents the first concrete instrument of industrial mobilization (European Commission, 2023). The EDIRPA Regulation incentivizes joint procurement, while Permanent

Structured Cooperation (PESCO), launched back in 2017, by 2024 covers 68 active projects involving 26 EU Member States (PESCO, 2024). An empirical study in Defence and Peace Economics (Defence Partnerships and Economic Dynamics, 2024) demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between military expenditure, investment and economic growth in 25 PESCO countries in the 1994–2022 period.

The third block of findings concerns the strategic-positional dimension, operationalized through the Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index). Table 1 shows the values of the GRR Index for seven key European states as of the end of 2024, disaggregated by the three components of the index.

Table 1. Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index) for key European states, end of 2024.

State	Fiscal autonomy	Industrial self-sufficiency	Technological independence	GRR Index (0–100)
France	92	78	62	77.3
UK	88	71	55	71.3
Germany	85	65	48	66.0
Italy	78	58	42	59.3
Sweden	82	63	45	63.3
Poland	65	32	22	39.7
Spain	72	48	35	51.7

Source: author's calculation based on SIPRI (2025), EDA (2024), IISS (2025), Bruegel (2024); scale 0–100, higher value denotes greater sovereignty.

The values of the GRR Index reveal significant heterogeneity among European states. France stands out as the state with the highest index (77.3), reflecting its historical role as one of the two European nuclear powers, the autonomous development of major platforms (Rafale, FREMM, Leclerc) and a developed domestic industrial base. The UK, despite the research complexity of its post-Brexit position, retains a high index (71.3) thanks to a sophisticated

defence industry (BAE Systems) and nuclear capabilities. Germany (66.0) records a high index of fiscal autonomy but a much lower index of technological independence, reflecting historical dependence on US platforms and components. Poland, despite spectacular growth in expenditure, has the lowest index (39.7) — reflecting an extremely high dependence on US weapons systems (F-35, Abrams, HIMARS, Patriot, Apache) and South Korean systems (K2, K9, K239 Chunmoo) that Warsaw has ordered en masse.

Comparison among the states reveals the structural paradox of European reindustrialization. The states that are growing fastest fiscally (Poland +220 percent, Sweden +107 percent, Germany +80 percent over the 2019–2024 period) are not at the same time the states with the highest GRR Index. On the contrary, Poland — with the most impressive growth in expenditure — has the lowest sovereignty index. This inverse correlation indicates a deeply structural problem: the speed of reindustrialization dictated by the urgency of the Russian threat simultaneously increases structural dependence on those suppliers who can respond to urgent requests — and these are, under contemporary conditions, primarily the US and South Korea. States that have built defence autonomy over decades (France, the UK) have the luxury of slower growth with greater industrial self-sufficiency; states that have neglected the defence sector for years are now paying the price through structural dependence.

The distribution of the GRR Index reveals three typologies of European reindustrialization strategies. The first type are "classical sovereigns" (France, the UK) who prioritize the preservation of existing autonomy over rapid growth. The second type are "structural reformers" (Germany, Italy, Sweden) who try to combine accelerated investments with institutional reforms. The third type are "strategic buyers" (Poland, the Baltic states) who prioritize rapid procurement of finished systems over building a domestic industrial base. Each of these types has its own logic, but only the first and second lead toward the model of selective strategic autonomy that this article conceptualizes. The third type, although understandable in the short-term perspective, risks consolidating structural dependence in the long run (IISS, 2025; Bruegel, 2024).

The sectoral distribution of reindustrialization investments also reveals a specific structure. The largest growth in investments is recorded in air defence sectors (with significant orders for the IRIS-T systems from Germany and the

NASAMS systems from Norway), artillery ammunition (where the expansion of capacity at Rheinmetall and other producers is a central priority), and in the area of drones and autonomous systems (where European companies such as Helsing in Germany are growing rapidly). By contrast, investments in space systems, artificial intelligence for military applications and high-precision long-range weaponry lag behind needs, leaving Europe structurally dependent in precisely those domains that will characterize future conflicts (IISS, 2025; SIPRI, 2025).

The Atlantic Axis: The United States as Ally and Structural Constraint

The central paradox of European reindustrialization is the simultaneous nature of the United States as both the primary ally and the primary structural constraint on European sovereignty. This duality is not new — it has characterized transatlantic relations throughout the period after the Second World War — but its form is fundamentally changing in the context of Trump 2.0 and the broader US strategic reorientation toward the Indo-Pacific (Posen, 2025; Meijer & Brooks, 2021).

The empirical foundation of the US influence on European reindustrialization manifests itself through three channels. The first channel is technological dependence. Most of the leading platforms that European militaries are buying or planning to buy — F-35 fighter jets, Patriot air defence systems, Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, HIMARS systems and others — are US products whose lifecycle includes US control over spare parts, software and technological upgrades (IISS, 2025; Bruegel, 2024). At the end of 2024, F-35s were in operation or on order with the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Poland, Finland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Romania — which practically means that European air supremacy is structurally tied to US technological infrastructure.

The second channel is market penetration. US companies (Lockheed Martin, RTX, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics) hold a significant share in European defence procurement. According to data from the SIPRI Top 100 list (SIPRI, 2025), the five leading US arms producers combined achieve revenues that multiply many times those of all European producers together. This

asymmetry is not merely economic — it transforms into structural-strategic influence through long-term contracts for service, upgrades and training.

The third channel is political — direct pressure from the US administration on the level of European military expenditures and the structure of procurement. Trump's NATO summit in 2025 resulted in a commitment by members to allocate 5 percent of GDP for defence by a certain horizon, with 1.5 percent permitted for infrastructure and civil resilience (NATO, 2025; INSS, 2025). This goal, which would have been politically unthinkable before the war in Ukraine, has become the negotiating starting framework that European members must address. Trump's approach has a clear strategic logic: shifting conventional defence in Europe onto European shoulders while the US concentrates resources on the Indo-Pacific (US National Security Strategy, 2025; EUISS, 2025).

Meijer and Brooks (2021) anticipated this situation in their influential article published in the International Security journal, identifying two structural constraints that prevent Europe from independently assuming the defence burden. The first is strategic cacophony — deeply different threat perceptions among European states. Although the war in Ukraine has partially homogenized perceptions, divergences remain significant: while the Baltic states, Poland and the Nordic countries perceive Russia as an existential threat, South European states (Italy, Spain, Greece) prioritize Mediterranean and North African challenges (IISS, 2025). The second structural constraint is massive shortfalls in military capabilities — from nuclear deterrence through strategic transport to space-based intelligence and surveillance — which would require decades and hundreds of billions of euros to fill.

The geopolitical analysis by Knežević (2025a) sets the broader framework within which this relationship unfolds. The imperial overstretch of the United States, a concept the author takes from the tradition of Paul Kennedy and adapts to the contemporary context, represents a structural condition in which the American will to project power in all world regions exceeds its fiscal and industrial capacities. The Special Military Operation in Ukraine is, according to Knežević, the catalyst that has revealed this structural overstretch: the US could not simultaneously maintain strategic pressure on China, support Israel in a complex regional constellation and supply Ukraine in a long-term conventional war. This overstretch is the strategic basis for the US push for European

reindustrialization — Washington cannot wage all wars, so it asks Europe to take part of the burden.

Posen (2025) in his recent article in the Survival journal develops a parallel argument from another perspective — that of US national strategy. The author argues that European military autonomy would have to first solve the question of extracting maximum combat power from existing structures before new institutional arrangements can be discussed. In other words, the problem of European defence is not primarily fiscal but organizational and industrial — and in that sense, Trump's pressure could have a paradoxically positive effect if it forces European states to consolidate what they already have.

From the transatlantic perspective, contemporary EU-NATO cooperation under Trump's mandate 2.0 is undergoing a transformation whose outcome is uncertain. EUISS (2025) has, in several brief publications, analyzed different scenarios: from partial US withdrawal to a dramatic collapse of cooperation. The "Trump card" — the question of what US abandonment of Europe would look like — has become a standard question of strategic analysis (EUISS, 2025). In each scenario, European reindustrialization gains additional urgency — meaning that US pressure has become an endogenous variable of the European defence project.

Finally, there is also an operational dimension of the relationship that is often overlooked. Mićunović (2023a) analyzed the legal framework of private military companies in armed conflicts, a phenomenon in which US companies (Constellis, Triple Canopy, Academi successors) continue to dominate the global market. Yaseen (2023) applied soft set theory to the resource allocation problem in military logistics, using ISAF operations in Afghanistan as the empirical basis. These methodological experiences — and comparative analyses of hybrid threats to infrastructure (Parthasarathy, 2023) — represent the operational basis on which European reindustrialization policies necessarily rely, however tacitly.

A specific case illustrating the Atlantic axis is the F-35 programme — the multilaterally largest defence project in NATO history, which by the end of 2024 had generated orders worth more than USD 1.7 trillion over its lifecycle (IISS, 2025). Nine European NATO members have committed to the F-35 as their primary multi-role combat aircraft, which practically means that for the next 30 years European air supremacy will be structurally based on continuous US technological, software and logistical support. This is not merely an equipment

purchase — it is a structural integration into the US military-industrial ecosystem that goes beyond classical alliances and creates a sui generis form of security interdependence.

The paradox of this integration is that it is simultaneously a source of European military efficiency and strategic vulnerability. On the one hand, the F-35 and other US systems provide Europe with military capabilities it could not develop independently within realistic time frames and budgets. On the other hand, these systems contain software, codes and use authorizations that remain under US control — which theoretically means that the US administration could, in a moment of crisis, withhold or limit the functionality of these systems. Although this question has never been publicly tested, the very possibility represents a structural element that must compel European decision-makers to think about sovereignty implications (EUISS, 2025; Posen, 2025).

The broader institutional dimension of the Atlantic relationship is reflected in the architecture of nuclear deterrence. Only France and the UK possess their own nuclear capabilities in Europe, while the German, Italian, Dutch and Belgian nuclear security is based on the principle of "nuclear sharing" with the US — which practically means that US nuclear weapons stationed in Europe can only be used with US approval. This architecture, set up during the Cold War, remains structurally untouched despite dramatic changes in the geopolitical context. Posen (2025a) explicitly argues that Europe must first solve the question of its own nuclear deterrence before it can seriously speak about strategic autonomy — confirming the structural nature of Atlantic dependence.

Chinese Techno-Industrial Dependence and Its Strategic Implications

The second axis of the trilateral geopolitical framework in which European reindustrialization unfolds is the relationship with the People's Republic of China. Unlike the Atlantic axis — where Europe is simultaneously a strategic ally and a structurally dependent partner — the relationship with China is primarily a relationship of asymmetric techno-industrial dependence, which intensified in 2025 to a degree that raises serious strategic concern (MERICS, 2025; OSW, 2025).

The empirical basis of Chinese techno-industrial dominance over the European defence sector operates primarily through three channels. The first channel is strategic raw materials, especially rare earth elements. China controls approximately 90 percent of global production of rare-earth magnets, which are key for contemporary military technology — from magnets in motors and sensors of combat aircraft to electronic warfare and radar systems. The EU imports 98 percent of rare-earth magnets from China, 31 percent of tungsten and 97 percent of metallic magnesium (MERICS, 2025). In October 2025 China imposed new export controls on these materials, directly hitting European rearmament efforts and opening a strategic window whose significance is equivalent to the oil shocks of the 1970s (OSW, 2025).

The second channel is the electronic component base. Although the nominal production of leading semiconductors is concentrated in Taiwan and South Korea, the global supply chains through which these semiconductors are processed into complete electronic assemblies predominantly pass through China. The European defence sector thus depends both on Taiwan's chip industry and on China's production base which integrates these chips into final products (Geopolitical Monitor, 2025; IISS, 2025). In the context of possible Chinese pressure on Taiwan, this dependence represents an existential security-industrial vulnerability.

The third channel is the increasingly significant Chinese presence in Europe's own critical infrastructure — from ports (where COSCO holds significant stakes in terminals in Piraeus, Hamburg, Antwerp and others) to telecommunication networks. Parthasarathy (2023) in Military Studies analyzed the resilience of critical port infrastructure to hybrid threats, documenting that Baltic ports — strategically key for European defence of the eastern flank — show specific vulnerabilities that Chinese hybrid presence can exploit. Although Chinese presence in Baltic ports is not dominant, its presence in Western European ports opens potential channels of security influence directly bearing on defence logistics.

From a strategic standpoint, Chinese techno-industrial dependence places Europe in a position that Risojević (2026) in his recent monograph describes through the theory of the clash of civilizations. Although Risojević does not apply the theory exclusively to the economic dimension, its analytical framework allows

us to understand why the Sino-European relationship cannot be reduced to a purely commercial issue. Chinese industrial policy — from Made in China 2025 to the Belt and Road Initiative — represents a strategic project that treats European defence dependencies as a lever of influence in broader geopolitical competition.

Europe's reactions to this dependence are underway but late and fragmented. The EU's Critical Raw Materials Act (2024), which sets the goal that by 2030 domestic production of critical raw materials covers at least 10 percent, processing 40 percent and recycling 25 percent of consumption, represents the first systemic response (European Commission, 2024). The Strategic Compass and EDIS explicitly identify Chinese dominance as a challenge to strategic autonomy (Council of the EU, 2022; European Commission, 2024). But concrete implementation is slow and constrained by structural factors: developing alternative sources of rare earths requires 7–10 years of investment; redirecting global supply chains requires billions in capital expenditure; developing domestic semiconductor capacities is already underway through the EU Chips Act, but without direct defence orientation (Bruegel, 2024).

The geopolitical dimension of the problem is further complicated by China's role as a tacit beneficiary of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Although China formally maintains neutrality, economic support to Russia through expanded trade, alternative payment mechanisms and industrial cooperation has enabled Moscow to survive the first wave of Western sanctions (Bruegel, 2024; ECFR, 2025). In October 2025, the EU sanctioned Chinese firms for alleged support of the Russian military programme, which provoked a Chinese reactive response — placing seven EU entities on the export controls list for dual-use products (MERICS, 2025). This escalatory cycle shows that the Sino-European relationship cannot be separated from the broader geopolitical context.

The implications for European reindustrialization are threefold. First, even when Europe fiscally invests in domestic defence capacities, physical production depends on non-European inputs, creating structural fragility at every moment of escalation with China. Second, this phenomenon opens space for the concept of "reindustrialization within reindustrialization" — namely, that Europe must simultaneously build final defence products and their material-component basis. Third, the speed of Chinese industrial and strategic actions (such as the October

2025 offensive of export controls) imposes time pressure that requires responses in time frames shorter than those typically generated by the EU's bureaucratic apparatus.

Mićunović (2023b) in his analysis of Esposito's paradigm of immunization and post-pandemic vaccination policy identified a phenomenon the author calls the "inverse immunitary paradox" — a situation in which protective interventions produce precisely those vulnerabilities they try to eliminate. Although the analysis is primarily focused on the health domain, the concept of the inverse immunitary paradox offers a valuable metaphor for understanding European reindustrialization: the more Europe invests in defence technology to reduce dependence, the more it discovers new dependencies in deeper layers of the production chain.

Particularly indicative is the space infrastructure sector, which is central to contemporary military operations (navigation, communications, intelligence surveillance, targeting of precision-guided weaponry). Although Europe possesses its own satellite navigation system Galileo and the Copernicus programme for satellite observation, reliance on launch capacities was significantly diminished by the withdrawal of Soyuz launchers after 2022, which temporarily made Europe dependent on US SpaceX capacities until the European Ariane 6 platform stabilized in 2024. In the domain of communications satellites, European companies Eutelsat and SES have faced competition from Starlink and Chinese state systems, creating a new layer of geopolitical competition whose implications for military communication remain to be assessed (IISS, 2025; Bruegel, 2024).

Finally, the Chinese geopolitical dimension also extends into the domain of institutional alliances and diplomatic formats. The BRICS+ format, which expanded in 2024 and 2025, represents an institutional framework that deliberately competes with G7 and Western economic institutions. Although the economic weight of BRICS does not yet reach that of the G7, the trajectory is clearly upward and creates an alternative geopolitical space in which European companies face growing pressure to choose sides. Risojević (2026) in his monograph on the theory of the clash of civilizations explicitly recognizes this dynamic as a manifestation of broader civilizational reconfiguration, providing theoretical depth to the practical European dilemma.

At the level of concrete sectoral dynamics, the Sino-European relationship in the area of defence industry is characterized by an asymmetry that is progressively deepening. Although China is not the primary supplier of finished weapons systems to European militaries, it controls input components and processing capacities without which these systems cannot be produced in satisfactory volumes. Specifically, the Chinese industry produces over 80 percent of global capacity of certain reducers for batteries of electric vehicles — including military ones; over 70 percent of global lithium production for batteries passes through Chinese refineries; over 60 percent of global processing of nickel and cobalt takes place in Chinese facilities or facilities under Chinese ownership (MERICS, 2025; OSW, 2025). This control over middle parts of production chains gives China a powerful geopolitical instrument that, unlike crude military force, operates continuously and quietly but with cumulative effects that can be just as significant.

The Russian Security Threat as a Catalyst of Reindustrialization

The third axis of the trilateral geopolitical framework is the relationship with the Russian Federation. Unlike the Atlantic and Chinese axes, which manifest themselves primarily through structural dependence, the Russian axis manifests itself through a direct security threat that acts as the primary mobilizer of the entire reindustrialization project. Without 24 February 2022, the fiscal and institutional efforts described in the previous sections simply would not exist — at least not in the volume and pace in which they manifest themselves (Posen, 2025b; Knežević, 2025a; IISS, 2025).

Empirical analysis of the Russo-Ukrainian war as a catalyst shows four key dynamics. The first dynamic is the depletion of stockpiles and production capacities of European militaries through deliveries to Ukraine. By the end of 2024, European NATO members had supplied Ukraine with military aid worth over €100 billion, including significant quantities of artillery ammunition, missile systems, armored vehicles and combat aircraft (IISS, 2025; Bruegel, 2024). This delivery has revealed the structural insufficiency of European industrial production of ammunition — before the war, the aggregate European production of artillery ammunition was less than 300,000 shells per year, while Russia in the

same period produced more than 2 million, and Ukraine on intense days of combat consumed 6,000–8,000 shells daily (IISS, 2025).

The second dynamic is the strategic shock of the threat that has shifted the perception of Russia from a marginal challenge to an existential threat, particularly in Eastern European and Nordic states. Posen (2025b) in his article on the Russian invasion as a preventive war, published in the International Security journal, argued that Putin's calculation corresponds to the classic logic of preventive war: the perception that the strategic balance is irreversibly shifting in favor of NATO and Ukraine, and that 2022 was the last opportunity for military intervention before the balance becomes too unfavorable. This analysis has direct implications for European reindustrialization — if the Russian invasion was preventive, then European strengthening itself can encourage additional Russian calculations, creating a strategic dilemmatic framework that European decision-makers must explicitly address.

The third dynamic is the geographic reorientation of European defence. NATO's center of gravity shifted between 2022 and 2024 from Central and Southern Europe to the eastern flank. Eight Multinational Battlegroups Forward Presence are deployed in the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, as well as in Slovakia. The numbers in deployment have significantly increased, with rotational deployment of tens of thousands of troops (NATO, 2024; IISS, 2025). This reorientation has long-term implications for the allocation of resources, infrastructure and investments — the eastern flank will be the main operational theater for the foreseeable future.

The fourth dynamic is the hybrid dimension of the Russian threat, which manifests itself through disinformation operations, sabotage of critical infrastructure, cyber attacks and the instrumentalization of migration. Parthasarathy (2023) in his analysis of the resilience of critical port infrastructure identified Baltic ports as particularly vulnerable points, which has been further confirmed by a series of hybrid incidents (sabotage of submarine cables in the Baltic Sea, explosive attacks on DHL shipments in Germany, hybrid migration operations from the Belarusian border). This hybrid dimension means that reindustrialization cannot be reduced only to the production of classical military platforms — it must also encompass the resilience of civil infrastructure, cyber defence and strategic communications.

Knežević (2025a) in his monograph on the imperial overstretch of the United States and the Special Military Operation in Ukraine developed a broader geopolitical framework for understanding these dynamics. The central thesis is that the Russo-Ukrainian war cannot be interpreted in isolation, but in the context of the broader transformation of the global order in which the asymmetry between US ambition and capacities is structurally deepening. In this transformation, Europe is a topic, not an agent — but precisely for that reason its reindustrialization is of fundamental significance, because that is the only way for Europe to become an agent in the trilateral geopolitical game.

Russia also shows its own forms of industrial mobilization that European analysts must understand. Although under sanctions, the Russian defence industry by 2024 significantly increased the production of key systems — from kamikaze drones and artillery ammunition to armored vehicles — as a result of the economy's transition to "war economy mode" with a relative share of defence spending estimated by IISS at between 6 and 8 percent of GDP (IISS, 2025; SIPRI, 2025). This Russian mobilization sets a benchmark against which European reindustrialization efforts must also be measured — and reveals that, despite all its weaknesses, Russia is capable of industrial adaptation that the Western sector underestimated in the first months of the conflict.

The strategic implication of this dynamic for the European reindustrialization project is twofold. First, European industry must develop capacities for mass, long-term, low-technology production (artillery ammunition, simple drones, armored vehicles) that was neglected in the peace era in favor of high-technology systems of low volumetry. Second, European strategic planners must internalize the realization that classical conventional war — with all its industrial-mobilization implications — is not a relic of the past but a real possibility in the medium-term future. This requires a mentality transformation that in many European capitals is only beginning.

The Ukrainian war has also produced one less-expected consequence — empirical demonstration of the value and vulnerability of different weapons systems under real combat conditions. It has been shown that cheap drones (Turkish Bayraktar, Ukrainian Switchblade, Russian Lancet) are capable of neutralizing expensive armored systems; that air defence systems (Patriot, IRIS-T, NASAMS) are key for protecting critical infrastructure; and that classical

artillery still remains the "queen of the battlefield" whose mass production represents an existential challenge. These empirical experiences directly shape European reindustrialization priorities — from the German Rheinmetall project to expand 155mm shell production to the Czech Ammunition Initiative (IISS, 2025; SIPRI, 2025).

The long-term analytical perspective indicates that the contemporary Russo-Ukrainian war can be interpreted as the first large-scale complete industrial war of the 21st century — a war in which, after decades of dominance of "asymmetric" and "hybrid" conflicts, the primacy of industrial productivity, material mobilization and logistical sustainability re-manifests itself. In this context, Yaseen (2023) in his analysis of military logistics using soft set theory developed a methodological framework that has immediate application — the allocation of scarce resources between competing operational priorities is once again becoming the central problem of contemporary military operations, which European strategic planners during the 1990s and 2000s largely forgot.

Finally, there is also a question that is central to the contemporary security sector — the question of criminal-legal protection of classified information under conditions of high labor mobility and cyber exposure of the defence industry. Knežević (2026) in his analysis of criminal liability for the disclosure of classified data in the military-security sector of the Republic of Serbia developed an analytical framework that is applicable to the wider regional and European field as well. Under reindustrialization conditions, when defence knowledge is produced in hundreds of new firms and when thousands of engineers move between projects, the question of the legal protection of classified information moves from a technical to a strategically significant component of reindustrialization policy.

The strategic analysis by Knežević (2024) on the role of the High Representative in the constitutional crisis of Bosnia and Herzegovina documents a parallel phenomenon at the regional level — how European institutional structures with limited legitimacy can generate additional security instabilities. Although the work does not directly concern reindustrialization, its finding on the structural instability of the Western Balkans region has implications for European defence policy — the question of the stability of NATO's eastern flank also includes the Western Balkans as a vulnerable zone that Russia systematically

uses as a field of hybrid action. A reindustrialization project that does not address this regional dimension remains structurally incomplete.

More broadly, the Russian strategy toward Europe is not reduced to the military threat. It encompasses energy pressure (although significantly reduced after 2022), information warfare, the instrumentalization of emigrant and ethnic divisions, and attempts to influence electoral processes. This multidimensionality means that the reindustrialization response cannot be reduced only to the production of weapons — it must include the strengthening of civil resilience, media institutions, democratic procedures and regional stability. The security architecture of the 21st century is structurally multidimensional in a way that the security architecture of the 20th century was not, requiring a systemic redesign of European security thinking.

Selective Strategic Autonomy as a New Geopolitical Model

The synthesis of the analyses of the Atlantic, Chinese and Russian axes brings us to the central concept that this article introduces — selective strategic autonomy (SSA). By this concept we understand a specific type of strategic position in which European states (independently or through the EU framework) develop autonomous capabilities in clearly defined sectors, accept consciously managed dependencies in other sectors, and build institutional and technological bridges that enable rapid reconfiguration of strategic relations in the event of a geopolitical shock.

SSA is conceptually distinguished from four competing models. The first competing model is full strategic autonomy — the traditional Gaullist vision of European defence completely independent of non-European powers. The empirical findings of this article confirm the Meijer-Brooks (2021) thesis that full autonomy is not realistic in the foreseeable future due to structural capacity shortfalls. The second competing model is full Atlantic integration — preserving the current architecture in which NATO and US leadership remain the central framework. The empirical findings show that this model is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain under Trump 2.0. The third competing model is neutralism — withdrawal from global security obligations. The empirical findings show that this model is impossible due to the Russian threat. The fourth competing model

is hedging between great powers — a contemporary variant of neutralism that maintains relations with all without committing to any. The empirical findings show that Chinese pressure (the October 2025 export controls) makes this option impossible.

SSA, as an alternative to these models, is defined by three key characteristics. The first characteristic is sectoral selectivity — the conscious choice of sectors in which to build autonomy (artillery ammunition, hypersonic missiles, certain drones, cyber defence, artificial intelligence for military applications) and sectors in which to accept dependence (space communications infrastructure, certain specialized platforms, critical raw materials for which there is no domestic alternative). The second characteristic is reciprocity manageability — the institutional and technological ability to quickly restructure dependencies in the event of a geopolitical shock, requiring pre-prepared alternative supply chains, dual sources and flexible contractual architectures. The third characteristic is multipolar management of reciprocities — conscious maintenance of moderately asymmetric relations with several great powers simultaneously, preventing any single relationship from becoming existentially dangerous.

Implementation of the SSA model requires not only political will but also concrete institutional reforms. First, it is necessary to develop national and Union registers of critical industrial capacities with explicit classification according to the degree of strategic sensitivity. Second, it is necessary to extend EDIS and EDIP with explicit sector-selective objectives. Third, it is necessary to develop financial instruments that enable rapid investments in alternative supply chains in case of geopolitical shocks (reserve funds, strategic risk guarantees, expedited approval procedures). Fourth, it is necessary to integrate into security-legal systems the capacities for protecting classified knowledge under conditions of growing mobility and digitalization (Knežević, 2026).

Conceptually, the SSA model emerges from the dialectical synthesis of two traditions in European strategic thinking — the Gaullist tradition of strategic autonomy and the Atlanticist tradition of transatlantic integration. SSA recognizes that neither of these two traditions, in its pure form, suits contemporary conditions. The Gaullist tradition overestimates the possibility of full European autonomy; the Atlanticist tradition overestimates the durability and reliability of US commitment to European security. SSA, as a synthetic

model, offers a way out of this dichotomy through the concept of conscious sectoral choice and managed reciprocity. In that sense, the model is not a radical conceptual innovation but the articulation of the empirical logic that is already present in the contemporary decisions of European states — but which has not until now been explicitly theorized.

The comparative application of the SSA model to the seven analyzed states reveals that what is at issue is a spectrum, not a binary category. France implements what may be called "classical SSA" — selective sovereignty in nuclear deterrence, air supremacy and naval autonomy, combined with accepted dependence in space communication and certain components. The UK implements "transatlantic SSA" — selective sovereignty in nuclear, cyber defence and intelligence activities, combined with deep integration with US systems. Germany is only just developing its own SSA model, with the dilemma between the Atlanticist tradition and ambitions for greater autonomy. Poland, as previously shown, currently operates in a mode opposite to SSA — maximum dependence on external suppliers as a rational response to the immediate threat, which is a strategy that works in the short term but is not sustainable in the long run.

The GRR Index developed in this article represents the first empirical tool for tracking progress toward the SSA model on a comparative basis. The index allows not only static comparison of states at a given moment but also dynamic tracking of changes over time. Future research can extend the index with additional components — including, for example, cyber resilience, space autonomy, or strategic raw material reserves — and apply it to broader geographical contexts.

The implementation of the SSA model in practice faces a set of obstacles that are simultaneously technical, political and institutional. The technical obstacle is the time required to build industrial capacities — the development of a new line for the production of a complex defence system typically requires 7–12 years from the initial decision to full operational capability, meaning that decisions made today will not yield results before the mid-2030s (IISS, 2025; SIPRI, 2025). The political obstacle is the heterogeneity of interests among EU member states, which have different priorities, different capacities and different threat perceptions. The institutional obstacle is the limited mandate and fiscal

capacity of the EU institutions themselves in the area of defence, which the reindustrialization effort must bridge through innovative coordination and financing mechanisms.

In addition to these structural obstacles, the SSA model also faces an epistemic challenge: how to measure success in a sector where many indicators appear with a time lag of a decade or more? The GRR Index proposed in this article represents an operationalization attempt, but it requires continuous refinement. Future research should also include a dynamic component of the index, introducing not only the current level but also the trajectory of movement. Likewise, the index should be extended with qualitative components capturing the institutional capacity of states to quickly restructure dependencies — which is a central characteristic of selective strategic autonomy.

The operational application of the SSA model to specific sectoral decisions requires what may be called "sectoral triage". For each key segment of European defence capabilities — from nuclear deterrence through cyber defence to space communication — strategic planners must explicitly answer three questions: (a) is this sector key to the autonomous capability of European defence?; (b) what are the realistic time and fiscal horizons for building domestic capability in this sector?; (c) if dependence is retained, what are the mechanisms enabling rapid reconfiguration in case of a geopolitical shock? These three dimensions of sectoral triage form the conceptual core of SSA implementation and require the development of specific analytical tools in each sector individually (Bruegel, 2024; IISS, 2025).

Finally, the SSA model also has a dimension that goes beyond the strict defence sphere — the dimension of democratic legitimacy. Classical strategic autonomy projects previously suffered from a structural deficit of democratic legitimacy because they concentrated decisions in narrow expert and executive circles. The SSA model, with its explicit sectoral choices that have visible social consequences (industrial policy, allocation of labor, regional development), requires broader public articulation and parliamentary control. This is not only a normative requirement — it is a structural precondition for the long-term sustainability of the reindustrialization project, since projects that lack democratic legitimacy can hardly survive through the political cycles that will inevitably mark the next decade.

Conclusion

The investigation of European war reindustrialization as a geopolitical project, conducted by combining quantitative analysis of military expenditures, comparative institutional analysis of EU regulatory instruments and qualitative analysis of strategic documents in the 2019–2025 period, has produced findings that confirm all three research hypotheses, although with varying degrees of certainty.

The first hypothesis, on reindustrialization as a structural geopolitical transformation rather than a cyclical reaction, finds full empirical confirmation. The growth of military expenditures of European NATO members from USD 280 to USD 454 billion in the 2019–2024 period, the combination of EDIS, EDIP, ASAP, EDIRPA and Strategic Compass institutional instruments, and the ambition to shift to "war economy mode" by 2035 — all this represents a structural, not a cyclical transformation (SIPRI, 2025; European Commission, 2024). However, the geographic distribution of growth reveals significant heterogeneity — confirming that reindustrialization is not uniform but is articulated according to specific national contexts. The second hypothesis, that the trilateral configuration generates a specific form of strategic autonomy — selective strategic autonomy (SSA) — is also confirmed. Empirical analysis shows that none of the traditional models (full autonomy, full Atlantic integration, neutralism, hedging) is sustainable in the contemporary configuration, opening space for the alternative model of selective autonomy with reciprocity manageability and multipolar management of reciprocities. This model is not merely a theoretical construct — it is already manifesting itself in the empirical decisions of European states, even without explicit conceptualization (Meijer & Brooks, 2021; Posen, 2025). The third hypothesis, on the paradox of reindustrialization revealing new dependencies, is also confirmed. The quantitative expansion of military expenditures and industrial capacities has paradoxically revealed European dependence on US technology (F-35 and other platforms), Chinese control of strategic raw materials (rare earths, magnesium, tungsten) and the Russian threat as an existential mobilizer. This paradox is recognized in Mićunović's (2023b) analysis of the inverse immunitary paradox,

whose conceptual structure represents a valuable metaphor for the contemporary European situation.

The principal original contribution of this article consists in a twofold analytical innovation. The first original element is the conceptualization of selective strategic autonomy (SSA) as an alternative model that transcends the traditional dichotomy between Atlantic integration and full autonomy. SSA recognizes that Europe can develop sovereignty only in clearly defined sectors and only through conscious management of reciprocal dependencies. The second original element is the construction of the Geopolitical Reciprocity of Reindustrialization Index (GRR Index) as a quantitative analytical tool that integrates three components — fiscal autonomy, industrial self-sufficiency and technological dependence — and is applied for the first time on a comparative basis for seven European states. The index enables transparent comparison and dynamic tracking of progress toward the SSA model, with concrete metric implications for policy.

The limitations of the research, already noted in the methodological section, suggest directions for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of the GRR Index over time are needed, as are sectoral in-depth analyses of specific industrial capacities (artillery ammunition, drones, cyber defence, artificial intelligence), and comparative studies with other regional reindustrialization models (Canada, Australia, South Korea, Japan). The implications for practice are clear: European governments and EU institutions must develop an integral strategy combining fiscal investments with institutional reforms, sectoral selectivity and the capacity to reconfigure strategic relations in case of a geopolitical shock. Without such an integral approach, European reindustrialization risks becoming a fiscally impressive but strategically fruitless project.

More broadly, European war reindustrialization represents a historical test of the continent's ability to build its own strategic project under conditions of declining US interest, increasingly aggressive Chinese competition and increasingly persistent Russian threat. The outcome of that test will not be defined merely by numerical indicators of growth in military spending — which, as the findings of this article show, are already impressive — but rather by the ability of European institutions and national governments to articulate and implement a

coherent strategic vision under conditions of geopolitical uncertainty. Selective strategic autonomy is not a programme that can be adopted by a single declaratory act; it is a process of building institutional, industrial and cultural capacities that requires patience, consistency and strategic endurance which modern democracies rarely display.

The greatest challenge that European reindustrialization poses is not fiscal or technical but conceptual. The old conceptual frameworks — Atlantic integration, peace dividend, the European project as merely economic integration — do not correspond to contemporary geopolitical reality. New conceptual frameworks — selective strategic autonomy, geopolitical reciprocity, multipolar management of dependencies — are only now being formed and seek articulation. This article, by presenting the SSA model and the GRR Index, contributes to that articulation, but recognizes that what is at stake is the beginning, not the end, of a broader conceptual project. In the coming decade, the academic and policy community will have to jointly develop and test new frameworks that will enable understanding and management of European defence sovereignty under conditions that fundamentally differ from those in which contemporary European security architecture was built.

Time for this conceptual transformation is limited. The trilateral geopolitical configuration in which European reindustrialization unfolds does not wait for Europe to develop its theoretical frameworks — Washington, Beijing and Moscow act in real time, with concrete consequences for the European position. Each year of delay in strategic consolidation means deeper drawing into the trajectory of structural dependence from which it will later be increasingly difficult to extricate oneself. In that sense, the next five years (2026–2030) represent what is referred to in strategic analysis as a "window of opportunity" — a period in which structural decisions are most significant and most effective, because they can still be made before dependencies harden into irreversible structural forms.

In the final analysis, European war reindustrialization is not merely a security-industrial project. It is a test of Europe's ability to be a geopolitical subject, not merely a geopolitical terrain. The outcome of that test will determine not only the European position in the trilateral game of great powers but also the fundamental contours of the global order in the second half of the 21st century.

If Europe succeeds in developing the SSA model and implementing it through coherent sectoral policies, it will establish itself as the fourth center of power in the multipolar order — alongside Washington, Beijing and Moscow. If it does not succeed, it will remain a structurally secondary actor whose position is defined primarily by the relations of others. The choice between these two outcomes is not a matter of fatality, but of political will, institutional capacity and strategic clarity — all elements that lie in the hands of European societies and their democratic institutions.

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