



Special Session Proposal

Regional Vulnerabilities and Trade Dependencies

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Abstract

In recent years, the evolution of Global Value Chains (GVCs) has gained increasing prominence, as geopolitical and economic instability — from armed conflicts to trade wars — has exposed the fragility of Europe's production networks and its external dependencies. In response, European trade and industrial policy have increasingly aligned under the banner of Open Strategic Autonomy, culminating in the European Economic Security Strategy. This framework sets out a coherent agenda to assess and manage risks to economic security at EU, national, and business levels, while maintaining economic dynamism. It rests on three pillars: strengthening competitiveness and technological capabilities in strategic sectors, safeguarding against risks such as supply-chain disruptions or technology leakage, and diversifying international partnerships to reduce critical dependencies. The Strategy recognizes that Europe's openness remains the cornerstone of its innovation capacity, but this must now be reconciled with greater strategic awareness of vulnerabilities and dependencies across GVCs.

Crucially, this vision cannot be spatially blind. The sources of Europe's strengths and weaknesses are inherently territorial. Industrial specializations, technological assets, innovative capacities and productive interdependencies are embedded in specific regional economies, each differently positioned within global production networks. Regions thus represent both the origin and the transmission channels of Europe's vulnerabilities and capabilities. Understanding how local structures interact with global dynamics is essential to identifying where economic security risks truly lie — and where the potential for resilience and renewal is greatest.



A genuinely strategic approach to economic security must therefore integrate a territorial perspective. By measuring, mapping, and interpreting the regional distribution of vulnerabilities, capabilities, and dependencies, policymakers can design more targeted interventions, reinforce regional resilience, and ultimately enhance Europe's collective autonomy. Economic security, in this sense, is not only the outcome of supranational strategy but the cumulative product of diverse regional economies — it is built, strengthened, or eroded from the ground up.