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Economic Security in an Era of Escalating Geopolitical Tensions

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Abstract

Economic security is currently becoming one of the key dimensions of strategic thinking in the context of growing geopolitical tension, instability, uncertainty and systemic economic shocks. The paper analyses economic security as a complex and multidimensional concept that combines the protection of survival, sovereignty and prosperity with the ability to anticipate, absorb and respond to growing threats and risks. The first part deals with the theoretical foundations of the concept of economic security. This is followed by a discussion of global trends and risks. The third part analyses the instruments, strategies and limits of EU economic security policy. And the final chapter formulates recommendations for moving towards a resilient and adaptive policy. The results of the study indicate the need for a coordinated and value-based response to the challenges of an unstable multipolar world in which tensions and rivalries are growing, because economic security is no longer just a question of national survival, but also of ensuring the sustainable development of open and democratic societies in a period of global transformation.

KEY WORDS: *Economic security, security threats and risks, tension, instability.*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant deterioration of the global and regional security environment, resulting from deepening and mutually influencing geopolitical, geo-economic, technological, environmental, and other challenges [1]. The current period can be characterized as a phase of profound strategic instability and uncertainty, during which the fundamental norms and mechanisms of the rules-based international order that dominated after the end of the Cold War are weakening [2,3]. The military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation brought a full-scale, high-intensity conflict to the European continent and fundamentally disrupted the stability of the EU's eastern neighbourhood, thereby restoring the seriousness of conventional military threats in Europe [4]. In parallel, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Middle East escalated, and tensions in the Indo-Pacific region grew, primarily in connection with the strengthening of the People's Republic of China's power and its assertive foreign policy in the South China Sea, especially towards Taiwan and other Southeast Asian states [5,6].

Part of this development is the increasing frequency and intensity of the use of geo-economic instruments of pressure, such as economic sanctions, selective restrictions on the export of strategic raw materials, state subsidies, as well as the introduction of unilateral tariff and non-tariff barriers. Examples can be observed in the growing technological rivalry between the US and China in the fields of semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies, or in the energy vulnerability of the European space as a result of the Russian invasion [7,8]. This development simultaneously deepens the fragmentation of the world order and contributes to the disintegration of multilateral cooperation mechanisms.

Against the backdrop of these processes, the concept of economic security is gaining new significance, which can no longer be viewed merely as a sectoral component of economic policy, but as a strategic and systemic element in safeguarding the vital interests of the state. Given the increasing risks associated with the disruption of supply chains, dependence on critical technologies, and vulnerability to coercive practices by both state and non-state actors, economic

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security is becoming an integral part of the national, European, and global security architecture [10]. As the World Economic Forum states, the interconnectedness between geopolitical conflicts, economic shocks, and technological dominance strategies leads to a situation where ensuring economic resilience is a key condition for the overall security of the state [10].

Economic security is no longer just a part of domestic economic policy or a secondary aspect of international relations. It is becoming an indivisible key component of strategic planning by states, regional blocs, and international organizations. Its importance is growing especially in connection with efforts to reduce vulnerability to supply chain disruptions, protect critical technologies, energy transition, and digital sovereignty [11].

Theoretical conceptualizations of economic security have evolved in parallel with globalization, deregulation, and technological trends since the 1970s, reflecting the increasing complexity and ambiguity of the boundaries between economics, technology, and national security. In the early stages, economic security was mainly perceived in connection with issues of self-sufficiency and control over national resources [12]. Friedberg defined it as a state in which the national economy is capable of supporting national interests without being exposed to unacceptable external pressure or internal shocks [13]. Buzan, within his concept of sectoral security, considered economic security as part of a broader security framework that protects the state from existential threats, and simultaneously as a tool for preserving fundamental values, including national sovereignty, economic prosperity, and the survival of society [14].

Within more recent approaches, Klimas defines economic security as the defence of fundamental values such as national survival, sovereignty, independence, and economic prosperity, and also as protection against threats including disruptions in the supply of critical commodities, the outflow of advanced technologies, and excessive dependence on other countries [15]. According to Yafteh, economic security represents the ability of an economic system to withstand shocks and disruptions, recover quickly from them, and at the same time maintain stable growth and ensure the well-being of citizens. It includes not only protection against external threats but also internal resilience to structural weaknesses and inequalities [16].

Yuzue and Sekiyama systematize economic security into three key categories: (a) values, which include the strategic goals of the state (survival, prosperity, independence); (b) threats, which manifest as disruptions in the supply of strategic commodities, technological dependence, disruption of foreign trade, or economic coercion; and finally (c) means, which states and international actors use to minimize risks and build resilience (e.g., stockpiling, investment screenings, export controls, support for innovation, diplomatic engagement, etc.) [17].

With the increasing interconnectedness of global economic, financial, and technological networks, the concept of "weaponized interdependence," articulated by Farrell and Newman, is gaining new significance in close connection with economic security [7]. This concept describes the ability of states that occupy central positions in global production, data, and financial networks to assert their will through the targeted disruption, restriction, or manipulation of flows of goods, services, data, or capital. Typical examples include US export restrictions on China in the field of advanced chips and semiconductor technologies, which aim to slow down Chinese development in artificial intelligence and supercomputing [18]. Another case is the use of financial sanctions and the exclusion of certain entities from global payment systems such as SWIFT – a tool that the United States and its allies used against Russia after the start of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 [19].

Against this backdrop, major global players such as the European Union, the United States of America, Japan, and others are formulating new national and supranational frameworks for economic security. In 2023, the European Commission adopted the European Economic Security Strategy, which identifies four main instruments: reducing risks, strengthening competitiveness, intensifying partnerships, and protecting economic interests through defensive tools [20]. Similarly, the United States of America, in its National Security Strategy, enshrines economic security as one of the foundations of strategic competitiveness [21]. Japan even created a separate ministry for economic security in 2022, reflecting the growing strategic weight of this agenda [22]. These frameworks confirm that economic security has become one of the priority areas of strategic thinking and public policy in an era of multipolarity and fragmentation.

In connection with the above information, the demand for a systematic and scientific anchoring of the concept of economic security is also growing, one that would go beyond ad hoc responses to specific geopolitical, economic, or energy crises. In the past, economic security was often mainly present in the discourse on ensuring national security, primarily in connection with the protection of resources, food self-sufficiency, ensuring smooth energy supplies, or securing the continuity of economic and financial flows.

Globalization also played a role in this, undermining the traditional definition of economic security, which focused on the economic vulnerability of states. Globalization brought a redefinition of economic security in view of the risks posed by cross-border networks of non-state actors and the economic instability of the new global environment [12] [23]. As a result of deepening globalization, technological changes, the strategic increase in global economic network interconnections, and hybrid forms of threats, the demand for an explicit, multidisciplinary, and analytically framed understanding of this issue has become much more urgent [24].

For this reason, the author of this paper also deals with the issue of economic security. It employs a qualitative interdisciplinary approach based on the triangulation of several research methods, primarily the analytical-synthetic method, qualitative content analysis, and a study of scientific and professional literature on security with a primary focus on economic security. In particular, scientific studies and articles from journals indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, as well as official documents and reports from the EU, USA, Japan, and other states and international organizations, are analysed. The approach also includes a discursive analysis of political and strategic frameworks,

especially in the case of the EU, as a significant actor in the field of global economic security. The chosen interdisciplinary approach is mainly based on security studies, international relations, political economy, and public policy. The aim of the author of the article is to provide a systematic analysis of economic security in the context of deepening geopolitical and geo-economic tensions in a multipolar and fragmented world.

2. Economic Security: Concept and Threats

Economic security as an analytical concept, practical policy, and at the same time an indivisible part of ensuring the overall security and defence of the state, rests on three basic pillars: (a) the survival of the state and its population, (b) the protection of sovereignty, and (c) ensuring long-term prosperity. These dimensions represent not only fundamental national security and defence goals but also reflect the strategic transformation that the global security and economic environment is undergoing [25]. Economic security thus emerges as a complex category that lies at the intersection of public policy, security and defence policy, economic policy, international relations, and global structures.

Survival represents the most basic value that the state protects in the face of economic threats. This can involve the physical security of the population through continuous access to basic commodities such as food, medicine, energy, and water [14]. Sovereignty, as the second pillar, includes the state's ability to make and implement political decisions independently of pressure from foreign actors, including economic forms of coercion. Finally, prosperity denotes the state's ability to ensure economic growth, innovation capacity, and competitiveness in an environment of increasing geo-economic competition and the dynamics of technological development [24,26].

Following these values, it is essential to analyse the typology of economic threats that disrupt their fulfilment. Farrell and Newman point out in this context that in the context of globalized interdependence, vulnerability increases through centralized global network structures that allow for the selective disruption of economic flows [7]. These threats can be systematically classified into four main categories.

Firstly, these are disruptions in the supply of strategic raw materials and components, which can paralyze entire sectors of the economy. The semiconductor crisis of 2020 to 2022, caused by a combination of the coronavirus pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and bottlenecks in supply chains, led to significant economic losses in the automotive, electronics, and electrical engineering industries [27].

Secondly, technological dependence on external suppliers of critical technologies – such as microprocessors, quantum computing, or artificial intelligence components – can significantly limit a state's sovereignty and its ability to respond to crises [17].

Thirdly, the use of economic coercive diplomacy is increasing, whereby powerful states use their market power to pursue political goals. An example is China's restriction on the export of rare earth elements or selective sanctions against specific companies and states that have made decisions contrary to Beijing's strategic interests [28].

Fourthly, a key threat is the abuse of global interconnectedness, especially through data, payment, and logistics infrastructure. As the concept of "weaponized interdependence" shows, central actors can disrupt or control the flow of data (e.g., via cloud platforms), interbank transactions (e.g., via SWIFT), or the flow of goods (e.g., via global maritime routes), thereby gaining leverage to pursue their own interests [7].

States and integration groupings respond to these threats with a set of economic security instruments, which can be divided into several categories according to their purpose and form.

One of the main instruments is the diversification of supply chains and geographical partnerships. The aim is to reduce dependence on a single dominant actor, especially in the case of highly concentrated markets (e.g., lithium mining, chip production, etc.), thereby increasing systemic resilience [29].

Another instrument is building technological sovereignty, i.e., the ability to develop, produce, and maintain key technologies without critical dependence on unpredictable external actors. This goal is pursued, for example, by the European Chips Act or Japan's "economic security promotion" policy [22].

Securing strategic reserves, especially of energy, food, pharmaceuticals, and other important raw materials, represents a traditional but still relevant instrument for managing short-term shocks and strengthening crisis preparedness.

The fourth category is foreign economic policy oriented towards open but balanced markets. This policy includes concluding reliable bilateral and multilateral agreements, promoting fair-trade principles, and developing economic cooperation infrastructure with strategic partners [30].

The issue of dual-use technologies, which can be used for both civilian and military purposes, also significantly affects economic security. Export controls, monitoring the transfer of know-how, as well as ethical frameworks for the development of new technologies, are therefore becoming part of preventive security and defence policy. This is an area where economic, ethical, security, and defence interests of states meet, and which requires a high degree of inter-institutional coordination and international cooperation [25].

3. Global Threats, Risks, and Challenges

In the current period, the world economy faces an unprecedented concentration of global risks and challenges, which have both cumulative and interactive characteristics. The World Economic Forum states in its report that the biggest short-term threats until 2027 include geopolitical recession, geo-economic confrontation, and societal polarization [10].

These phenomena mutually reinforce their impacts and disrupt the fundamental assumptions of global stability, which were previously the openness, predictability, and interdependence of the world economy.

Geopolitical recession represents a systematic decline in the international system's ability to prevent conflicts and crises and to coordinate collective solutions due to increasing multipolarity, rivalry, declining trust in institutions, and the return of power politics. In this environment, geo-economic confrontation is becoming one of the key instruments of competition between states. It includes measures such as sanctions, tariffs, bans on the export of strategic technologies, or selective restrictions on investments, the aim of which is to weaken the economic potential of the [18] [28]. The third destabilizing factor is deepening societal polarization, which has been intensified, especially in recent years, by the spread of disinformation, conspiracy theories, and various fake news [31], as well as growing frustration with the inability of political elites to solve basic socio-economic problems. This leads to internal interference and the weakening of democratic societies, which reduces their ability to effectively and efficiently face external challenges [32].

The connection between economic risks, the growth of security threats, and geopolitical developments has become evident in the last decade. The war in Ukraine triggered a deep inflationary wave through a sharp rise in energy, food, and fertilizer prices, which subsequently led to a global slowdown in economic growth and an increased probability of recession in many developed and developing economies [33]. Disruptions in supplies from Ukraine and Russia particularly affected markets for grains, energy resources, and metals, with countries of the Global South becoming particularly vulnerable to the secondary effects of these outages [34]. At the same time, the protectionist approach of some states has increased, which has manifested in the introduction of export bans on selected commodities and the strengthening of domestic self-sufficiency at the expense of the efficiency of international trade.

Given this situation, it is justified to speak of the risk of systemic shocks that could disrupt the basic functioning of the global economy. Among the most serious is the threat of a global economic and financial crisis, caused by a combination of high debt, rising interest rates, weakening investor confidence, and reduced international liquidity [10].

A further weakening of global stability is contributed to by the concentration of strategic resources and critical technologies in the hands of a narrow group of countries or companies. An example is the dominance of several Asian producers in the field of advanced chips or the monopolistic position in the processing of lithium, cobalt, or rare earth elements, which are essential for the digital and energy transformation. This asymmetry increases the risk of politically motivated export restrictions and at the same time deepens the strategic vulnerability of importing states [18,35].

A serious problem is also the weakening of multilateral mechanisms that were supposed to mitigate conflicts and promote coordination in the areas of trade, finance, or energy. The effectiveness of the WTO is undermined by the inability to reform the dispute settlement mechanism, while the G20 faces political polarization among its members. The UN Security Council is paralyzed by the veto of permanent members, and even regional groupings often fail to respond to complex crisis scenarios in a timely and coordinated manner. This erosion of multilateral structures leads to a greater orientation towards bilateral and ad hoc solutions, which, however, both reduce predictability and weaken the ability to build long-term stability [36].

4. European Economic Security in a Multipolar and Fragmented World

In an era of increasing geopolitical competition, strategic uncertainty, and a disrupted international economic architecture, the European Union finds itself in a situation where it must reassess its long-term normative, economic, and security foundations. The concept of economic security is thus increasingly coming to the forefront of EU strategic thinking, especially as a result of exogenous shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, disruptions to global supply chains, and growing economic, energy, and technological pressure from authoritarian regimes. In response to these challenges, the EU has developed several strategic documents that signal a significant shift from naive liberalism to a more pragmatic and security-oriented economic policy.

Key European political initiatives include the European Economic Security Strategy of July 2023, which defines economic security as the EU's ability to protect its strategic interests from economic threats, secure critical functions, and strengthen competitiveness in a changing global environment. The strategy rests on four pillars: (a) risk identification and assessment, (b) capacity building and resilience, (c) strengthening international partnerships, and (d) using defensive tools in accordance with international law [20]. Another relevant document is the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence of 2022, which reflects the need for a stronger European presence in the field of foreign, security, and defence policy and highlights the economic dimension of defence, especially in the areas of strategic technologies, cybersecurity, and the defence industry [37].

To implement these goals, the EU utilizes various instruments to protect and strengthen economic security, placing particular emphasis on mechanisms for screening foreign investments. This mechanism, introduced in 2020, allows member states to analyse the impact of investments from third countries on security and public order and, if necessary, to restrict or block these investments. In addition, the EU is developing its own policy to defend against economic coercive diplomacy, which was reflected in the adoption of the proposal for an Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) that will enable responses to potential economic blackmail by third countries.

In the area of strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, the EU strives to build capabilities in critical sectors such as semiconductors, cloud computing, quantum technologies, and artificial intelligence. In 2022, the EU Chips Act was adopted, which aims to double the EU's share of the global chip market by 2030 and support investment in European production capacity [35]. These measures complement several initiatives stemming from the EU's Common

Security and Defence Policy, which are focused on coordinated defence investments, the development of the European defence industry, and the joint development and building of military capabilities and technologies [31].

Despite these ambitious steps, however, the EU faces several systemic risks and limitations that reduce the effectiveness of its policies. Primarily, this involves internal fragmentation among member states, which have different interests, industrial structures, and historical ties, making it difficult to create a unified strategic framework. Some states, like France, advocate for an autonomous approach, while others, such as the Baltic states or Poland, prefer close coordination with the USA [38]. Furthermore, there is a persistent dependence of the EU on external actors, especially in the areas of energy, technology, and raw materials.

These challenges can be briefly illustrated through selected case studies that reveal key weaknesses in European economic security. The semiconductor case showed a high dependence on Taiwan and South Korea, as well as limited European capacity in advanced lithographic equipment. The energy crisis following Russia's military invasion of Ukraine revealed how deeply the EU was exposed to Russian gas infrastructure, requiring urgent diversification measures and the construction of LNG terminals. In the area of critical raw materials such as cobalt, lithium, or graphite, the EU is significantly dependent on imports from China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other geopolitically unstable regions, and is only slowly making progress in building strategic reserves and partnership mining agreements [39].

The above implies that the EU's economic security is formed in the tension between the idealistic values of an open market and the pragmatic need to protect strategic interests. The future effectiveness of the European approach will depend on the ability to overcome internal differences, accelerate the implementation of strategic projects, and align economic and security policies within a unified framework.

5. Towards a Resilient and Adaptive Economic Security

Changes in the global order, increasing uncertainty, and the accumulation of security threats and systemic risks are creating pressure to redefine the traditional understanding of economic security. While a protectionist and defensive approach dominated in the past, current conditions require a more complex, proactive, and adaptive model that combines economic integrity, technological independence, and geopolitical foresight. In this context, the paradigm of resilience is increasingly being promoted, which is no longer seen merely as the ability to survive a crisis, but as an active tool for managing uncertainty and increasing autonomy in an unstable world [20].

Resilience is becoming a central strategic goal that includes the diversification of resources and partnerships, the strengthening of domestic innovation capacities, strategic stockpiling, and the development of redundancies in critical sectors. The EU, as one of the largest actors in the global economy, faces the challenge of transitioning from dependence on efficient but vulnerable supply chains to flexible and robust structures that allow for rapid recovery in the event of disruption [20].

A key area where resilience intersects with security is technological and digital sovereignty. The ability to develop and maintain critical technologies such as microprocessors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and 5G networks has become a matter of national security significance. The EU – in an environment of growing rivalry between technological powers – cannot remain dependent on external supplies, especially from countries that do not respect the principles of the rule of law and an open market [40].

Similarly important is the connection between economic and energy security, especially in the context of climate transformation. The transition to renewable sources, the electrification of industry, and the digitalization of infrastructure require not only stable supplies of raw materials but also new geopolitical and trade partnerships. This increases the importance of securing critical raw materials such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements, the extraction and processing of which is highly concentrated [41]. A resilient economy must therefore combine responsible investment in domestic capacities with credible international supply agreements, including strategic partnerships with democratic states in Latin America, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific [40].

Given the complexity of the challenges, it is evident that economic security cannot be an isolated sector of policy but must be integrated into all aspects of strategic decision-making – from industrial policy to foreign relations, and the environmental and digital agendas. This requires not only coordination between EU institutions and member states but also a higher degree of foresight, strategic planning capabilities, and implementation flexibility.

On this basis, several key recommendations for policymakers can be formulated:

- Increase investment in domestic innovation ecosystems, especially in areas of strategic value.
- Streamline European investment screening mechanisms to also include secondary threats and technological chains.
- Build alliances of resilience with like-minded actors (e.g., the USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, South Korea).
- Ensure greater strategic transparency, including systematic mapping of dependencies and regular vulnerability assessments.
- Promote the integration of economic security into education and research, thereby creating a generational framework of strategic literacy in a changing world.

This is based on the fact that resilient and adaptive economic security is not a static goal but a process of building capacities, mechanisms, and attitudes that will enable European democratic societies to face future crises with greater preparedness, cohesion, and autonomy.

6. Conclusions

Economic security has transformed over the last decade from a marginal component of security policy into one of its strategic dimensions, which is an integral part of geopolitical thinking, technological development, and strategic planning. The deterioration of the global and regional security environment, increasing geopolitical and geo-economic tensions, the abuse of economic interconnectedness as a tool of pressure, and recurring systemic shocks (pandemics, conflicts, energy crises) have fundamentally redefined the understanding of economic risks. As recent events show, the world faces a confluence of multiple risk factors that require a coordinated, adaptive, effective, and also value-anchored response.

From a theoretical perspective, it is evident that economic security is not just a technocratic concept but a politico-normative framework that expresses the values and preferences of a given actor. Models of survival, sovereignty, and prosperity define not only objective needs but also subjective perceptions of threats, which vary depending on the regime type, economic dependence, and the level of institutional resilience. The approaches of the EU, USA, and Japan differ in techniques, but they share a basic understanding of the strategic importance of technological autonomy, diversification, and shared resilience.

Empirical analysis shows that the European Union has moved from normative liberalism to a more pragmatic model of "strategic openness," which emphasizes the prevention of vulnerabilities, the protection of critical sectors, and the building of domestic capacities. Initiatives such as the European Economic Security Strategy, the EU Chips Act, and instruments aimed against economic coercion indicate a development towards a holistic policy, which, however, faces limitations arising from fragmentation among member states, insufficient coordination, and external dependencies. The connection between technological, energy, and economic security points to the need for a systemic approach that goes beyond sectoral frameworks and integrates a security perspective into all areas of strategic planning.

The presented findings lead to the conclusion that economic security in the 21st century cannot be understood in isolation but as part of a broader project of democratic resilience and a strategic culture based on openness, responsibility, and cooperation. Furthermore, the shift towards a resilient economic security model requires a fundamental transformation of the institutional mindset within democratic states. It is no longer sufficient to respond to crises reactively; instead, a proactive "security-by-design" approach must be integrated into industrial and technological policies. This involves creating robust monitoring systems that can identify emerging dependencies before they become critical vulnerabilities. By fostering a deeper synergy between the private sector, academia, and state institutions, the European Union can build a cognitive advantage that allows it to navigate the complexities of "weaponized interdependence" without compromising its core values of transparency and market freedom.

At the same time, the success of these strategic efforts is inextricably linked to the internal cohesion of society. As economic security measures—such as diversification of energy sources or reshoring of critical production—may involve higher short-term costs, it is essential to maintain public trust through clear communication and equitable distribution of the transition's benefits. Strengthening economic resilience must therefore be perceived not only as a defensive necessity against external rivals but as a commitment to protecting the social contract. Ultimately, an adaptive economic security policy serves as a vital shield that ensures the continuity of democratic governance and the prosperity of citizens in an increasingly fragmented and unpredictable global landscape.

In this spirit, European policy should strive for: (a) bridging the gap between competitiveness and the protection of values that are the foundation of the legitimacy of democratic institutions, (b) institutionalizing economic security as a horizontal policy, not just as crisis management, (c) supporting pluralistic multilateralism, which includes not only state but also non-state actors, and (d) investing in strategic thinking and research that develops the ability to anticipate new forms of threats and risks (e.g., in the field of artificial intelligence).

Democratic societies currently face the challenge of maintaining openness and transparency in an environment of increasing competition and uncertainty. The response should therefore not be to close in on protectionism but an intelligent and purposeful defence of an open society through resilient and adaptive institutions. Economic security is increasingly becoming not only part of individual policies but also one of the pillars of the survival of democratic societies in a multipolar and fragmented world.

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