MARKT EN MACHT

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

MARKET AND MIGHT

Speler of Speelveld
in de Hegemonie strijd

DENKWERK

DenkWerk is een onafhankelijke denktank die met krachtige ideeën bij wil dragen aan een welvarend, inclusief en vooruitstrevend Nederland. Hiervoor brengt DenkWerk Nederlanders bij elkaar die hun rijke kennis, ervaring en creativiteit willen inzetten om richting te geven aan brede maatschappelijke vraagstukken die hen na aan het hart liggen.

Om dat te bereiken doet DenkWerk haar eigen onderzoek, gebruikmakend van een breed netwerk van experts. Hiermee willen we vraagstukken grondig onderzoeken, structuur brengen en inspiratie aandragen voor acties of verder onderzoek.

Om bij te dragen aan het maatschappelijk debat en verandering in gang te zetten, streven we ernaar de resultaten van ons werk in het publieke domein te delen.

contact@denkwerk.online
www.denkwerk.online

MARKT en MACHT
Speler of Speelveld in de Hegemonie strijd

Januari 2026

FOREWORD

Exactly one year after the inauguration of Donald Trump, it has become clear that the United States can no longer be regarded as a trusted friend or ally, but has instead turned into a hard geopolitical competitor. The façade of partnership still stands, yet its foundations have shifted. *America First* means exactly that: short-term self-interest takes precedence; deals replace alliances, transactions replace trust. “The European Union was formed to ‘screw’ the United States”[1] and “You don’t pay your bills, you get no protection. It’s very simple.”[2]

This conclusion is uncomfortable. Since the Second World War, Europe and the United States jointly constructed a world order based on stability, predictability, and shared values.[3][4] That order rested on a strategic exchange: Europe received security and economic space in return for political support of American leadership. That era has ended. As a result, Europe—and the Netherlands within it—must relearn how to operate in a world in which even friends speak the language of power.

DenkWerk’s focus has always been on the Netherlands. But when it comes to geopolitics, the analytical lens must shift to Europe. The Netherlands alone is simply too small to act as a decisive player. American power politics will, in the longer run, undermine prosperity not only in the United States but globally as well. Europe should therefore not seek to imitate this approach, but must ensure that it does not become its geopolitical victim. Countervailing power is required to maintain balance in the international system.

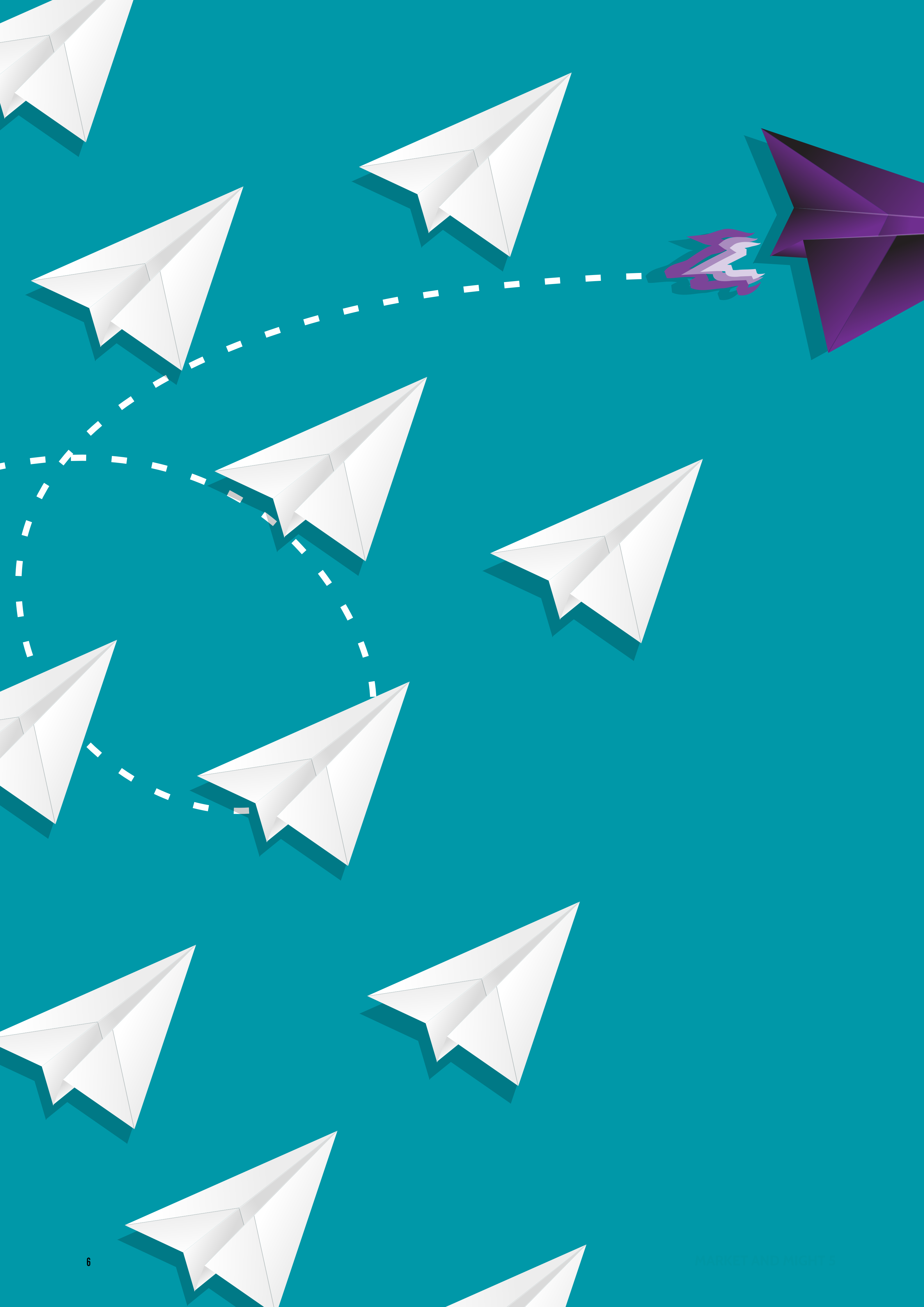
So far, Europe has struggled to play this geopolitical game effectively. Too often, it arrives at the table with hat in hand, facing actors that operate faster, harder, and more ruthlessly. The reflex of “talking until consensus is reached” no longer works in an environment where others think in terms of power and hegemony. While Europe continues to reason from the virtues of free markets and consensus-based governance, the world around it is changing at record speed.

The outlook is therefore deeply concerning. For critical components of its production chains, Europe is almost entirely dependent on China or the United States. These two great powers, now openly competing for global hegemony, increasingly disregard European interests. Europe is no longer seen as a player, but as a playing field. Those who are a playing field are used; those who are players set the rules. The choice Europe faces is therefore simple, but uncomfortable: either it accepts a role as spectator, or it rebuilds strategic capacity.

Whenever one country depends on another without reciprocity, asymmetry emerges. In an era defined by hegemonic competition, such asymmetry is deeply problematic. Where asymmetry exists, the law of the strongest prevails. Treaties and multilateral agreements become little more than paper shields. The United States’ intervention in Venezuela—apparently driven by the country’s vast oil reserves[5]—Trump’s open suggestion to ‘buy’ Greenland,[6] and repeated threats to withdraw from NATO[7] illustrate how quickly existing agreements can lose their practical meaning.

Cooperation within this new geopolitical environment, while preserving Europe’s commitment to the rule of law, is not impossible—but it can only be sustained on the basis of equality. This requires urgent reconfiguration of international cooperation, while simultaneously strengthening Europe’s economic capacity and remaining within planetary boundaries. The challenge is formidable, and is therefore addressed across multiple DenkWerk studies.[8][9][10]

In this report, DenkWerk assesses Europe’s current position through a lens of sober realism. How much geopolitical and geo-economic power do we truly possess? How did this vulnerable position come about? And, most importantly, what is required to reclaim strategic room for manoeuvre?



1 FROM INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Over the past four decades, policy and business were shaped by an optimistic belief in the power of international cooperation. The fall of the Berlin Wall not only marked the end of the Cold War; it also became the symbolic starting point of an era in which borders seemed to fade, [11] trade expanded rapidly, and global integration became the dominant economic point of departure.

Globalisation was underpinned by the idea that economic interdependence generates prosperity—and stability. Countries that trade with each other, the argument went, are less likely to fight one another. [12] This logic drove an unprecedented expansion of global value chains. Production was split up, relocated, and concentrated where it could be organised most efficiently. Design took place in Europe and the United States, assembly in Asia, and raw materials were extracted in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. The world turned into a finely meshed production network.

For many countries, this was a win-win. [13] In emerging economies, globalisation enabled hundreds of millions of people to be lifted out of poverty, as shown in Figure 1. [14] In advanced economies, these developments delivered lower consumer prices and steady economic growth. Costs fell not only because of scale, but also through specialisation and the optimisation of logistics processes, including just-in-time production. [15]

IN EMERGING ECONOMIES, GLOBALISATION MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE TO BE LIFTED OUT OF POVERTY.

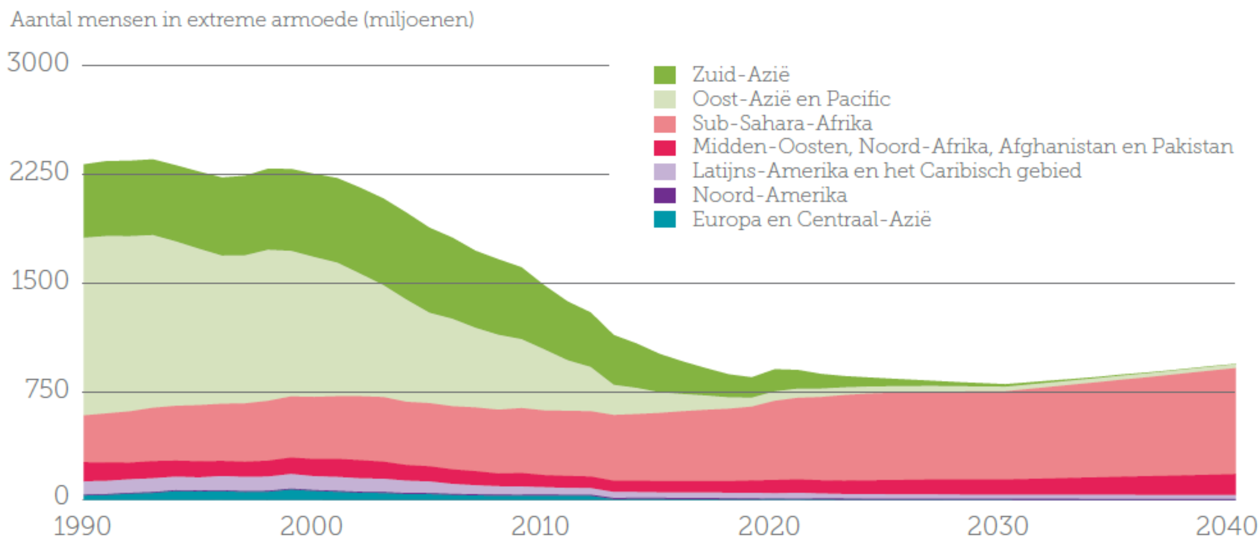


Figure 1: Decline in Extreme Poverty by World Region between 1990 and 2040
Source: Our World in Data

Note: Extreme poverty is defined as living below the international poverty line of 3 US dollars per day. The figures are adjusted for inflation and for differences in the cost of living between countries.

These efficiency gains went hand in hand with the reduction of inventories and strategic buffers. Many firms assumed that international trade would remain reliable and uninterrupted. Globalisation came to be seen as a stable and self-evident feature of the economic order. As a result, risks embedded in value chains received limited attention for a long time.

The logic of specialisation and asymmetry

The long period of international cooperation coincided with strong patterns of specialisation. Countries built on existing comparative advantages, which were further reinforced as firms, knowledge institutions, and suppliers clustered in the same locations. This clustering increased efficiency and strengthened economies of scale: larger volumes, shorter supply lines, and specialised labour translated into higher productivity and lower costs.

The Netherlands, for example, hosts several key clusters around Wageningen, ASML, and the Port of Rotterdam. Another well-known case is the electronics cluster around Shenzhen in China, where designers, component suppliers, and large-scale assembly firms reinforce each other, forming a global production hub for consumer electronics. [16]

These dynamics gave rise to so-called hubs [17] that came to play a pivotal role in global value chains. Such central nodes granted certain regions more influence than others. An asymmetric structure emerged in which a limited number of hubs became decisive for the flow of goods, services, and knowledge. In the domain of digital data management, we currently observe a similar development, with a small number of very large firms assuming a hub-like function. [18]

In a free market, oligopolistic or monopolistic outcomes are always a latent risk, which calls for robust competition policy. In a global market, however, this is difficult to organise. A monopoly at the global level can easily be framed as a national interest. Both the United States and China increasingly prioritise national interests in their competition policies. Over the past decade, the United States has largely dismantled international trade regulation through the WTO. [19] China, too, has repeatedly departed from the spirit of WTO rules. [20]

Shocks that revealed vulnerability

From 2008 onwards, the landscape of economic globalisation began to shift. Shocks such as the global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposed how vulnerable existing dependency structures had become. A single event in one location could cascade through entire chains: a banking crisis in the United States froze global credit markets; halted production in Asia led to shortages of medical equipment and microchips; and Europe confronted the consequences of its dependence on Russian gas.

These crises pointed to a deeper pattern. The global economy had been pushed far towards efficiency, while robustness and redundancy were insufficiently developed. The belief that free markets would always deliver sufficient suppliers proved overly optimistic in domains where a single firm or country exercises dominant control—such as energy, semiconductors, or cloud infrastructure.

Many of these dependencies had, in fact, been known for years. Research prior to 2014 had already highlighted Europe's strong reliance on Russian gas, [21,22] the high concentration of advanced chip production, and the limited number of countries supplying critical raw materials. [23] Yet as long as systems continued to function, the prevailing assumption was that they would keep doing so. This amounted to a form of habituation: risks were recognised, but not incorporated into policy.

RISKS WERE IDENTIFIED, BUT NOT INCORPORATED INTO POLICY

From cooperation to competition for strategic dominance

China—though similar dynamics apply to countries in Africa and Latin America—has long experienced firsthand that dependencies can be deployed as instruments of power. The United States, for example, has historically been highly reluctant to supply China with advanced technologies. [24,25] This experience has informed a long-term Chinese strategy aimed at reducing critical dependencies on foreign actors.

China's rise was not driven solely by the relocation of production to low-cost regions—the globalisation wave itself—but also by a gradual move up the value chain towards segments with higher value added. [26] From its position as the "workshop of the world," China evolved into a country that explicitly aspires to global leadership in advanced technology and innovation. [27]

As a result, the economic—and geopolitical—centre of gravity has shifted towards Asia. This shift is illustrated in Figure 2. Asia's share of the global economy has been increasing for years and is expected to exceed half of global GDP after 2030. [28]

This transformation has altered the logic of global relations. Large Asian economies perceive new opportunities, but also recognise that the United States is unlikely to relinquish its hegemonic position in the world economy without resistance. Where globalisation was previously rooted in mutual dependence and cooperation, states now actively deploy economic dependencies as tools of power.

Export controls, investment screening, managed access to technology, and pressure on raw material and logistics chains are prominent examples of this shift. Farrell and Newman describe this mechanism as *weaponized interdependence*: in asymmetrically structured networks, states that control central nodes can leverage economic interconnectedness for geopolitical influence. [29]

The earlier belief that trade would automatically stabilise the international order has given way to a different insight: asymmetric dependencies can be directly translated into power. Optimising for efficiency alone is therefore no longer sufficient in a world defined by strategic competition, intensifying technological rivalry, and shifting global power balances.

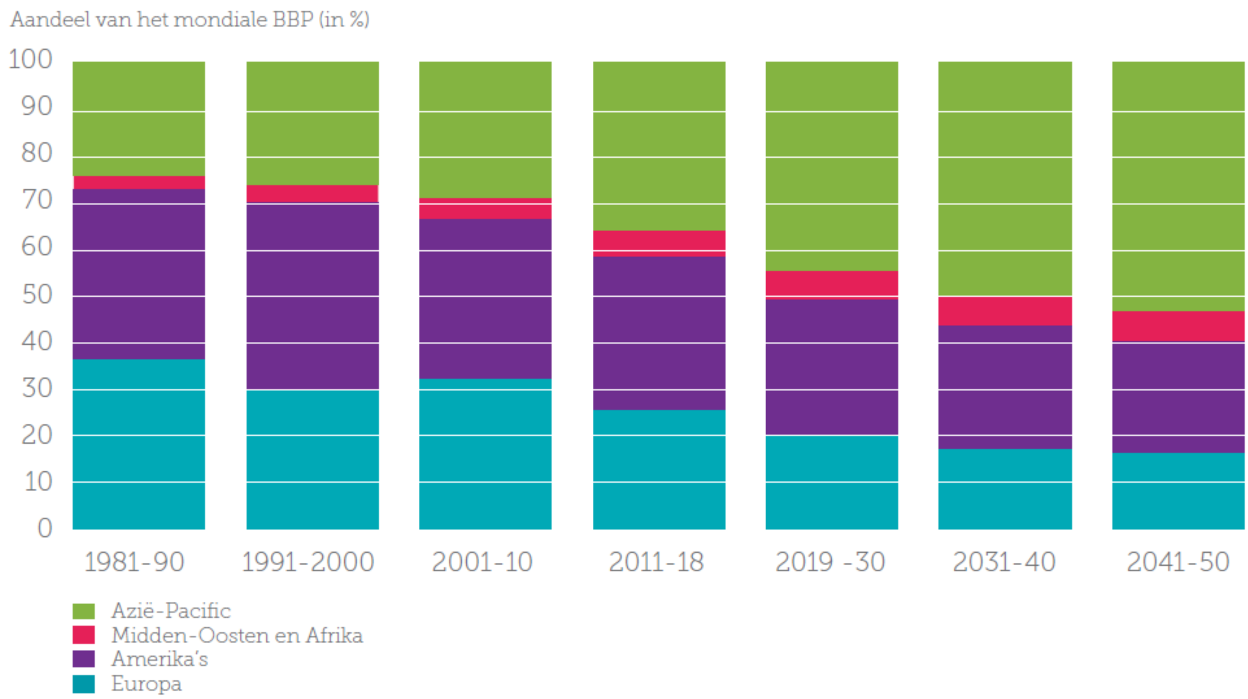


Figure 2: Global GDP Distribution: The World Economy Is Shifting towards Asia

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit

Europe must undergo a mental shift

In this new reality, Europe faces the need for a fundamental mental shift. The European Union emerged as a peace project, built on cooperation, stability, and the removal of economic barriers. The fact that European economies developed deep dependencies on other countries was not considered problematic. For decades, this premise functioned well and, from a prosperity perspective, it remains defensible. Yet it increasingly fails to align with a world in which geopolitical competition over strategic sectors has become decisive.

European countries will have to learn to operate in an environment where power politics, rather than free-market logic, sets the tone.

THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A PEACE PROJECT, NOT A POWER PROJECT. BUT THE WORLD REQUIRES US TO LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF POWER

For a long time, Europe relied on free-market reasoning: if shortages emerged, price signals would attract alternative suppliers. This logic worked in a period when globalisation was relatively stable and geopolitical tensions remained low. In domains where a single actor controls critical production, technology, or infrastructure, however, the price mechanism functions only to a limited extent. Those who control gas, raw materials, semiconductors, or cloud platforms determine the room for manoeuvre of others—regardless of the price they are willing to pay.

Moreover, Europe tends to respond slowly and in a fragmented manner in sectors where rapid decision-making, targeted investment, and concentrated capacity are essential. Traditional market logic offers insufficient guidance under these conditions. In today's world, power-based thinking is no longer a choice, but a prerequisite.

Conclusion: a troubling starting position

The era of free-market globalisation—in which efficiency took precedence over robustness—is coming to an end. Dependencies that once appeared rational can, in a world shaped by power politics, be converted into instruments of pressure. Europe will have to adapt to this reality, but doing so takes time, while other geopolitical blocs are already further along.

The coming years are therefore critical for Europe's position in the world. Europe's vulnerability is widely visible. The Netherlands will have to position itself accordingly—both in terms of domestic economic steering and in defining its role within and vis-à-vis Europe.

EUROPE IS VULNERABLE — AND THE WORLD CAN SEE IT

2 CRUCIAL INTERESTS

Dependency as a point of departure

Chapter 1 set out how globalisation and specialisation have led to tightly interwoven production chains, and how interdependence is increasingly framed as a potential vulnerability. This has triggered a renewed focus on questions of resilience and robustness, both at the national and the European level.

This reassessment requires precision. Not every dependency constitutes a problem, and not every disruption is strategically relevant. Many dependencies are temporary, inconvenient, but relatively easy to diversify or absorb locally. Other dependencies, however, affect functions that are so fundamental that disruption does not remain confined to a single sector or market, but cascades across multiple societal domains. Distinguishing between these types of dependencies is essential to prevent policy from being driven by a generalised aversion to openness.

The importance of functions and sectors

The foregoing makes clear that dependency is a logical outcome of an open and specialised economy. The policy challenge therefore does not lie in reducing dependencies as such, but in identifying those dependencies that have a disproportionate impact when disrupted. The significance of a function or sector becomes visible precisely at the moment it ceases to operate. Four interrelated criteria are guiding in this assessment.

First, there is the *degree of interconnection* with other functions. Interconnection refers to a function's position within the system. Functions that are upstream and whose failure simultaneously affects multiple downstream functions exhibit a high degree of interconnection. Some functions form a foundational layer underpinning large parts of the economy and the public sector. Disruption is then not confined to a single chain, but propagates across sectors and societal domains. Energy supply, digital infrastructure, and communication networks are clear examples. The availability of critical raw materials—including rare earth elements and other strategic materials—plays a similar role, as these constitute a necessary basis for defence, the energy transition, digital technologies, and advanced manufacturing. Defence fulfils this role indirectly, as security and deterrence are preconditions for nearly all economic and societal activity.

Second, the *character of disruption* matters. For many goods and services, disruption leads to a gradual deterioration of societal functioning: higher costs, reduced availability, or quality loss. For other functions, system behaviour is binary: it either functions fully, or not at all. The loss of electricity or of central digital authentication systems does not result in "less" functioning, but in the immediate halt of production, service delivery, and administrative processes—leading to societal disruption.

Third, the *time horizon to disruption* is critical. The shorter the period during which society can function without a given function, the greater its strategic weight. In sectors such as energy supply, telecommunications, and acute healthcare, failure leads to societal dislocation within hours or days. For critical raw materials, including rare earth elements, the time horizon is often longer—weeks to months—but disruption can nonetheless be strategically destabilising because alternatives are scarce and scaling up replacement supply structurally takes time. In other sectors, such as parts of manufacturing, adaptation remains possible over longer periods.

Fourth, a limited number of functions directly affect the *functioning of government*. Disruption undermines not only economic activity, but also security, enforcement, public health, and administrative continuity. Defence is the most pronounced example: failure directly impairs the ability to protect territory, meet international obligations, and uphold public order.

When these four characteristics coincide, a structural vulnerability emerges—a so-called *chokepoint*. In such cases, dependency is not a temporary inconvenience, but a risk that requires targeted policy and deliberate steering.

Dependencies in functions such as defence, energy supply, digital infrastructure (cloud), telecommunications infrastructure, and financial infrastructure therefore differ fundamentally from ordinary market or trade dependencies (Table 1).

INTERDEPENDENCE IS INCREASINGLY VIEWED AS A POTENTIAL VULNERABILITY

Sector	Verwevenheid	Aan/uit	Tijd tot schade	Publieke impact	Conclusie
Defensie/Veiligheid	Zeer hoog	Hard	Dagen/weken	Hoog	Choke point
Energie	Zeer hoog	Hard	Uren/dagen	Hoog	Choke point
Cloud	Zeer hoog	Hard	Uren	Hoog	Choke point
Telco-infrastructuur	Zeer hoog	Hard	Uren	Hoog	Choke point
Financiële infrastructuur	Zeer hoog	Hard	Uren	Hoog	Choke point
Kritieke grondstoffen (o.a. zeldzame aardmetalen)	Zeer hoog	Zacht	Weken/maanden	Middel	Strategisch kritisch
Halfgeleiderindustrie	Zeer hoog	Zacht	Weken/maanden	Middel	Strategisch kritisch
AI-infrastructuur en -systemen	Hoog	Zacht	Weken/maanden	Middel	Strategisch kritisch
Luchtvaartindustrie	Hoog	Hard/Zacht	Weken	Middel	Strategisch kritisch
Voedselindustrie	Hoog	Hard/Zacht	Weken	Middel	Strategisch kritisch
Auto-industrie	Middel	Zacht	Maanden	Middel/Laag	Pijnlijk, niet existentieel
Textiel / consumentengoederen	Laag	Zacht	Maanden/Jaren	Laag	Beheersbaar
Cacao-industrie [1]	Laag	Zacht	Maanden/Jaren	Laag	Niet strategisch

Table 1: Importance of sectors in dependencies
Source: DenkWerk (2025)
Note: The classifications used in the table (low, medium, high, very high) reflect a relative assessment of the systemic importance of sectors. 1. As an example of the largest group of goods and services that are not strategic.

3 EUROPE'S POSITION IN THE CONTEST OF INTERESTS

Importance is not enough: position as the decisive factor

Chapter 2 established which system functions carry structural weight for the functioning of society. That assessment explicitly concerned importance: it identified where disruption can have broad societal repercussions. Whether, and to what extent, intervention is required, however, is not determined by importance alone. What ultimately matters is Europe's position within these functions and sectors.

When dependency becomes asymmetric

Dependency becomes problematic when it is asymmetric—when Europe's room for manoeuvre is structurally smaller than that of other actors. To assess this position systematically, three interrelated criteria are applied. Together, they determine whether reciprocity can be transformed into power and pressure.

The first criterion is *control over infrastructure and "rails"*. This concerns governance over the physical and digital nodes through which processes run: energy and data networks, cloud platforms, payment infrastructures, pipelines, certification regimes, and digital ecosystems. Those who control these nodes can condition, delay, or terminate access. In network terms, these are central links where relatively small interventions can have far-reaching effects. In functions with high societal importance—such as energy, telecommunications, or cloud services—this control translates directly into broad leverage.

The second criterion is *technical autonomy*. The core question is whether Europe can switch providers, manage systems independently, and retain control over essential elements such as cryptographic keys, software updates, and oversight mechanisms. Dependency becomes asymmetric when effective control is lacking, even if infrastructure is physically located on European territory. This is particularly salient in digital services and software-intensive functions, where lock-in can emerge without visible physical dependence.

The third criterion concerns *redundancy and recovery capacity*. Europe's position becomes vulnerable when alternatives are absent or when replacement and scaling structurally take a long time. Long lead times, capital intensity, and highly specialised knowledge mean that disruptions cannot be absorbed within a short timeframe. This is evident in defence industries, critical raw materials, and pharmaceutical supply chains, where temporary shocks can have prolonged effects.

When an actor holds a strong position across these three criteria, effective power emerges. A weak position, by contrast, results in impotence. In practice, power is often exercised through legal and political channels: sanctions, export controls, licensing regimes, compliance requirements, or supervisory measures. These instruments are relatively straightforward ways of activating existing power positions. In sectors with low societal importance—such as cocoa or parts of consumer goods value chains—such legal influence may at most result in price or availability effects. In high-importance functions, however, the same instruments can trigger immediate societal and administrative disruption.

These three criteria compel a value-chain perspective. A strong position in a single link is insufficient if another link elsewhere can bring the functioning of the entire chain to a halt. [30,31]

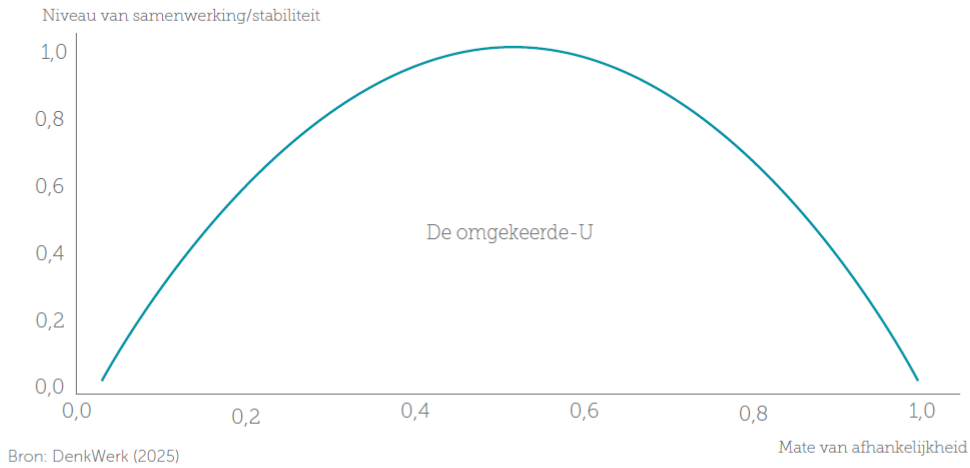


Figure 3: The Inverted U-Curve
Source: DenkWerk (2025)
Note: The figure presents a conceptual model. The inverted U-shaped relationship aligns with a broad body of literature on trade, interdependence and cooperation. Classical and contemporary studies show that reciprocity fosters cooperation, while dominant power positions and one-sided dependencies tend to undermine it (including Montesquieu; Keohane Nye, 1977; Oneal Russett, 1999; Martin et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

The logic of the inverted U

The three criteria determine when dependency becomes asymmetric; the inverted U describes what this implies for the nature of cooperation. On the left-hand side of the curve, dependencies are limited and reciprocity is weak. Cooperation is thin and provides little stabilising effect.

In the middle of the curve, dependencies are reciprocal and the asymmetry criteria remain limited: neither party holds decisive control. In this zone, dependency supports cooperation—the core logic underpinning international trade and cooperation.

The right-hand side of the curve is reached when multiple asymmetry criteria coincide and reinforce one another. Dependency then shifts from a reciprocal relationship to an asymmetric dependency and a potential instrument of pressure. Cooperation remains possible, but becomes conditional and unstable. The inverted U thus functions as an organising consequence model: it shows how the accumulation of asymmetry criteria shifts a position from stability towards vulnerability.

Europe's current position by function and sector

Ultimately, the objective is to intersect importance and position. To do so, we first map Europe's position in the key functions and sectors identified in Chapter 2.

Defence and weapons systems — Europe faces a structural capacity challenge in the field of defence. Despite having its own defence industrial base, the continent remains highly dependent on the United States for its military capabilities. Figure 4 shows that the United States has been the dominant supplier of European weapon systems for decades. [32] In the years following 2014, after the annexation of Crimea and the increase in perceived threat from Russia, this dependency intensified further.

When time, interoperability, and scale matter, Europe defaults to American systems. In 2024, the United States spent approximately $997 billion on defence, while combined European expenditure amounted to around $693 billion, following years of underinvestment below the NATO benchmark. [33] This gap translates directly into differences in scale, standardisation, and production capacity. Whereas the United States operates with a limited number of system variants, Europe produces dozens of systems in parallel. [34]

The war in Ukraine exposed the practical consequences of this fragmentation: limited stockpiles, dispersed production, and a near absence of rapid scaling capacity.

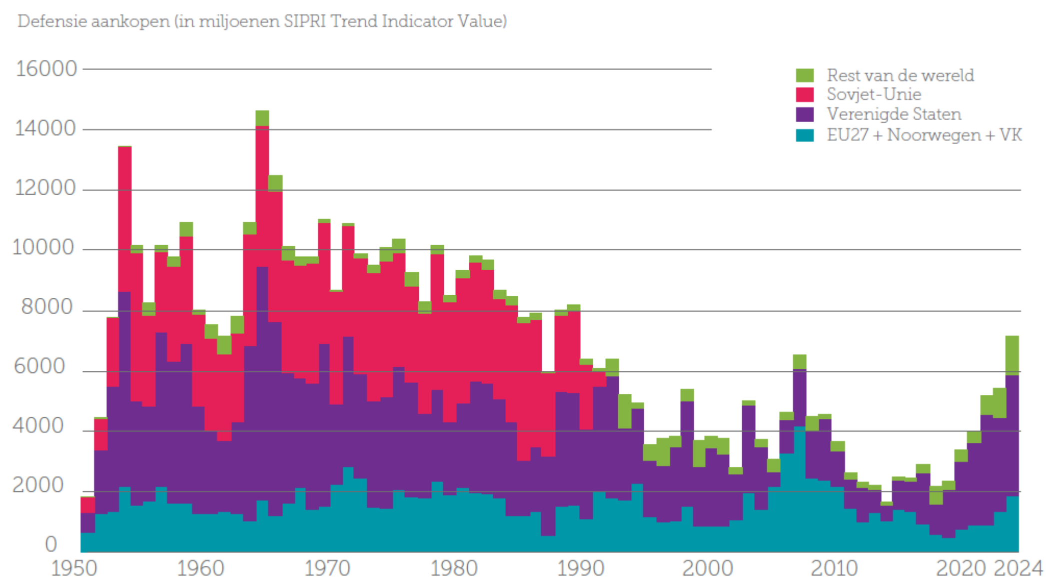


Figure 4: European Defence Procurement by Country of Origin, 1950–Present
Source: SIPRI
Note: SIPRI's Trend-Indicator Value (TIV) is a standardised measure of the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons systems and captures the military capability transferred, not the financial value of arms transfers. TIV series are therefore not comparable to defence expenditure figures and are used in this report solely to analyse dependencies and concentration in arms supplies.

Digital services and cloud infrastructure — Europe is highly dependent on American providers (Figure 5). [35] More than 65% of the global cloud market, virtually all dominant operating systems, and a large share of critical enterprise software are under U.S. control. Maintenance, security, and continuity therefore rely on an external ecosystem over which Europe has limited influence.

An underlying architecture of tightly interconnected microservices renders this dependency operationally acute: a single decision or outage can trigger cascading effects [36] across both public and private processes. This dependency is not theoretical. In the past, U.S. sanctions have effectively cut off access for institutions and firms through Microsoft services. [37]

Telecommunications infrastructure (5G and 6G) — Mobile networks constitute a critical backbone for the economy, government, and security. Fifth-generation networks are now indispensable for industrial automation, logistics, healthcare, and defence applications. Sixth-generation networks will deepen this dependence further through tighter integration with cloud services, sensor networks, and artificial intelligence.

Unlike cloud services and operating systems, Europe does possess global champions in this domain. Nokia and Ericsson rank among the global technological leaders and, together with Huawei, form the core of the worldwide market for network equipment. The United States lacks comparable end-to-end suppliers in this field. This gives Europe a relatively strong starting position at the radio access and network equipment layers.

At the same time, this position is not autonomous. The telecommunications value chain is deeply internationally interwoven, with dependencies in semiconductors, specialised components, software layers, and standards-setting processes. Moreover, the balance of power is shifting towards software-defined networks, virtualisation, and cloud integration—domains in which European control is far less assured.

The strategic question for 5G, and especially for 6G, is therefore not whether Europe has suppliers, but whether it can anchor its current industrial position across the full value chain, including core networks, software stacks, and future standards. In a function of such high societal importance, the loss of this anchoring can rapidly translate into asymmetric dependency, even without any physical disruption of the network itself.

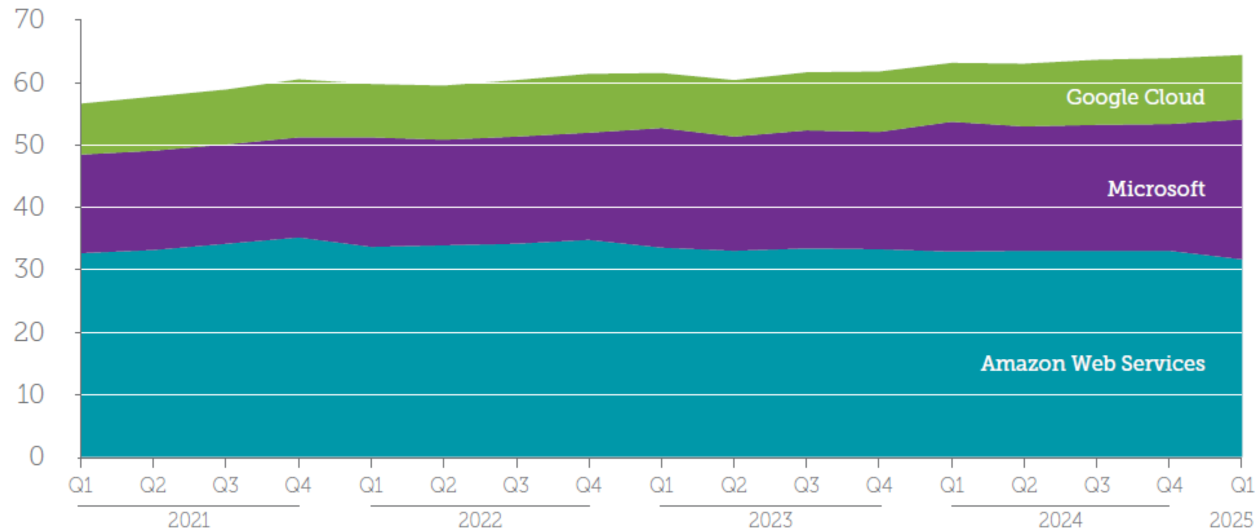


Figure 5: Global Market Shares of the Largest Cloud Providers (2021–2025)
Source: Canalys

Financial infrastructure — Europe operates within a financial system that lies deeply within the American sphere of influence. [38] The dominance of the dollar in reserves, trade, and commodities means that European banks and firms almost invariably rely on U.S.-controlled payment rails. Because dollar transactions pass through U.S. correspondent banks and clearing houses, they automatically fall under American jurisdiction—even when they take place entirely outside the United States. Sanctions imposed by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) demonstrate the power of this instrument: access to dollars can be cut off by a single decision.

Digital payment layers reinforce this asymmetry. Stablecoins are almost entirely dollar-denominated, and the major commercial payment networks operating in Europe—Visa, Mastercard, and PayPal—are American. In the absence of its own public digital payment infrastructure, Europe's digital economy risks being drawn even further into the dollar-based system.

Even financial reserves do not provide an autonomous anchor. Large shares of Europe's gold reserves [39] are physically stored in U.S. vaults. [40,41] Legally European, but de facto under American control, this constitutes a strategic risk that is rarely articulated, particularly in a period of political volatility in Washington. Taken together, the result is a financial system that Europe relies on intensively, but does not control.

At the same time, Europe's control over SWIFT provides leverage over the international messaging system, giving it an effective nodal position in global payments infrastructure, including dollar transactions.

Critical technologies — The global technological frontier no longer lies in Europe. In almost all strategic technologies—such as quantum computing, generative artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and semiconductors—leadership is held by either China or the United States. China now dominates 57 of the 64 frontier technologies measured by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)[b], driven by an integrated approach linking science, production, and scaling. [42] Where Europe often innovates at the laboratory level, China translates innovation directly into industrial application, allowing scale and learning effects to materialise more rapidly. [43]

Goods and critical raw materials — Europe, and the Netherlands in particular, are almost entirely dependent on external suppliers for essential materials, often concentrated in a single country. [44] A recent study by the ECB showed that more than 80% of the

European industrial base is three steps removed from a Chinese producer of rare earth elements. [45] China dominates the extraction and processing of rare earths, magnesium, and manganese, as shown in Table 2. The United States plays a comparable role in specific other critical raw materials. Crucially, concentration is most pronounced not in extraction, but in refining and processing. Access to raw materials does not automatically translate into access to functional end products. Even with access to rare earth elements, Europe is still unable to produce permanent magnets without external processing capacity.

Energy — Despite shifts in sourcing, Europe remains structurally a net importer of energy. [46] The energy transition changes the nature of this dependency, but does not yet reduce it. New dependencies are emerging around technologies, networks, and critical materials. The same pattern applies to the Netherlands: domestic generation is increasing, but full autonomy remains a distant prospect.

At the same time, energy carriers are traded on a liquid and global market, with potential production surpluses on the horizon. Energy vulnerability is therefore fundamentally limited, although it can translate into high costs and price volatility. From a strategic perspective, energy dependency poses less acute risks of immediate societal disruption than other critical functions, but it remains economically consequential.

	Land (grootste aandeel)	Land (Aandeel)	HHI[1]	% Import buiten EU27
Anorganische chemicaliën; organische en anorganische verbindingen van edelmetalen en zeldzame aardmetalen	China	52%-81%	0,402-0,744	90%+
Magnesium (metalen)	China	77,50%	0,62	99,90%
Mangaan	China	74,70%	0,571	99,80%
Keramische producten	China	68%-87%	0,477-0,764	18%-94%
Glas en glaswerk	China	62%-88%	0,405-0,781	51%-94%
Speelgoed	China	62%-84%	0,400-0,707	39%-96%
Kleding, stoffen en textiel	China	75%+	0,413-0,877	75%+
Beryllium (metalen)	Verenigde Staten	84,80%	0,723	97,80%
Vloeibaar propaan	Verenigde Staten	71,90%	0,53	93,00%
Sojabonen	Brazilië	55,10%	0,406	94,00%
Ruwe rietsuiker	Brazilië	82,60%	0,686	62,20%

Table 2: Import Shares and Concentration (2024)
Source: WITS
Note: The table shows the share of the largest country of origin in Dutch imports by product category, including an indication of concentration (HHI) and the share of imports originating from outside the EU27. 1. Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI): a measure of market concentration, calculated as the sum of the squared market shares of all suppliers in a market. A higher HHI indicates a more concentrated market and therefore greater potential market power and vulnerability to dependencies.

AI as a strategic dependency: from regulation to sovereign data and cloud

The rise of artificial intelligence marks a structural shift in power within the global economy. AI is not an abstract digital phenomenon, but a physical industry built on computing power, energy, specialised chips, and hyperscale data centres. It is precisely at these tangible layers that Europe is today deeply asymmetrically dependent.

Figure 6 shows that, over the past decade, Europe has generated a relatively low number of radical innovations in artificial intelligence. Despite strong regulatory frameworks—most notably the GDPR and the AI Act—Europe has very limited proprietary AI infrastructure. This has produced a paradox: Europe sets the rules for the use of AI, but not the conditions under which AI is developed and deployed.

This dependency has two distinct axes. On the one hand, Europe is structurally reliant on the United States for high-end AI capacity. American hyperscalers dominate the cloud landscape, while Nvidia controls nearly the entire ecosystem of AI chips and development software. Even Europe's own AI champions train and scale their models on U.S. infrastructure. This creates a form of functional dependency: access to AI exists, but only within technical, legal, and commercial frameworks defined by others.

On the other hand, a quieter dependency on China is emerging. In private clouds and industrial applications, Chinese suppliers—most notably Huawei—are gaining ground through aggressive pricing and vertical integration. At the same time, China is building a dominant position in AI patents and alternative chip architectures. Should access to U.S. technology become more restricted, parts of European industry risk being pushed towards Chinese infrastructure as the only scalable alternative.

The strategic question is therefore not whether Europe can become fully autonomous, but where dependency is acceptable, where it must remain manageable, and where it is unacceptable. Full decoupling is neither economically nor technologically realistic. What is required instead is targeted intervention at critical chokepoints: generic cloud services for vital sectors, AI infrastructure for defence and security, and the underlying data centre capacity and energy supply chains.

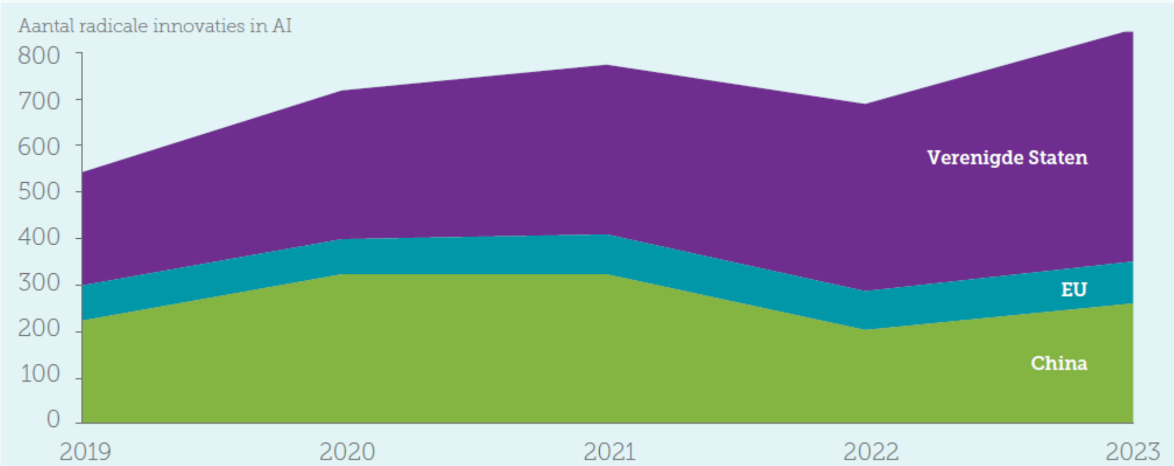


Figure 6: Development of Radical AI Innovations (2019–2023)
Source: Bruegel

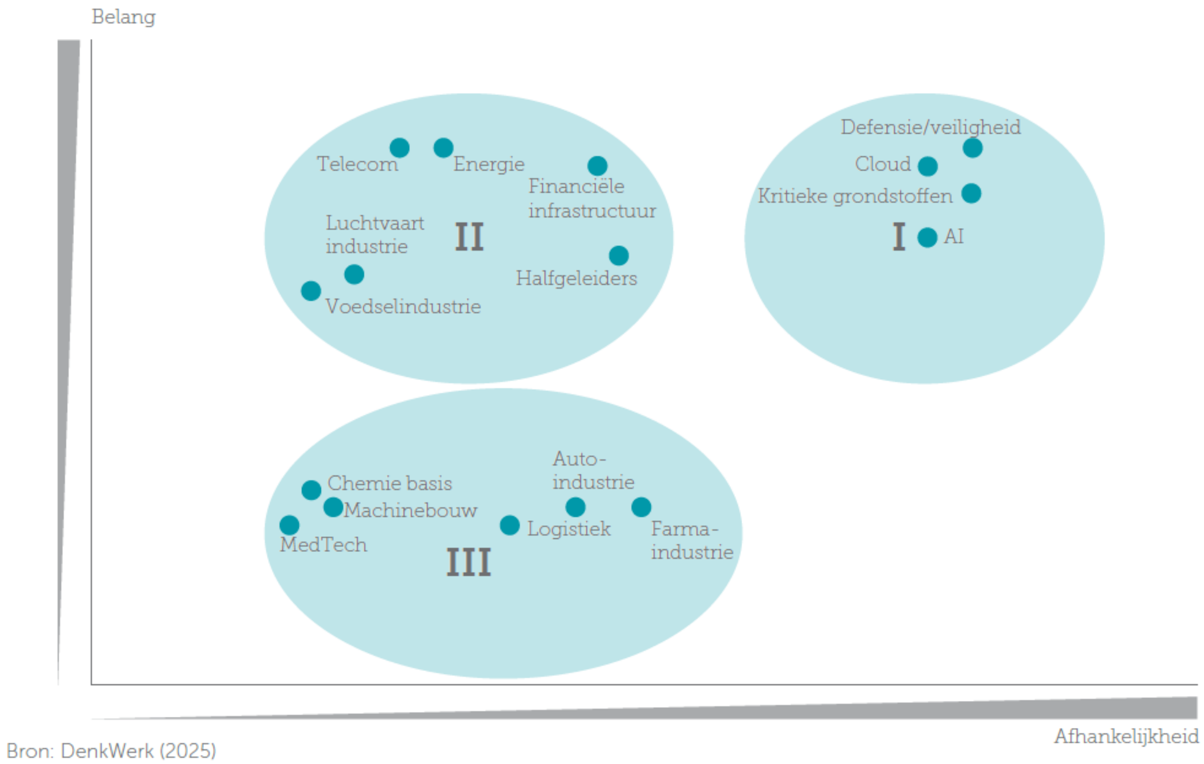


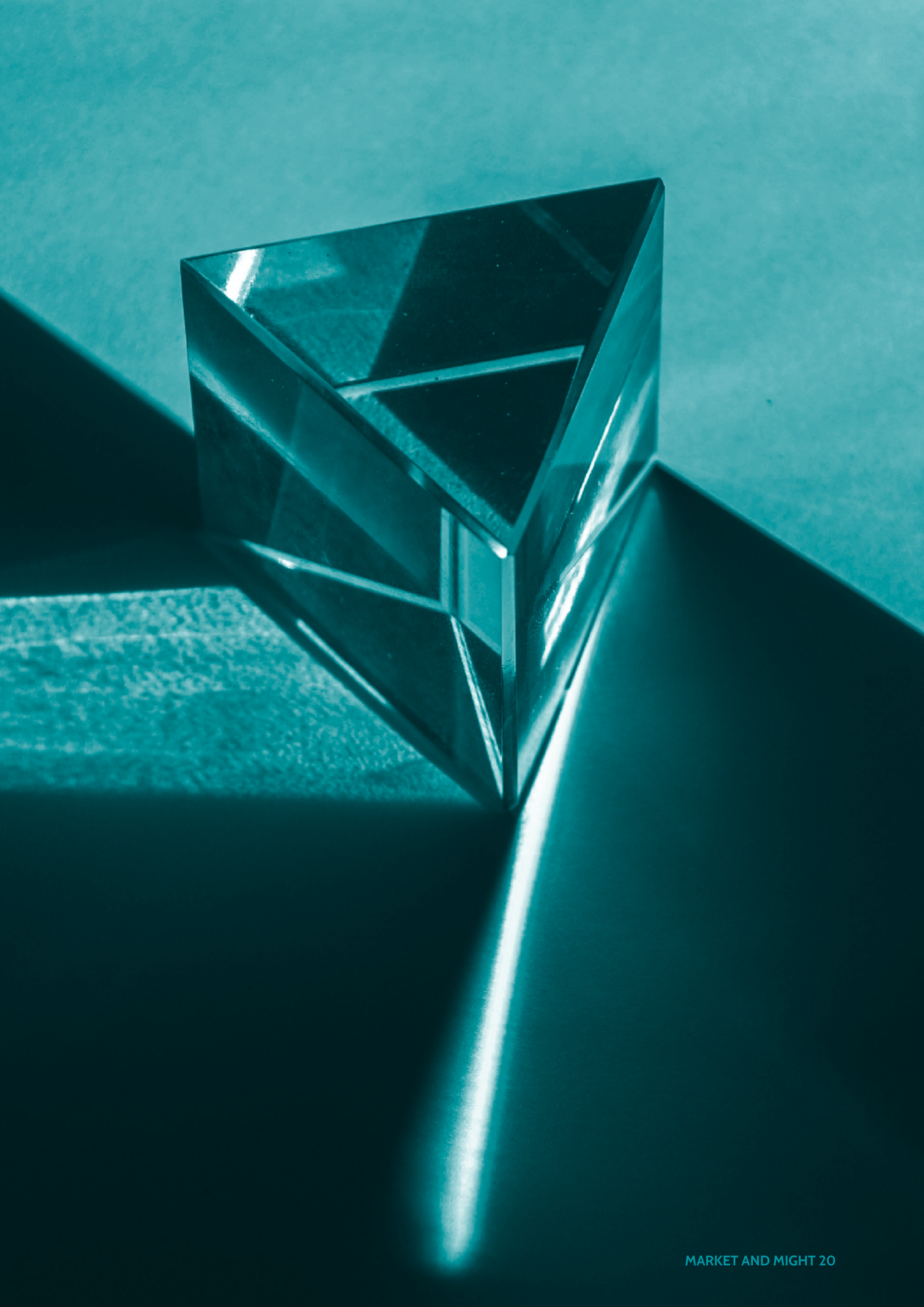
Figure 7: Classification of Strategic Sectors Based on Importance and Dependency
Source: DenkWerk (2025)
Note: The figure organises system functions along two dimensions: societal importance (vertical axis) and the degree of Europe's dependency (horizontal axis). The positioning is indicative and based on the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3. It is intended as an analytical tool to distinguish priorities.

Where do strategic risks concentrate?

Strategic tension arises where high societal importance coincides with an asymmetric position. Where Europe faces structurally limited room for manoeuvre within a critical system function, the risk extends beyond efficiency losses alone.

This intersection enables focus. Figure 7 visualises this logic by crossing the importance of a function with Europe's relative position. System functions where importance is high but Europe's position remains reciprocal or robust primarily require vigilance (Group II), as well as an assessment of whether these sectors can be further developed into sources of leverage. Functions where high importance and asymmetry coincide, by contrast, constitute the core problem (Group I). These are the areas where further analysis and concrete courses of action must concentrate. Finally, Group III comprises functions that are not risk-free, but lack the urgency of Groups I and II. c

WHERE IMPORTANCE IS HIGH BUT POSITION IS WEAK, ACTION BECOMES UNAVOIDABLE



4 EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK AND CAPACITY FOR ACTION

Europe is rich in values, but limited in means. It is powerful in rules, yet restrained in power. It is precisely in this tension that the central question of this chapter arises: can a system designed to preserve peace also organise countervailing power in a world that is becoming increasingly less peaceful?

Europe is not a federal state, but a community of countries whose cooperation was built on economic interests rather than on the accumulation of power. The European Coal and Steel Community was designed to transform rivalry into mutual dependence, and thereby into peace. [47] This project produced an impressive institutional architecture: free movement, a single market, common regulation, and even a shared currency. Yet despite this depth, Europe remains a collection of national political economies that struggle to converge on shared strategic choices. This tension runs through the chapter as a central theme: a wealthy continent that has created internal stability through rules and redistribution, but finds it difficult to develop power, speed, and strategic capacity externally.

Europe's distributive logic: internal strength, external constraint

Europe's economic architecture is built on public redistribution and market regulation—a model that delivers stability, but also inertia. The welfare state provides citizens with security, while reinforcing the notion that risks should be collectively absorbed. This makes Europe predictable, but constrains its ability to make strategic leaps. Market ordering and social protection together account for the largest share of public expenditure: on average around 27% of GDP, rising above 30% in Germany, France, and the Nordic countries. [48] Europe thus operates the largest public welfare state in the world.

Public spending in the United States follows a different logic. Not because Washington has greater fiscal space—on the contrary, the U.S. levies significantly less tax and has structurally fewer public resources than Europe—but because it is willing to finance strategic capacity on credit. Where Europe guards its budget, the United States uses the budget as a geopolitical instrument. Fiscal space is created through sustained deficits of around 6% of GDP, [49] a federal debt exceeding 120% of GDP, [50] and large-scale investment programmes that do not wait for fiscal balance. [51] Scale and speed take precedence over cost containment. China follows a third path: not through debt, but through state banks and central planning. [52]

The outcome is stark and uncomfortable. Europe is internally stable but externally constrained; the United States is externally powerful but internally fiscally strained and potentially vulnerable; [53] China is externally assertive and internally authoritarian. [54]

This distributive logic can be understood through the lens of the geo-economic trilemma. The position Europe has chosen within this trilemma shapes both its capacity for action and the way it deploys policy instruments.

The geo-economic trilemma: three objectives, two choices

The geo-economic trilemma rests on the proposition that three objectives cannot be fully maximised simultaneously: strategic autonomy, maximum economic openness and integration, and independent democratic institutions (Figure 8). Tension arises from the friction between these goals. Maximising openness and integration enhances efficiency and prosperity, but simultaneously creates dependencies on external suppliers.

Strategic autonomy, by contrast, requires limiting such dependencies through diversification of value chains, the creation of buffers, and the development of domestic capacity. Independent democratic institutions, in turn, shape how strategic autonomy can be organised: they impose legal constraints, demand legitimacy, and prioritise proportionality and accountability. This makes Europe's approach fundamentally different from that of more centralised or authoritarian systems.

Europe has historically prioritised openness and democratic governance, accepting dependency as the price of efficiency and stability. In a world of intensifying geopolitical competition, that balance is increasingly under strain. The trilemma does not imply that Europe must abandon its core values, but it does clarify that trade-offs are unavoidable. Expanding strategic autonomy will require conscious choices about where openness can be sustained, where it must be constrained, and how democratic control can be preserved while acting with greater speed and strategic intent.

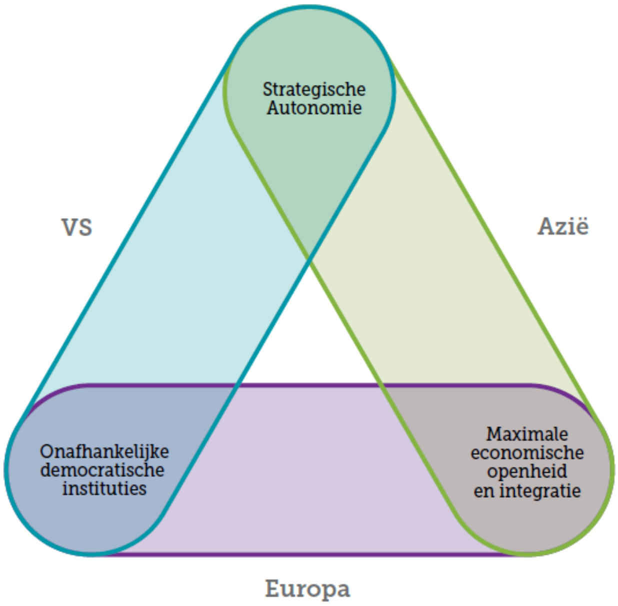


Figure 8: The Geoeconomic Trilemma
Source: DenkWerk (2025)

They constrain the concentration of power, impose requirements of legitimacy and the rule of law, and anchor decision-making in public accountability. The European Union, the United States, and China each make different trade-offs within the trilemma. These choices explain their divergent power positions.

The European Union combines strong, independent democratic institutions with a high degree of economic openness and integration. The single market, competition policy, legal protection, and transparency form the core of the European model. [55,56] This combination has delivered prosperity and internal stability, but it has also produced structural dependencies. Strategic autonomy has long remained implicitly subordinate to efficiency and market integration. [57]

The United States positions itself primarily along the axis of strategic autonomy and is willing to subordinate economic openness to that objective. Open markets remain important, but are constrained whenever national security, technological dominance, or geopolitical influence are at stake. This is reflected in large-scale subsidies, export restrictions, sanctions, and targeted industrial programmes. Democratic institutions formally remain intact, but come under pressure from the scale, speed, and centralisation of strategic economic decision-making. [58]

China positions itself within the geo-economic trilemma along strategic autonomy and selective economic openness, with democratic institutions subordinated to state objectives. [59] Economic openness is deployed instrumentally: it is permitted insofar as it contributes to industrial upgrading, technological development, and value-chain dominance, and restricted once it threatens those goals. [60] Strategic sectors are protected through state planning, state-owned banks, targeted subsidies, and direct steering. [61] Institutional checks and balances do not operate as autonomous constraints on state power, but function within a system in which the judiciary, media, and political processes are subject to direct party control. [62] This enables speed, scale, and coordination, but at the expense of institutional independence and rule-of-law safeguards.

Taken together, this comparison makes clear that Europe occupies a structurally distinct position within the geo-economic trilemma compared to the United States and China. Europe has chosen to maximise openness and democratic governance, accepting limits on strategic autonomy as the price of stability and legitimacy. In an environment of intensifying geopolitical competition, this position no longer represents a neutral equilibrium, but an increasingly exposed one.

For Europe, one element is non-negotiable: independent democratic institutions. [63] Movement towards greater strategic autonomy can therefore only take place through choices about the degree and form of economic openness, in order to build strategic capacity within democratic constraints.

Demand-side versus supply-side steering: a system built on regulation

A position within the geo-economic trilemma also determines the choice of policy instruments. Europe primarily shapes economic dynamics through demand-side steering and relies above all on rules. Carbon pricing, product standards, consumer protection, privacy frameworks, and competition policy are designed to change behaviour from the bottom up. This approach works, but slowly. It is policy that disciplines rather than policy that builds.

By contrast, the United States operates largely through supply-side steering: fiscal incentives, subsidies, guarantees, and strategic public procurement. [64] This is policy that directly creates capacity. China follows a third route: central planning combined with local execution, control over value chains, and the deliberate acceptance of temporarily inefficient overcapacity in order to build strategic advantage. [65]

Europe does possess supply-side instruments—most notably in agricultural policy [66]—but their deployment across the wider economy remains exceptional and fragmented. [67] The result is a sharp asymmetry: Europe writes rules, others create capacity. Rules organise behaviour; capacity shapes history. It is precisely this tension that renders Europe geopolitically vulnerable.

This asymmetry becomes even more pronounced when considering the time dynamics of policy. Demand-side instruments operate over years: firms must invest, consumers must adapt behaviour, and suppliers must implement new standards. Both the United States and China place far greater emphasis on innovation as a means of strengthening their geopolitical position. [68] Their supply-side steering operates within months. Once subsidies, tax credits, and guaranteed offtake contracts are announced, investment patterns shift almost immediately. [69–71] This helps explain why the United States experienced an unprecedented wave of reindustrialisation in batteries, semiconductors, and clean technologies within two years—while Europe was still engaged in consultation, state-aid assessments, and standard-setting. [72]

Moreover, demand-side instruments place the burden of transition on individual actors, whereas supply-side instruments place responsibility with the state. This is a fundamental difference. Europe expects change from millions of firms and households; the United States and China mobilise the state first, and the market second. As a result, they create pathways that firms find attractive to follow, whereas Europe primarily marks pathways that firms are expected to comply with.

Finally, scale is decisive. In a world where critical sectors—from semiconductors to AI models—are capital-intensive and characterised by strong network effects, the actor that can rapidly mobilise mass gains the advantage. Supply-side steering is a tool for construction; demand-side steering is a tool for ordering. Those who only order, but do not build, remain dependent on those who do.

If Europe is to avoid becoming a hinterland of the United States and China, it will have to adjust both its position within the trilemma and the associated policy toolkit. Strategic autonomy cannot be built within the existing straitjacket of procedural logic and budgetary orthodoxy. It requires an institutional shift—one that explicitly preserves democratic space, but necessarily entails movement along the axis of economic openness.

This may involve, for example, more explicit industrial policy in core domains, a European fund to support geopolitical objectives, and joint debt instruments such as Eurobonds for defence. These options are developed further in the following sections. As long as such a shift fails to materialise, Europe will remain dependent in domains where dependency directly translates into vulnerabilities in security, prosperity, and political room for manoeuvre.

European decision-making: the political capstone that confirms earlier patterns

European decision-making fits logically into the pattern outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Europe is not a federal state, but an association of states that organise stability through rules rather than through centralised power. This model functioned as long as Europe was primarily inward-looking; it begins to strain once geopolitics demands speed and concentration of resources. While many market-related decisions in the EU can be taken by qualified majority, strategic domains—foreign policy, security, sanctions, and taxation—still often require unanimity. [73] This means that any member state, large or small, can veto decisions that affect collective security.

Unanimity was originally intended as a safeguard for equality within a peace project. In a geopolitical environment, however, it has become a brake on speed, [74] precisely the type of constraint already observed in the trilemma and in Europe's reliance on demand-side steering. Positions within the trilemma also diverge across member states, with the desire for autonomy often framed more in national than in European terms. Northern countries emphasise fiscal discipline and the rule of law; southern countries call for solidarity and investment; eastern member states experience Russia not as an abstract risk but as an immediate threat; and a small number of countries—most notably Hungary—actively use veto power to pursue national or even personal political objectives.

The result is that Europe is least effective precisely in those areas where speed and unity are most needed. Every compromise must be economically and legally sound, but also politically acceptable to 27 different electorates. Decision-making thus becomes not only an institutional challenge, but a power problem. A Union that cannot act quickly struggles to project power. And a Union in which one or two countries can block strategic policy cannot adopt a coherent position in a world where opposing blocs are centrally directed.

Conclusion: the tipping point

Europe has reached a moment at which the trilemma is no longer optional. The three patterns developed in this chapter—the free-market logic that prioritises economic openness over strategic capacity, the preference for demand-side steering that places rules above construction, and the decision-making architecture that favours unanimity over speed—reinforce one another. Together, they explain why Europe is normatively strong but geopolitically vulnerable.

At the same time, this chapter does not only reveal Europe's constraints; it also shows why the tipping point represents an opportunity. Precisely because these limitations are interconnected, potential solutions can be as well. If Europe is willing to treat strategic investment not as a discretionary European cost but as a necessary public function; if it is prepared to deploy supply-side steering selectively in domains where capacity is decisive; and if it organises decision-making through coalitions that can move when unanimity blocks progress, space emerges to break the existing pattern. That space is larger than is often assumed.

This provides the natural bridge to the next chapter, *Europe's strengths*: an exploration of the assets Europe does possess—its resources, values, market size, institutions, and societal capacity—and how these, if deployed strategically, can form the basis for renewed autonomy and influence.

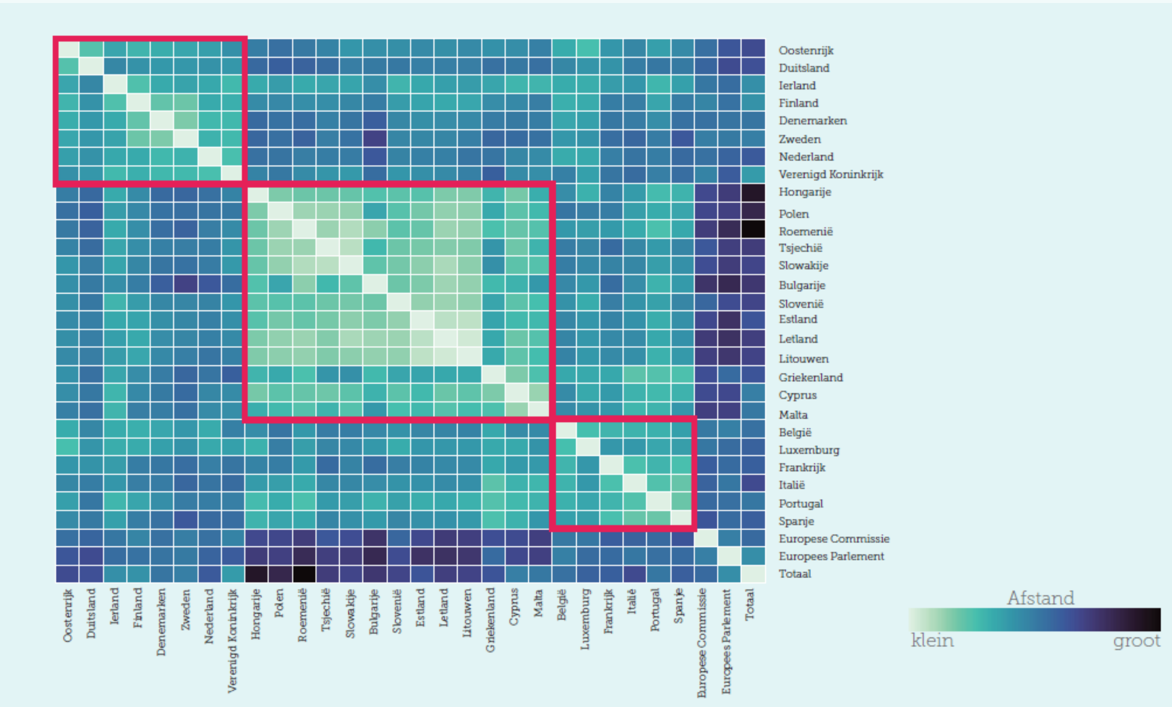
THOSE WHO ONLY ORDER, BUT DO NOT BUILD, REMAIN DEPENDENT

Structural fragmentation within the European Union

The European Union is structurally fragmented. Member states differ in economic structure, security priorities, and political preferences. Northern European countries tend to prioritise fiscal discipline; southern European countries emphasise social support and stability; and eastern member states focus primarily on security vis-à-vis Russia. This diversity makes the formulation of a coherent common strategy inherently difficult.

Reports such as the Franco-German *Sailing on High Seas* (2023) and analyses by the European Council on Foreign Relations (2025) point to a proliferation of mini-coalitions within the EU, often formed around specific issues but lacking a shared long-term strategic vision.

An analysis of voting behaviour across multiple policy domains among the 27 EU member states over the period 1996–2019 illustrates this pattern. The analysis measures the extent to which countries vote in alignment, with lighter colours indicating higher levels of agreement. Policy areas are weighted according to the importance assigned by the member states themselves. What stands out is that the Eastern European bloc is positioned at a considerable distance from the final collective decisions. The question this raises is straightforward: how sustainable is such a configuration in a context of growing geopolitical pressure?



Source: DenkWerk Kickstart AI (2025)

Note: adapted from Arregui, J., and Perarnaud, C. (2021) — A New Dataset on Legislative Decision-Making in the European Union: The DEU III Dataset


#TeamJunckerEU

5 EUROPE'S STRENGTHS

Europe is easily dismissed by other geopolitical blocs as a declining West that can be written off. That assessment is misguided. Europe no longer holds the dominance it enjoyed before the World Wars, but it is far from a marginal actor on the global stage. Economically, Europe—taken as the EU, the EEA, and the United Kingdom—remains a heavyweight. The internal market, with around 450 million consumers, is one of the largest integrated economic zones in the world and provides a stable foundation for economic power. [75]

Europe's workforce is among the best educated globally, [76] underpinning a strong knowledge-intensive economy. The European welfare state also translates into significant consumer purchasing power. European regulation is explicitly oriented towards this consumer power and has proven capable of shaping behaviour beyond Europe's borders. [77] This is evident, for example, in digital regulation, where Europe has taken a leading position in privacy and consumer protection. [78]

On the production side, Europe has weakened its power position by allowing excessive dependency to emerge within global value chains. Yet it continues to occupy positions within those chains that secure high value-creation potential. This can be illustrated by the so-called smile curve shown in Figure 9. [79,80] Europe remains strong at both ends of the curve, where value capture is greatest. Globalisation over recent decades enabled the global dispersion of production chains, with lower value-added activities logically outsourced to countries with lower labour costs.

This "smile-curve logic," however, underestimated a critical risk. Even activities with relatively low value added can generate substantial dependencies. When these segments of the chain become geographically concentrated or politically exposed, they can evolve into strategic chokepoints. Europe's challenge, therefore, is not only to preserve its strengths at the high-value ends of the chain, but also to recognise and address vulnerabilities that arise in parts of the production process traditionally seen as peripheral.

EVEN LOW VALUE-ADDED ACTIVITIES CAN BECOME SOURCES OF MAJOR DEPENDENCY

Figure 9: The "Smile Curve": Distribution of Value Creation and Dependencies Along Global Value Chains
Source: DenkWerk (2025)

The strength on the left-hand side of the smile curve lies in the high educational level of Europe's population, the quality of its scientific research, [81] and a culture in which creativity is actively encouraged and rewarded. [82] Europe does not suffer from a shortage of ideas or inventions, but it does struggle to translate those inventions into scale in the market. [83] This is striking, because Europe has accumulated ample capital [84] that could, in principle, finance precisely that scaling-up phase. The capital exists, but it is not deployed in ways that systematically support innovation. Capital therefore remains a latent strength in Europe—one whose importance is underscored by historical experience.

The strength on the right-hand side of the smile curve is determined by deep insight into consumer preferences and consumption patterns. Europe's service-based economy aligns well with this end of the curve, and rising global prosperity makes it a genuine growth market. [85] The European policy toolkit, with its emphasis on demand-side steering, has the weaknesses described in the previous chapter, but it also has clear strengths in this segment of the curve. Marketing, branding, and service-oriented activities are typically not capital-intensive, but they are highly sensitive to regulation—an area where Europe exerts influence.

In addition, Europe hosts several globally decisive knowledge clusters. ASML and its ecosystem dominate the global lithography value chain; [86] European medical technology companies rank among the world leaders; [87] and in climate technologies Europe leads in offshore wind, electrolysers, and green hydrogen standards. [88]

Finally, Europe possesses something no other actor commands to the same extent: regulatory authority. Through the so-called Brussels Effect, the EU exports standards globally in areas such as data protection, competition, product safety, and climate policy. [89] More than 140 countries have now adopted privacy legislation inspired by the GDPR. [90]

Enhancing earning capacity and resilience through deepening the single market

One of the most important ways for Europe to strengthen its position in the global order is to better mobilise its internal strengths. Reports by Letta and Draghi, [91,92] as well as an IMF study, [93] show that the EU constrains itself through a dense web of internal regulations that often differ by member state, along with other cross-border barriers. According to the IMF, these internal frictions are equivalent to tariff barriers of around 40% for goods and more than 100% for cross-border services. Creating more room for European firms to operate seamlessly across the entire EU market would unlock scaling opportunities that are currently too often absent. [94]

The lack of such opportunities helps explain why many start-ups relocate to the United States, where scale is easier to achieve. [95] Scale is frequently decisive for competitiveness. By failing to fully exploit its own scale potential—and by not enabling abundant capital to be invested at attractive returns within its own region—the EU weakens itself as a global competitor.

From strengths to pressure points

Europe has been shown to face asymmetric dependencies that can be weaponised against it in a geopolitical power struggle. The question is whether Europe can also deploy its own strengths as pressure points to generate countervailing power.

Hard pressure points

Semiconductors: ASML and the EUV ecosystem

Europe possesses the only machines in the world capable of producing advanced, state-of-the-art chips: ASML's EUV systems, [96] combined with the unique optics supplied by Zeiss and complementary deposition and packaging systems from firms such as ASM and BESI. This value chain is not merely scarce; it is irreplaceable. [97] The technical barriers are so high that even China's state-directed investment efforts have failed to produce viable alternatives.

The strength of this pressure point also lies in continuity. Semiconductor fabs require a constant supply of servicing, spare parts, calibration, and software updates. If Europe were to halt that supply, output would decline within weeks.

Aviation: Airbus and European subsystems

China's civil aviation sector—and large parts of Asia's—remains structurally dependent on European aircraft and components. [98] Key subsystems, including engine components (Safran, MTU, Rolls-Royce), avionics (Thales), and air management systems (Liebherr Aerospace), form a certified ecosystem that cannot be replicated without European involvement. Because maintenance cycles are legally and technically tightly regulated, [99] aircraft are grounded within weeks if spare parts, software updates, or certification approvals are withheld. This creates a rare form of direct dependency: the withdrawal of European servicing capacity translates almost immediately into grounded fleets.

Medium-hard pressure points

Market access and regulatory authority

The internal market provides Europe with a structural pressure point, as access to it is inseparable from compliance with European rules. This allows Europe to steer design choices and production standards towards European technologies, including advanced recycling processes where Europe holds a competitive lead.

The structure of the internal market also creates a more direct option for leverage. Europe imports large volumes of low-value goods from China that are not critical for Europe's own functioning, but are essential to China's export-driven earning capacity. [100] Temporarily restricting or suspending these non-critical flows would impose relatively limited costs on Europe, while generating immediate and substantial economic effects for China.

Other strengths without strategic leverage

Beyond the pressure points identified above, Europe remains competitive across a wide range of sectors, as also reflected in Group III in Chapter 3. Europe's prosperity does not arise by chance. These strengths, however, largely fail to meet the criteria of high interconnectedness, binary disruption, short time-to-damage, and direct impact on government functioning. In these domains, market mechanisms dominate: efficient suppliers capture significant demand without acquiring structural power.

Taken together, Europe does possess several pressure points, but it makes only limited use of them. The consultative culture and internal fragmentation previously identified help explain why these instruments remain largely dormant.

EUROPE MAKES ONLY LIMITED USE OF THE PRESSURE POINTS IT POSSESSES

6 REDUCING ASYMMETRIC DEPENDENCIES

In Chapters 2 and 3, we identified several critical asymmetric dependencies that have positioned Europe too far to the right on the inverted U-curve. As a result, Europe has become overly exposed to the power politics of other geopolitical blocs. European countries must therefore jointly develop a strategy to reduce these dependencies. This will not be a simple undertaking, particularly in light of the specific characteristics of Europe's institutional framework and decision-making model described in Chapter 4.

When reducing asymmetric dependencies, two strategic approaches can be distinguished. [101]

Strategic autonomy

The first direction is strategic autonomy. This implies that Europe seeks to organise as large a share as possible of critical dependencies and value chains within its own borders—or those of genuinely trusted partner nations. The objective is to reduce reliance on external suppliers and to limit vulnerability to geopolitical shocks.

This path is both economically and technologically demanding, [102] and can therefore only be pursued selectively, reserved for the most critical dependencies—such as defence and digital infrastructure.

In the field of defence, European NATO countries have committed to structurally increasing defence efforts towards approximately 3.5% of GDP. [103] This involves not merely higher expenditure, but the restoration of European military credibility: rebuilding ammunition stocks, scaling up the defence industrial base, improving deployability, and reducing reliance on the United States. If the additional 1.5% of GDP in committed spending on "adjacent and supporting sectors" is included, it becomes clear that this represents a serious budgetary challenge.

Building an independent European digital infrastructure is an undertaking of comparable magnitude. For decades, Europe benefited from developments largely financed and built elsewhere—primarily in the United States. Earlier DenkWerk reports, *The Online World* and *The Data-Driven Future*, explicitly highlighted the structural power embedded in ownership of physical and digital infrastructure:

"U.S. and Chinese data conglomerates are rapidly building an unbridgeable lead. Just as they currently act as gatekeepers of internet markets, they may soon become gatekeepers in the data-driven world—for sectors such as automotive, healthcare, and energy."[104]

Reducing dependency in this domain, as in defence, requires a substantial and coordinated European effort aimed at building autonomous capacity.

Strategic indispensability

The alternative direction of strategic indispensability starts from a different logic. Rather than attempting to internalise entire value chains, Europe focuses on critical niches and so-called chokepoints or pressure points in which it can become globally leading or irreplaceable. In Chapter 5 we examined Europe's strengths and potential pressure points, and it is logical to seek chokepoints within and around these strengths (see Table 3).

Drukpunt	vs China	vs USA
Geavanceerde lithografie ASML	√	√
Vliegtuig technologie	√	
Toegang tot EU markt	√	√
Digitale infrastructuur (6G)		√

Table 3: European Leverage Points vis-à-vis China and the United States
Source: DenkWerk (2025)

Note: The strategic significance of 6G infrastructure and Europe's positioning within it are further elaborated in Chapter 10.

To deploy pressure points credibly, Europe—or a "coalition of the willing," to be discussed later—will need to protect existing leverage and expand it where possible. The other power blocs are already playing along the axis of power and are actively reducing their own asymmetric dependencies. China's "Made in China 2025" strategy is explicit about its ultimate ambition of self-sufficiency. [105] Although the United States frames its policies in terms of security and leadership rather than sovereignty, the movement towards autonomy and the reduction of dependencies is equally pronounced. [106]

In both cases, the objectives are clear: to reduce reliance on others in critical sectors and to secure control over strategic chokepoints.

China	Verenigde Staten
Made in China 2025	CHIPS Act
Dual Circulation	Supply Chain Resilience
Self-reliance	National Security
Technologische autonomie	Industrial leadership
Staatsgeleide opbouw	Staatsgefaciliteerde markt

Strategies of China and the United States

Protecting and expanding pressure points—dependencies for others—will therefore be a dynamic process. Just as Europe seeks to reduce its own vulnerabilities and strengthen its leverage, others are doing the same. This is not always economically efficient, but it is necessary if Europe wishes to retain control over the direction of its own society.

What remains of the European autonomy agenda?

In recent years, the European Commission has initiated a clear shift in course. Where strategic dependencies were once treated as secondary, they now occupy a central place in European policy thinking. Concepts such as strategic autonomy, economic security, and weaponised interdependence have become commonplace. Dependencies in semiconductors, energy, critical raw materials, cloud infrastructure, and defence are no longer framed purely in economic terms, but explicitly as geopolitical matters. This mental and political shift is in itself significant: it has enabled policies that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

This reorientation has resulted in a series of concrete frameworks and legislative instruments. The Chips Act, the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Net-Zero Industry Act, and strengthened rules on foreign subsidies, investment screening, and export controls have all been enacted. The EU has demonstrated that, as a policy coordinator, it is capable of acting. There are also tangible results: scaling up parts of the semiconductor ecosystem, [107] investments in batteries, [108] acceleration in defence production, [109] and large-scale energy infrastructure projects. [110] Autonomy is not yet systemic, but it is emerging in fragments—sector by sector, file by file. The agenda appears sufficiently consequential that the most recent U.S. national security strategy even contains language advocating the dismantling of the EU. [111]

At the same time, the gap between ambition and execution remains substantial. [112] The European Union has little autonomous implementation capacity. It can set norms and coordinate, but it cannot build, own, or invest at scale over the long term—that responsibility rests with the member states, where sustained attention to the full strategic agenda remains limited. [113] This is also the case in the Netherlands.

There is no permanent European investment vehicle for strategic capacity, no structural fiscal framework, and no executive counterpart comparable to an American Department of Energy or Department of Defense (now referred to as the Department of War). [114]

Moreover, the EU continues to rely heavily on frameworks and incentives, assuming that markets will subsequently deliver outcomes—while in strategic sectors market risks are too high and first-mover disadvantages are often paralysing. [115]

The core of the problem is therefore structural. Europe has articulated the diagnosis with clarity, but lacks the corresponding instruments. It seeks to realise geopolitical autonomy without engaging in geopolitical behaviour. As long as power, capital, and decision-making are not structurally concentrated where necessary, strategic autonomy will remain a policy ambition rather than a geopolitical reality.

In the next three chapters, we will analyse what is feasible in the short term (risk management) and in the medium term (capacity building), and subsequently how—and with whom—steps towards greater autonomy can be taken.

GEOPOLITICAL AUTONOMY REQUIRES GEOPOLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

7 WHAT IS THE PERSPECTIVE FOR ACTION?

For the Netherlands and Europe to act with the aim of reducing asymmetric dependencies, it begins with a different orientation. The primary consideration in these dependencies is no longer price-quality optimisation, but the reduction of vulnerability. In some cases, this may mean paying more or accepting slightly lower performance. It also implies that so-called "dirty" or undesirable processes such as mining or refining may need to return to Europe and the Netherlands.

"Strategic autonomy requires a different optimisation: not the lowest price or the highest performance, but reliability under stress."

This reorientation applies both in the short term and in the medium term. Choices must be made on the basis of a broader assessment framework than price and quality alone.

Short term: managing risks

We first examine two short-term actions that can help make dependencies more manageable:

- reorienting trade flows
- stockpiling and retaining secondary streams

Reorienting trade flows (friendshoring)

The question whether the EU can, in the short term, reduce critical dependencies without building new production capacity requires an analysis of the extent to which import flows from risk countries (China, the United States, and Russia) can be redirected towards alternative exporters. To gain an initial sense of this, a model-based simulation was conducted to assess to what degree a goods list of critical materials, equipment, and components in healthcare, ICT, energy, and critical minerals could be "shifted" by accepting higher prices.[1] The exercise is explicitly indicative: specific product characteristics were not considered, and services were excluded. The model reallocates trade based on existing capacity, without assuming additional production.

The main conclusions of the simulation are cautiously encouraging:

- Exposure to trade flows from China and the United States declines visibly. EU dependence on China decreases from 11.32% to 8.23%, and on the United States from 8.14% to 1.85%. This is substantial, given the short time horizon within which trade can realistically adjust. A subsector analysis shows that exports in the technical sector are more difficult to redirect (see Figure 10).
- The redistribution consistently points in the same direction: Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia gain, but also Mexico, Malaysia, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian economies emerge as potential partners. These countries already export at scale in the relevant product groups and could generate additional supply in the short term (see Table A.1).[2]

An important caveat is that although exposure to risk countries declines, trade concentration (measured using the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index) hardly decreases. In some sectors it even increases. This is because many product groups have only one realistic alternative supplier. Substitution therefore automatically leads to new concentration elsewhere.

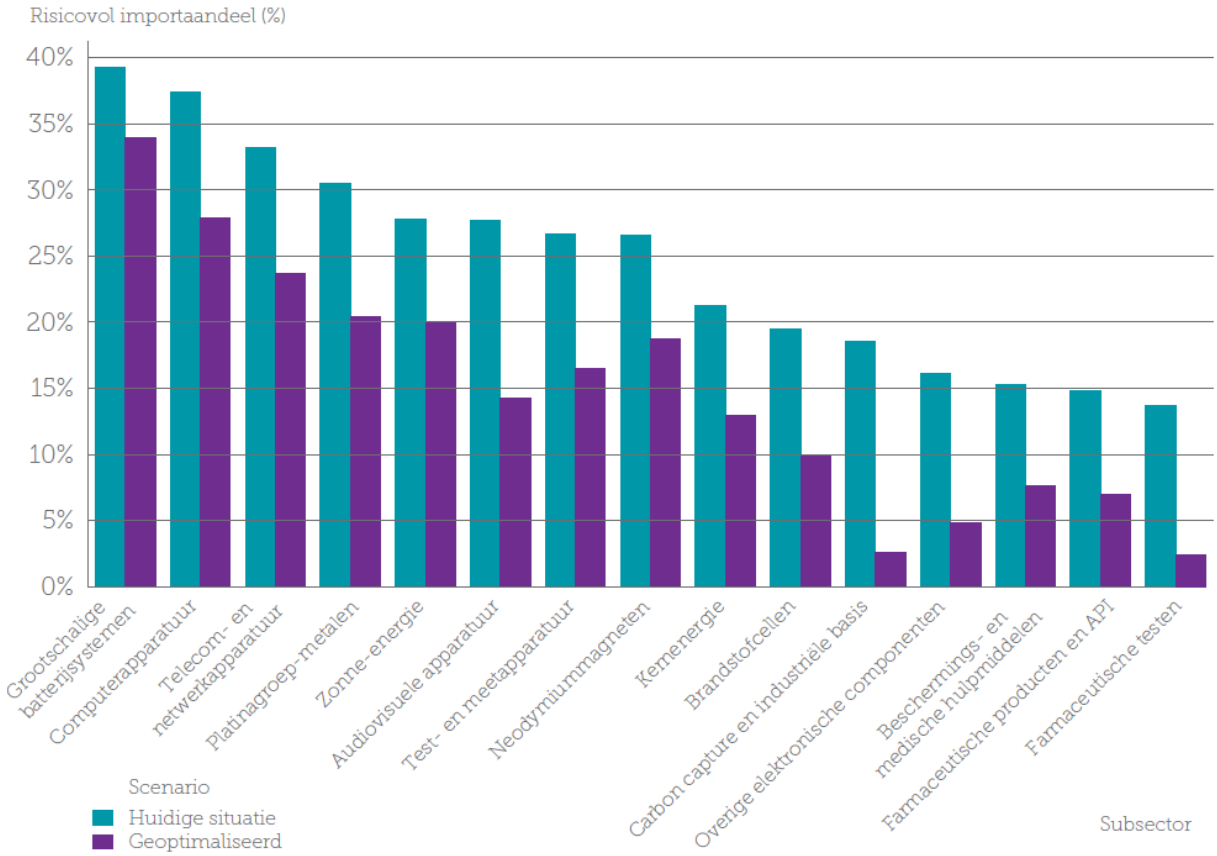


Figure 10: Import Shares from China, the United States, and Russia by Subsector Before and After Optimisation
Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)

Note: Blue shows the current situation, Purple shows the optimized situation

- The share of high-risk imports declines for inputs, capital goods and semi-finished products: these are the segments where other exporters, such as Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia, can rapidly free up additional capacity. For finished products, by contrast, risk exposure remains high, even after optimisation. Final goods are concentrated in Chinese production ecosystems that are not easily replicated. As long as Europe does not regain midstream capacity and final assembly, asymmetrical dependency will persist (see Figure 11).
- Finally, the model reallocates approximately €150 billion in imports. For all critical goods, short-term trade flows are shifted by paying a higher price (as was the case with LNG when Russia shut off the gas supply [116]). The model does not quantify the associated costs, but these will certainly amount to tens of billions of euros. At the same time, both the United States and China are actively competing for access to critical raw materials [117]. On several occasions, the EU has already been outcompeted — for example in attempts to secure rare-earth contracts in Brazil.

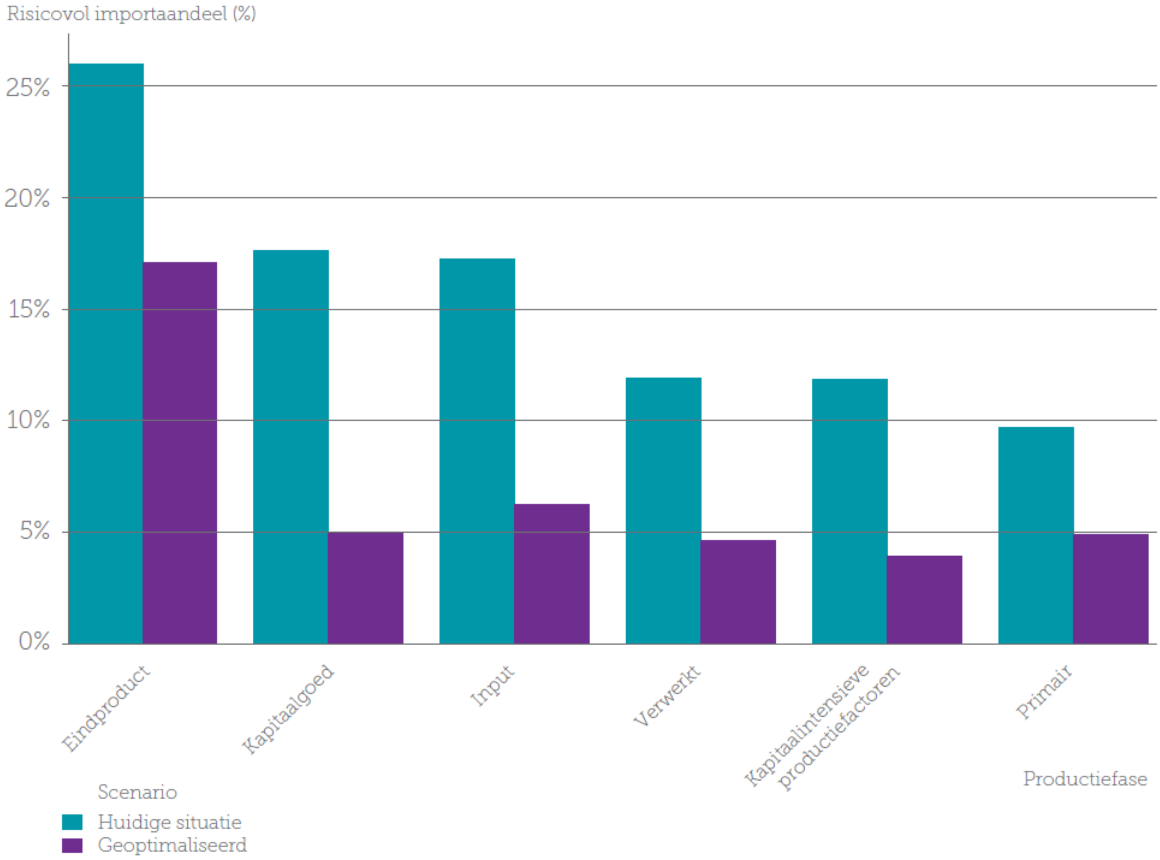


Figure 11: Import Shares from China, the United States, and Russia by Production Stage Before and After Optimisation

Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)

Note: Blue shows the current situation, Purple shows the optimized situation

Stockpiling and retaining secondary flows (pre-recycling infrastructure)

Stockpiling critical materials

Stockpiling critical materials primarily enhances the EU's resilience, as strategic reserves function as shock absorbers. A physical buffer makes it possible to absorb temporary supply disruptions — whether caused by war, export restrictions or logistical incidents — without production immediately coming to a halt or the full shock cascading into prices and availability.

Stockpiles also function as a geopolitical signal. When the EU builds up reserves, it implicitly sends the message that it can bridge a period of disruption and is less vulnerable to economic coercion. This increases the credibility of other instruments, including sanctions, export restrictions and conditional trade, because internal vulnerability is reduced.

Only materials that are stable and efficient to store are suitable for rapid stockpiling [118]. Metals, precious metals and many oxides remain intact for years and require limited storage space, whereas reactive compounds such as lithium hydroxide degrade quickly and low-grade ores are too voluminous for cost-efficient storage.

A decisive condition is usability. A stockpile only has strategic value if Europe can process the material itself into functional semi-finished or finished products. Without domestic refining capacity, a reserve remains a passive asset. Stockpiling materials that do not meet this condition must therefore go hand in hand with building European production and refining capacity.

Retaining secondary raw materials

Each year, the EU allows substantial volumes of strategic secondary raw materials to flow out of its economy. Battery black mass, copper and aluminium scrap, rare-earth-containing magnets, and other critical residues are collected, shredded and subsequently exported to distant pre-processing hubs. There, they are upgraded and ultimately processed within Asian refining chains, often dominated by Chinese firms [119].

In the short term, Europe does not yet need to recycle these materials domestically. However, retaining these flows is essential: sorting, buffering, dismantling and pre-processing. This forms the raw-material base — the infrastructure — for future European recycling capacity and prevents value and strategic control from leaking out of the EU [120].

This is precisely why the ReSourceEU framework explicitly calls for reducing scrap exports of critical materials and for retaining strategic waste streams within the internal market [121]. ReSourceEU argues that secondary raw materials in Europe are scarce enough to be treated as strategic assets, and that their leakage undermines the development of a European circular value chain.

By keeping secondary flows within the EU, Europe breaks a structural dependency that would otherwise continue to deepen. Conversely, when these flows are retained or conditioned through export requirements, input costs for foreign refiners rise immediately. For countries that have organised their midstream capacity around such inputs, European scrap is not a substitutable resource. Short-term success therefore means regaining control over the raw materials we already possess.

Finally, stockpiling and export restrictions on scrap are interpreted by trading partners as limitations on their access to raw materials. China has, in comparable situations, threatened export restrictions when other countries strengthened their own reserves [122]. Short-term stockpiling policy must therefore anticipate potential retaliation and escalation in raw-material markets.

AUTONOMY IS NOT WITHOUT COST

8 MID-TERM MEASURES: BUILDING CAPACITY

As set out in Chapter 6, the route of "strategic autonomy" is economically and technologically demanding. This route should therefore be reserved for functions and sectors with the highest systemic relevance, in particular defence and cloud infrastructure — or more precisely: data autonomy. For other high-importance sectors, reducing dependencies is sufficient as long as credible alternatives remain available. Preserving and strengthening Europe's own strategic pressure points remains essential in order to operate on the basis of reciprocity.

Defence

Europe's defence challenge requires rapid and large-scale scaling. The deteriorating threat environment makes clear that existing capabilities are insufficient, both quantitatively and qualitatively. At the same time, the most acute gaps are visible: layered air and missile defence (in particular interceptor missiles), long-range weapons and deep-strike capabilities, command and control and a robust digital data layer, ammunition production, counter-drone systems, military mobility, maritime air defence, and satellite capacity for communication, observation and positioning [123].

This challenge requires not only higher defence budgets, but above all a substantial expansion of European production capacity. The industrial base is fragmented, characterised by too many variants and insufficient scale [124]. Standardisation and interoperability are prerequisites for speed and mass production. While it is largely clear what is required, implementation remains difficult due to national decision-making processes, diverging interests and widely differing fiscal positions.

For a significant share of EU–NATO countries, fiscal space to carry these investments nationally is limited (see Figure 12). Joint financing [125] — most plausibly through project-based Eurobonds — therefore becomes a practical precondition rather than a political luxury.

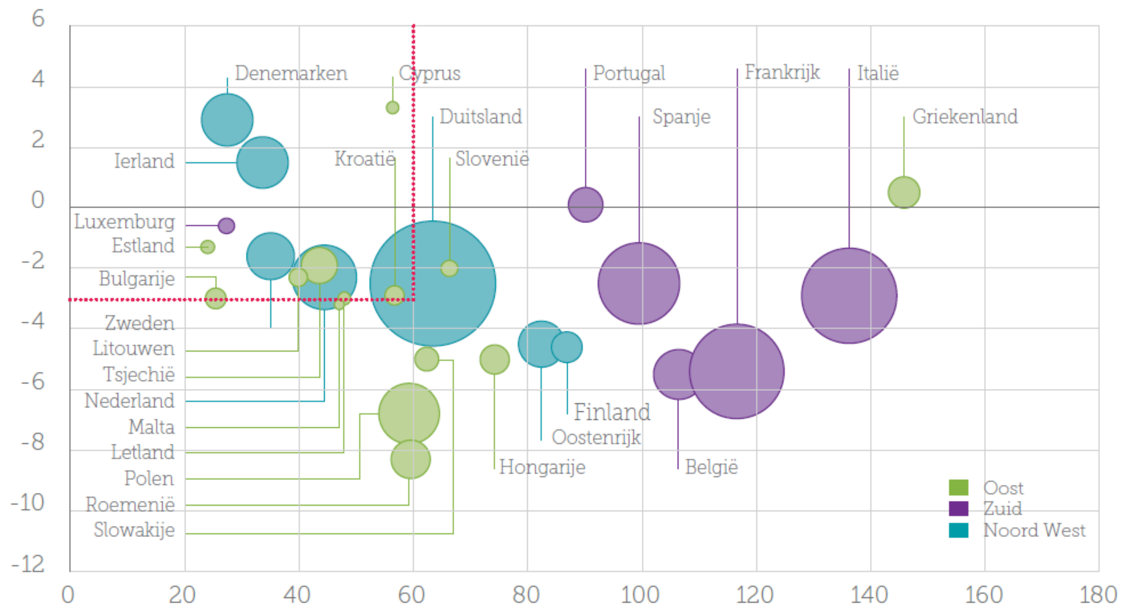


Figure 12: Government Debt vs Budget Deficit vs GDP

Source: OECD Economic Outlook (2025)

Note: x-axis: government debt as a percentage of GDP. y-axis: budget deficit as a percentage of GDP. The size of the bubbles reflects the size of the economy (GDP). Colours distinguish EU regions: blue shows north west, purple south, and green east.

Cloud

Europe does not possess hyperscaler-scale cloud infrastructure and is therefore structurally dependent on American providers of IaaS and PaaS [126]. Initiatives such as GAIA-X have not fundamentally altered this reality: they strengthened governance and standards, but did not build industrial capacity, scale or investment logic [127]. Strategic technology does not emerge from coordination alone, but from execution, capital and active market formation.

An alternative route lies in a joint venture among major European telecom operators such as Deutsche Telekom, Telefónica, Vodafone, Orange and KPN. These companies already control critical assets within European jurisdiction: fixed and mobile networks, data centres, operational security, identity management, and long-standing relationships with governments and vital sectors. By bundling and standardising this infrastructure, a European cloud layer can emerge that is legally, operationally and technically European.

At the same time, it must be recognised that this alone is insufficient. Hyperscaler scale also requires a mature software and services layer, a developer ecosystem, high-performance computing (HPC) and artificial intelligence (AI) capacity[3], and the ability to sustain multiple development and scaling cycles.

This approach fits within the broader European concept of the so-called EuroStack [128]: the systematic construction of a European digital value chain, from connectivity and data centres to cloud, software and data governance.

An autonomous cloud is therefore not an end in itself, but a functional building block to anchor critical public and economic processes within a European technological ecosystem and thereby reduce asymmetrical dependencies.

A second pillar is therefore essential: governments must act as pre-committed launching customers. Multi-year procurement commitments for sovereign workloads create guaranteed demand and break the chicken-and-egg dynamic of the cloud market. Governance plays a supporting role through certification, data portability and exit conditions, but cannot substitute for capacity.

Strategically, Europe does not need to replicate American hyperscalers. The objective is not global dominance, but sufficient scale within the European market to regain control over data, standards and operational continuity. In that light, a European cloud joint venture is neither an IT project nor a market intervention driven by efficiency considerations, but a deliberate choice for strategic autonomy in a domain where dependency can be directly translated into political and economic pressure.

Recycling

Europe can reduce dependencies by processing secondary flows of critical materials within its own market. Recycling thereby becomes a strategic source. The potential is significant. Permanent magnets constitute the most important secondary source of rare earth elements, and sector analyses estimate that recycling could, over time, cover approximately 20% [129] of current European demand. This potential can only be realised if Europe simultaneously builds dismantling, processing and refining capacity [130].

Over time, the recycling of rare earth elements can, under specific technical and scale conditions, move towards the operational cost level of primary extraction (see Figure 13) [131,132]. The business case varies substantially by material, scale and processing step, but improves as volumes increase and technology matures.

Scaling therefore requires active support, including permitting, long-term offtake security and investment in processing capacity. Even when financial returns are modest, the strategic value of a fully-fledged European recycling value chain — an "urban mine" [133] — may in itself provide sufficient justification.

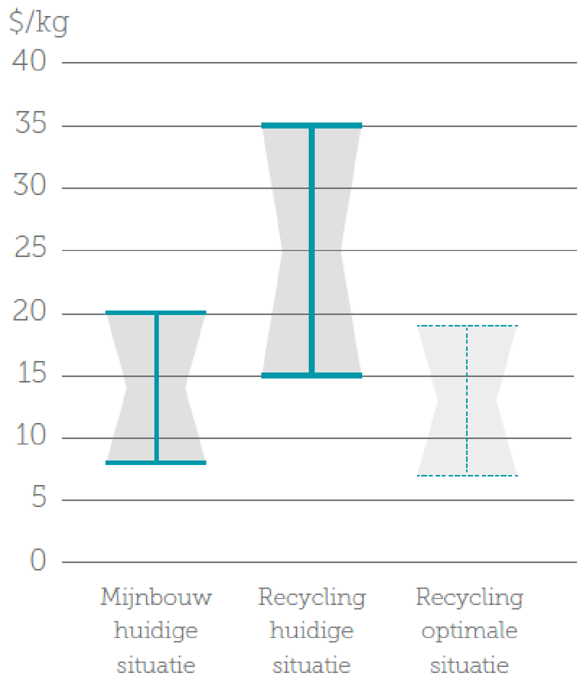


Figure 13: Operating Costs of Light REE Oxides (USD/kg)
Source: Hidayat (2026) & Rare Earth Exchanges (2025).
Note: The ranges shown reflect indicative operating costs (USD/kg REO). Values vary by feedstock, scale, and location; the "optimal scenario" (long-term projection) assumes high utilisation rates and concentrated secondary streams (such as permanent magnets).

How can the Netherlands and Europe deploy — and build — strategic pressure points?

In a world in which economic interdependence is increasingly used as an instrument of power, the central question is no longer only how the Netherlands and Europe can reduce their vulnerabilities, but also how they can deliberately deploy their existing and potential pressure points. The perspective thus shifts from defensive protection to active positioning.

Europe already possesses a limited number of strategic pressure points that can be deployed without launching entirely new industrial policy trajectories. Earlier chapters highlighted ASML and Airbus. In addition, Europe controls a powerful — though politically difficult to coordinate — instrument: access to the internal market. Restricting market access through tariffs, standards or prohibitions can impose direct economic costs on third countries. Deploying this instrument requires an explicit political assessment of how much economic pain Europe is willing to absorb in order to create geopolitical room for manoeuvre.

Leveraging existing pressure points alone is insufficient to place Europe in a structurally stronger position. Europe must also build capacities that are relevant and indispensable to others. Future pressure points emerge where high strategic relevance coincides with a strong — or strengthenable — European position. They become durable when they generate lock-in through services, maintenance, updates or ecosystems that are costly to replace.

6G provides an illustrative example of a future pressure point combining high importance with a still-shapeable position. The United States aims to establish a foothold in this domain. Europe, however, retains a relatively strong starting position in core networks, radio technology and standard-setting. Consolidating this position through joint roadmaps, public launching customers and pooled R&D can prevent 6G from becoming another structural dependency.

Strategic pressure points presuppose the availability of human capital. Shortages of engineers and technical specialists already constrain the scaling of strategic capacity. Investment in technical education and targeted talent inflows is therefore not a supporting measure, but a core component of building European pressure points. Without people, any strategic position evaporates, regardless of how strong it appears on paper.

Credibility forms the final condition. Capacity only becomes a pressure point when it falls under European jurisdiction and when European decision-making is sufficiently predictable to be recognised by others as a real instrument of power.

WITHOUT PEOPLE, ANY STRATEGIC POSITION EVAPORATES, REGARDLESS OF HOW STRONG IT APPEARS ON PAPER.

9 HOW DOES EUROPE DEVELOP DECISIVENESS?

Coalitions of the willing within and beyond Europe

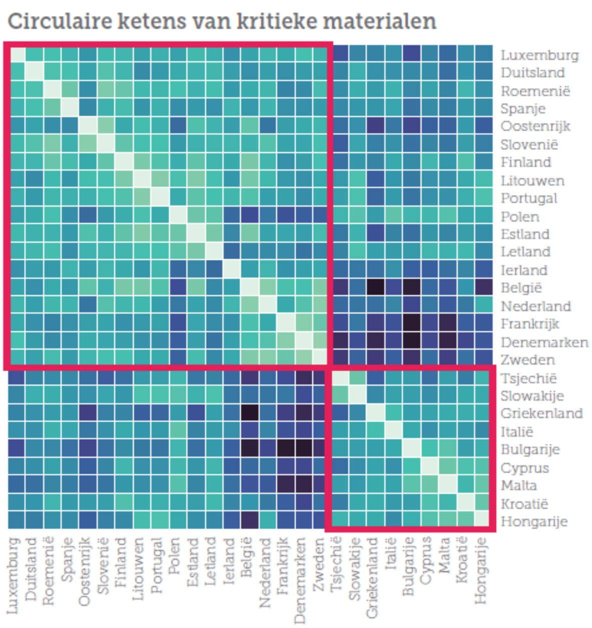
The internal scale of the EU is sufficient to sustain industrial value chains, but decision-making among 27 Member States is too slow for strategic dossiers. Here, the diversity of interests — and above all the absence of European-level executive capacity — becomes visible.

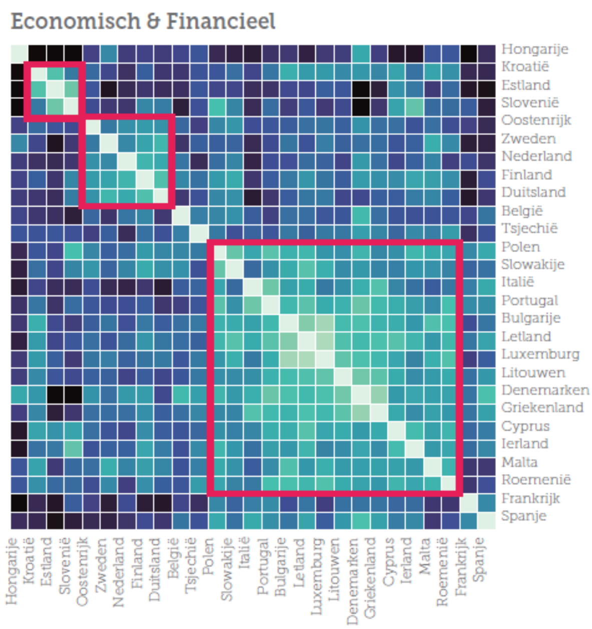
Data on voting behaviour within the Councils of the European Union[4] show that cooperation outside the most politically sensitive domains is feasible. At the same time, for more contested areas — such as agriculture, climate and finance — significant distance remains between national positions. There are, however, identifiable "clusters" of countries that align more closely with one another (see Figure 14).

In the domain of circular value chains, the picture is strongly polarised. A distinct eastern cluster — including, among others, Greece and Italy — forms a pronounced counter-bloc. In Economic and Financial Affairs, the frugal-country cluster stands out clearly. For Energy, Infrastructure and Digital policy, the pattern differs: here, polarisation is limited, with Hungary as a notable exception in the energy domain. This suggests a broader consensus and therefore potential for cooperation at European level.

A second execution layer is therefore conceivable: plurilateral coalitions within the EU framework that can invest and coordinate more rapidly without undermining the internal market. These so-called "coalitions of the willing" can initiate projects without unanimity, while allowing — but not requiring — other Member States to join at a later stage.

The example of the MRTT (Multi Role Tanker Transport) programme (see box) illustrates how such cooperation can function in practice.





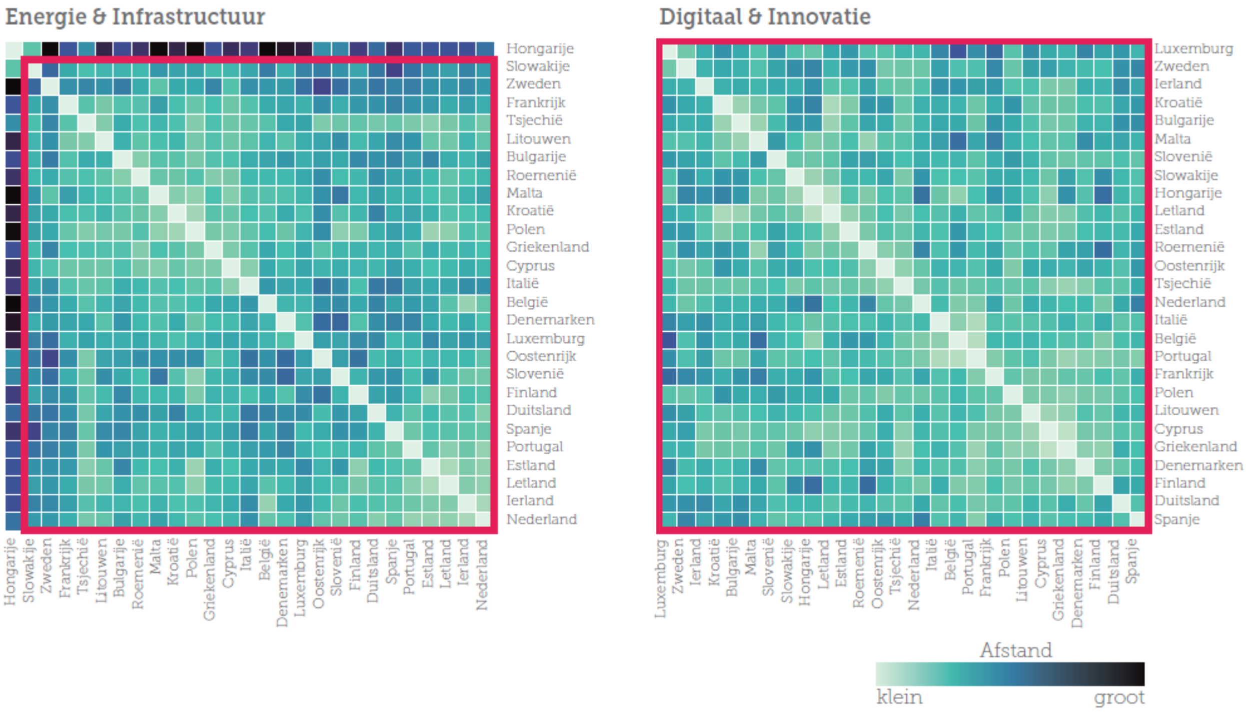


Figure 14: Distance Between European Countries by Policy Issue
Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)
Note: A lighter colour indicates a smaller distance between countries. The ordering of countries in the figures follows hierarchical clustering by category (average linkage method), placing countries with similar profiles next to one another. See the technical note in the online appendix.

The Multinational Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) Fleet

Europe had long known that it was falling short in strategic airlift and air-to-air refuelling capacity. This weakness became painfully visible during military operations in Afghanistan and especially over Libya in 2011, where European air forces proved structurally dependent on U.S. aircraft to sustain their own missions. The dependency was not a surprise, yet for years it remained without a joint solution. Each country continued to plan within its own budgetary, military and industrial framework.

The breakthrough came in 2012, when European defence ministers explicitly mandated the European Defence Agency to address the shortfall collectively. That political decision, however, did not immediately translate into action. Only in 2016 did the Netherlands and Luxembourg take a concrete step by jointly procuring two tanker-transport aircraft. Crucially, the innovation was not only *what* they purchased, but *how* they organised it.

Procurement and management were deliberately placed outside national structures: acquisition was centralised, and maintenance, management and operational support were assigned to a joint NATO organisation. Instead of national ownership, access to capacity became the organising principle. Countries did not buy aircraft bearing their own flag, but secured a guaranteed number of flight hours per year. The aircraft were registered as civilian assets and operated jointly from fixed bases in the Netherlands and Germany, with multinational crews.

Once the programme was operational, other countries joined. Germany and Norway followed in 2017, with Belgium and the Czech Republic joining in subsequent years. The fleet expanded from two to eight aircraft, becoming operational from 2020 onward for air-to-air refuelling, strategic transport and medical evacuation. In 2025, Sweden and Denmark decided to accede, bringing the fleet toward twelve aircraft.

This case demonstrates that European cooperation can materialise when a small group of countries takes the initiative and assumes the initial risk. By separating ownership from use, limiting political decision-making to accession, and entrusting execution to a professional joint organisation, scale was achieved that individual countries could not realise alone. The joint tanker and transport fleet thus provides a working example of how Europe can build strategic capacity without waiting for full unanimity.

Not only voting behaviour within Europe lacks uniformity; the financial capacities of Member States also differ significantly (see Figure 12). This makes the distinction between joint European action and frontrunner initiatives legitimate. In cases where collective action is deemed essential — for example in defence and security — the necessary financing should also be organised jointly. Project-based Eurobonds may provide a viable, and likely the only realistic, option. For topics where a subgroup of frontrunners chooses to pursue a new course together, they must likewise be able to operate through shared fund-based financing.

Coalitions are also possible beyond the EU. Europe's position between the United States and China is shared not only with other European countries, but also with partners such as Japan, Canada, Australia, Turkey and South Korea (Figure 15). Japan is a particularly interesting partner — and perhaps even a model — as it has secured a leading position in several innovative technologies, including optical systems and artificial intelligence [134]. South Korea is likewise a compelling partner, with strong capabilities in semiconductor technology and cybersecurity.

It is therefore essential that, in the pursuit of greater autonomy, Europe carefully considers with whom such autonomy can be strengthened beyond its own borders. An analysis based on UN voting behaviour shows that the Global South has recently voted structurally closer to China than to the West, but also that the EU positions itself closer to Africa than the United States does. The greatest divergence emerges on issues related to human rights and economic development, where the European tone is often perceived in the Global South as technocratic and moralising. When the EU moderates its position in these domains, the distance to potential partners in Asia, South America and Africa narrows.

At the same time, Figure 16 demonstrates that Japan and South Korea vote structurally close to the EU in the UN, including on relatively sensitive dossiers. This further confirms that these countries are particularly well-suited partners for cooperation beyond Europe.

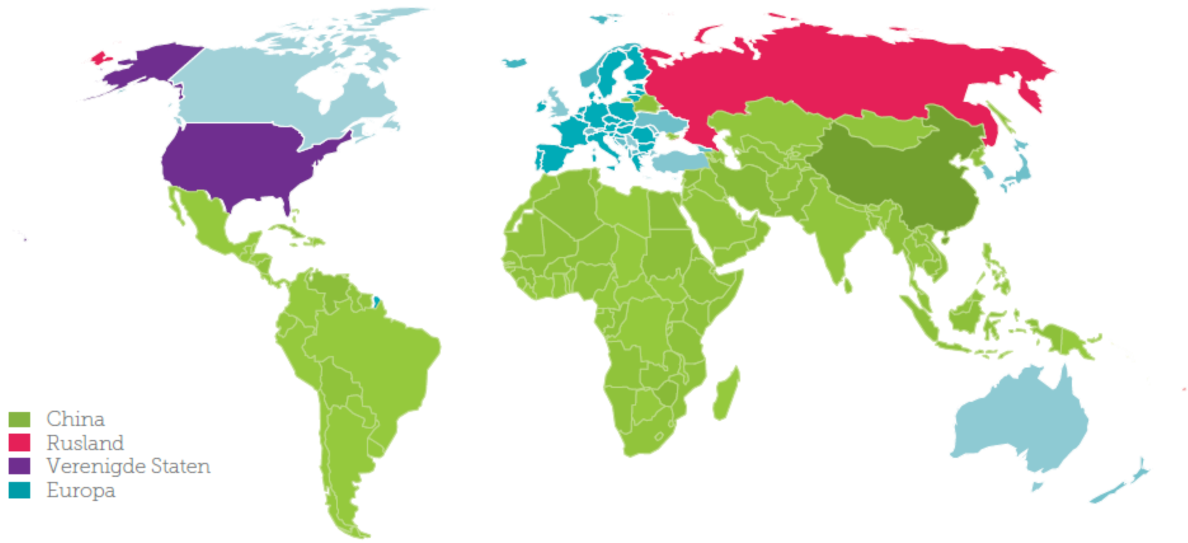


Figure 15: UN General Assembly Voting Patterns since 2000 vis-à-vis Global Blocs of Power
Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)
Note: The colour indicates the power bloc with which voting alignment is strongest; the intensity of the colour reflects the degree of that alignment.

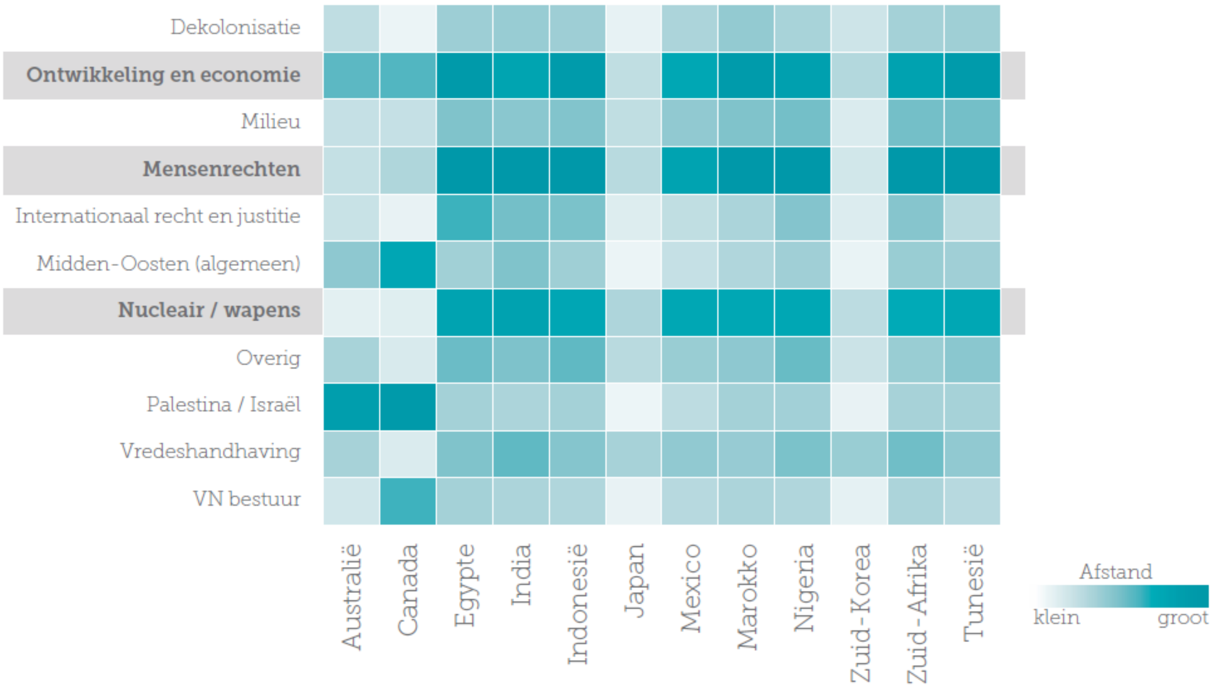


Figure 16: Voting Distance to the EU by Policy Issue
Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)
Note: A darker colour indicates a greater distance from the EU on the respective issue

In all of these potential partnerships, decisiveness is of critical importance. The United States and China are actively securing long-term and strategic off-take agreements with producers across multiple countries for critical minerals — in some cases with forward delivery rights extending deep into the decade [135]. This constrains what remains available to the rest of the world, including Europe.

COOPERATION IS A CONDITION FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

10 FROM THINKING TO ACTING: ORGANISING MOMENTUM

Europe — and this certainly applies to the Netherlands — already faces a substantial long-term policy agenda. Planetary depletion requires sustainability, and demographic ageing demands renewed attention to earning capacity. This report shows that an additional, urgent and structural task must now be added.

The United States and China have entered into a contest for economic hegemony. Both are leveraging Europe's dependent position to strengthen their own. Under Trump, the United States has even articulated a desire to dismantle the EU. Europe, as a democratic rule-of-law community with broad-based societal prosperity, represents a stabilising force in the world. Preserving that identity requires the capacity to build countervailing power and to reduce — or eliminate — asymmetric dependencies.

Time is limited. The hegemonic contest is already underway, and the primary battleground is new technology. This does not mean abandoning the principles of open markets in global trade. It does mean building autonomous positions in strategically critical goods and services. In this report, defence and security, cloud infrastructure, critical raw materials and AI have been identified as such domains. The private sector will not lead this transition toward greater autonomy. Direction must come from government.

This will entail short-term costs — financial and potentially in terms of welfare. These are the costs of avoiding a subordinate position in the longer term. In Brussels, strategic thinking is already further advanced than in many Member States. The European Commission should therefore be given greater room for concrete action and the budgets that accompany it. The Draghi and Letta reports equally merit implementation to strengthen the internal market [136], [137].

Given the urgency, some European countries will need to move ahead and form a leading group. The Netherlands should be among them, as emerging technologies will also shape long-term earning capacity. Beyond Europe, alliances with Japan, Canada, Australia and South Korea — and with partners in Africa and South America — should be actively pursued.

Chapters 7 and 8 have outlined the short- and medium-term directions through which Europe can manage and reduce asymmetric dependencies. These include redirecting trade flows in critical materials, building strategic reserves (including of secondary streams), and expanding domestic production capacity in defence and cloud infrastructure. These measures follow logically from the analysis of the geopolitical landscape and imply administrative and political consequences. Chapter 9 makes those consequences explicit, clarifying what action in this context truly requires. The emphasis lies on governance and coordination — partly national, but primarily international, both within and beyond the EU.

This chapter marks the transition from analysis to action. Action requires clearly defined objectives, a defined time horizon, agreement on participating actors, and sufficient resources. A long-term strategic method — such as that applied in China — may serve as a reference model when applied specifically to asymmetric dependencies. For European Member States operating within short political cycles, this is challenging. A less politically exposed institution such as the European Commission therefore deserves a strong coordinating role.

Strategic thinking about geopolitical counterpower is already more developed at the European Commission level than in many Member States. Moreover, European industry itself recognises the necessity of greater (digital) autonomy and deeper cooperation — as illustrated, for example, by the EuroStack initiative [138].

Starting under uncertainty

Strategic action cannot wait for full certainty, unanimity, or perfectly closed business cases — especially not in highly innovative technologies. In a context of geopolitical competition, direction emerges through action. Delay undermines credibility and reduces the space to scale up later. Starting under uncertainty is therefore an inherent feature of strategic policy.

At the same time, acting quickly creates the first symbolic gain and is essential to make the shift from thinking to doing credible. This requires initial measures that are administratively straightforward and deliver visible effects within a short timeframe. These first steps signal that the change of course is serious. Tangible results make strategic autonomy concrete and understandable, and create political and societal space for follow-up measures that are more costly and generate greater friction.

While government sets the direction, implementation will in many cases need to be private. Strategic autonomy will only materialise when companies can invest rationally — even if this is more expensive than global optimisation. This requires supply-side steering: certainty of demand, scale, and continuity, and a distribution of risks that enables investment. Policy certainty arises from uniform and long-term frameworks that clarify what capacity is required and where investments can generate returns. In this way, companies become co-carriers of strategic autonomy.

Organising public control over knowledge and/or production

Economic autonomy requires that takeovers, capital injections, and access to data by non-EU actors are no longer assessed solely as commercial transactions, but as strategic positions within value chains. One instrument available to governments is to acquire a partial or full equity stake in companies operating in domains characterised by asymmetric dependencies. In the past, governments frequently held a "golden share" in strategically important firms.

State participations are an instrument to safeguard public interests where markets do not do so automatically, or where no market exists. Until now, they have primarily been used in cases of classical market failure — such as network monopolies — or in emergency situations (for example during banking crises), with a strong practical emphasis on financial performance [139]. In a context of strategic autonomy, participations could also be used to reduce asymmetric dependencies or to build strategic pressure points. The objective then shifts from return on investment to ensuring that a company or infrastructure remains under European control.

Such state participations must not become political playthings. It is essential that day-to-day management and governance are shielded from ad hoc political intervention. The Solvinity case on the following page illustrates this.

STRATEGIC ACTION CANNOT WAIT FOR FULL CERTAINTY

Solvinity: a strategic dependency made visible

The proposed acquisition of Solvinity by a U.S. party exposed how vulnerable the Dutch digital backbone has become. Solvinity operates secure cloud and platform services for ministries, municipalities and public agencies. It functions as a critical node that facilitates state access, identification and data exchange. In 2025, Zivver — the Dutch provider of secure communication services for healthcare, government and the legal sector — was also sold to an American group. In both cases, the services concerned had originally been developed precisely to reduce European dependencies.

The vulnerability became even clearer in the same year when the United States, invoking the CLOUD Act (2018), submitted a data request to the International Criminal Court. The ICC relied on an American cloud provider. That alone was sufficient to establish extraterritorial legal access, even though the data was physically stored in Europe.

This situation reflects what the Dutch Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (RLI) describes as an overly narrow interpretation of market failure. Government intervention occurs in cases of monopoly, but not in cases of strategic autonomy. The transfer of a company facilitating parts of the DigiD, MijnOverheid and justice chains to an American investor is therefore treated as a regular market transaction. In reality, it represents geopolitical market failure: an asymmetric dependency that makes public institutions vulnerable and that markets cannot correct on their own.

The instrument suited to address this already exists: public shareholdings. In *Participating without dogma's*, the RLI argues that state participations are too rarely deployed in strategic sectors and that market failure related to economic security is insufficiently recognised. Current practice treats participation as a measure of last resort.

The model of NLFI illustrates how a participation can be structured without political interference in day-to-day operations. NLFI is a foundation that manages the state's shareholdings in ABN AMRO and ASN Bank. By placing ownership in an independent foundation, a buffer is created between the state and the company: the state remains the owner, while professional management is tasked with safeguarding long-term public interests. Political instructions must be formalised, substantiated and public. This architecture provides what was lacking in the Solvinity and Zivver cases: stable ownership, predictable governance and the capacity to block unwanted takeovers.

A European example

In light of the above, we have examined a number of possible actions. Several are included in this document as illustrative examples. Here we develop one case in greater detail. This "use case" does not offer a comprehensive solution to all dependencies, but it meets clear criteria: it can be started quickly, produces visible effects, and is executable within existing institutional structures. Its function is to generate momentum. If initial steps succeed, space emerges for more far-reaching and costly decisions.

Building a European player with system power – Nokia and Ericsson versus Huawei

What should be done?

The market for mobile infrastructure is not European but global. 5G and 6G standards are developed in international standardisation bodies such as 3GPP and the ITU, where companies — not governments — shape the technical architecture of global networks [140]. In this market, two medium-sized European players compete: Nokia (approximately €19 billion in revenue) and Ericsson (approximately €22 billion), alongside Huawei (€86 billion). China invests heavily, including through Huawei, in next-generation 6G platforms and thereby exerts substantial influence over the design of future standards.

Although Europe can exclude Huawei from its physical networks, it cannot avoid the future global standard to which its infrastructure must ultimately connect.[5]

Figure 17 shows that Europe's representation in the core bodies of 3GPP is structurally declining, while Asian players are increasing their influence over standard-setting.

As long as Nokia and Ericsson operate as two separate entities, they divide their development capacity across parallel systems and competing designs. In a global technological race, where speed and scale determine influence over the next network architecture, such fragmentation weakens Europe's position. Europe effectively invests twice in largely similar building blocks, while countries such as China concentrate investment along a single coordinated line.

If Europe does not strengthen its technological autonomy in this domain, it risks becoming dependent on standards designed elsewhere. To assess Europe's position, we examine patent data from the EPO and USPTO. Two metrics are central: the uniqueness and diversity of technological specialisations. A strong position is characterised by high uniqueness and high diversity. Figure 18 shows that China and the United States build strength by combining a wide range of technological competencies (high diversity) that few other countries control (high uniqueness). Europe collectively possesses comparable knowledge, but loses influence because these competencies are fragmented across separate countries and firms.

Consolidation is therefore necessary [141]: one European player with sufficient scale to sustain 6G innovation and build system power. In 2025, a group of major European telecom operators jointly addressed the President of the Commission, urging a revision of the merger and competition framework to allow European infrastructure suppliers to compete internationally [142]. However, the current EU competition framework leaves structurally limited room for such strategic mergers [143].

Attempts at consolidation between major players are rarely approved, or only under strict conditions such as divestments. In many cases, this results in lengthy procedures, delays, and ultimately scale reduction rather than scale reinforcement.

Our position is clear: in strategic sectors, Europe should no longer automatically maximise competition, but safeguard autonomy. This requires creating room for controlled consolidation between Nokia and Ericsson, ensuring that Europe retains a seat at the design table of critical mobile infrastructure.

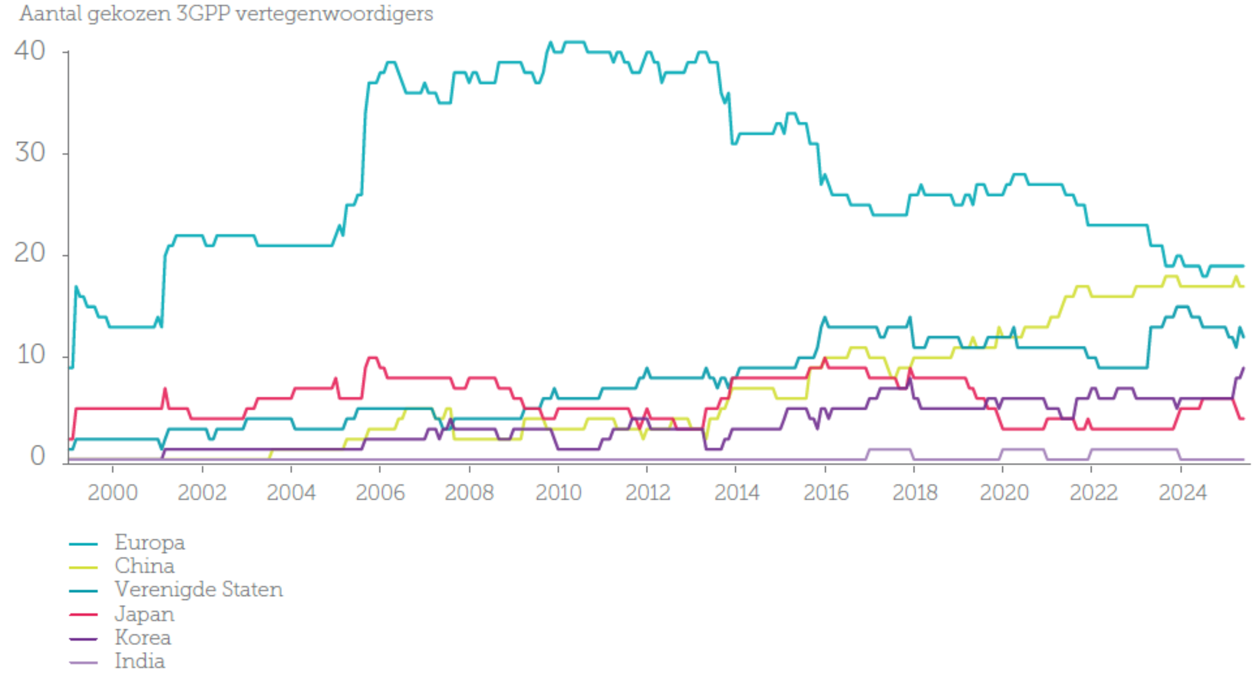


Figure 17: 3GPP Representation by Region Over Time
Source: Swennenhuis (2025)

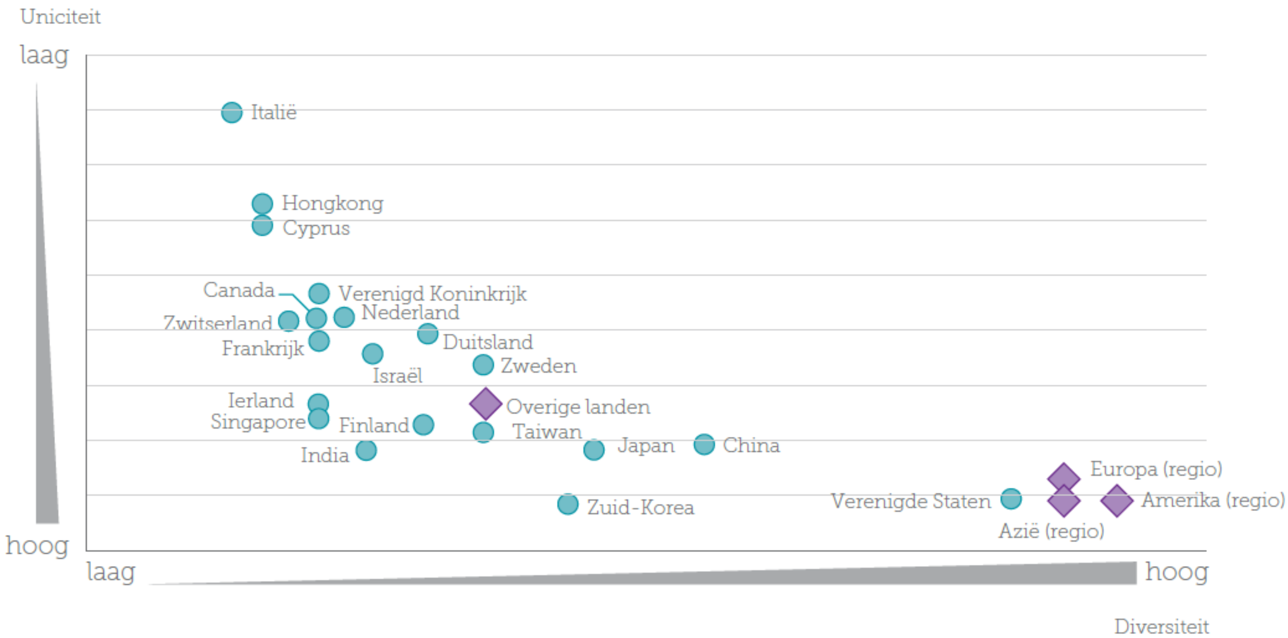


Figure 18: Uniqueness versus Diversity in 5G Patents by Country and Region
Source: Parcu et al. (2022)

A further step could be that Europe — or a coalition of willing Member States — takes a substantial stake in Nokia and Ericsson, or even considers full acquisition. The primary objective would not be to manage a monopoly, but to create scale and system power in order to maintain geopolitical influence vis-à-vis players such as Huawei. Telecommunications infrastructure constitutes a strategic layer. Public involvement is therefore a logical instrument to safeguard technological autonomy.

With whom should this be done?

Within Europe. The logical core consists of Finland and Sweden, where Nokia and Ericsson are anchored, complemented by Germany, France and the Netherlands — countries with the largest telecom operators (such as Deutsche Telekom, Orange and KPN) and with an established policy tradition in strategic technology programmes (including the Chips Act, the Battery Alliance and European defence initiatives). These countries possess the industrial base, political willingness and market scale required to sustain a European network player and to influence 6G standardisation.

Outside Europe. For 6G development, cooperation with Japan and South Korea is strategically logical. Both countries have advanced telecom sectors, strong R&D capabilities and a shared interest in an open, non-Chinese 6G ecosystem. Companies such as NEC (Japan) and Samsung (Korea) are already active in international 6G consortia and represent natural partners in interoperability, testing and standardisation. They are also politically reliable technology partners, operating within comparable security frameworks and sharing concerns regarding Chinese technological dominance.

Europe needs scale; Asia offers complementary technology and aligned strategic interests. Cooperation increases the likelihood of retaining influence over the global standard — something neither region can achieve alone at present.

The path forward is clear. The challenge lies in acting swiftly, while the necessary measures do not fit within the traditional model applied thus far. Yet action is required if Europe wishes to retain control over its technological future.

Conclusion

- Asymmetric dependencies are among the most urgent challenges confronting Europe.
- Dependencies must become more symmetrical — returning towards the centre of the inverted U-curve.
- Europe must build geopolitical resilience. The Netherlands can play a catalytic role by forming coalitions and using its informal political influence to generate momentum for European scale and strategic autonomy.
- Strategic autonomy is necessary, but it is not cost-free. Europe will need to accept a reduction in certain aspects of market efficiency.
- Capacity-building does not fit within the previously dominant model of maximum economic openness.
- Europe must strengthen itself by fully deepening the internal market in order to realise scale.
- This requires European governments to act not only through regulation, but also on the supply side.
- Europe must seek partners beyond its borders that pursue comparable geopolitical resilience.
- This agenda is necessary in order to preserve as much of the 'market' and 'democracy' as possible.

APPENDIX

Rang	Land	Toename	Belangrijkste sector	Aandeel Oud (%)	Aandeel nieuw (%)
1	Mexico	9860.83	ICT	0,66	1,07
2	Japan	9627.31	Volksgezondheid	1,29	1,68
3	Maleisië	9242.03	ICT	0,79	1,16
4	Saoedi-Arabië	9167.42	Energie	0,77	1,14
5	Canada	9158.18	Kritieke Materialen	0,55	0,90
6	Zuid-Korea	9027.08	ICT	1,35	1,72
7	Vietnam	8966.48	ICT	0,97	1,35
8	Overig Azië	6982.02	ICT	1,05	1,34
9	Ver. Arab. Emiraten	6829.65	Energie	0,28	0,57
10	Verenigd Koninkrijk	5358.04	Volksgezondheid	3,23	3,35
11	Zwitserland	4798.54	Volksgezondheid	3,30	3,44
12	Singapore	4701.30	Volksgezondheid	0,64	0,84
13	Irak	4601.75	Energie	0,86	1,05
14	Thailand	4444.87	ICT	0,57	0,76
15	India	4175.44	Volksgezondheid	0,94	1,10
16	Noorwegen	3089.65	Energie	2,16	2,26
17	Brazilië	3040.21	Energie	0,84	0,90
18	Kazachstan	2452.84	Energie	1,04	1,15
19	Australië	2400.48	Kritieke Materialen	0,16	0,26
20	Nigeria	2304.16	Energie	0,81	0,91
21	Indonesië	2129.06	Kritieke Materialen	0,19	0,28
22	Koeweit	1859.15	Energie	0,01	0,09
23	Oman	1701.04	Energie	0,04	0,11
24	Angola	1622.12	Energie	0,30	0,37
25	Libië	1572.58	Energie	0,97	1,04

Table A.1: Optimised Trade Flows Outside the EU: Top 25 Non-EU Beneficiaries of Trade Diversification
Source: DenkWerk & Kickstart AI (2025)

Note: Table A.1 presents the 25 non-EU countries to which EU imports of critical goods are reallocated under the optimised friendshoring scenario. The results are based on an optimisation of trade flows at the HS6 level (CEPII BACI, 2023), allowing for a maximum additional export capacity of 5 percentage points per product from alternative supplier countries. Increase (USD million) indicates the additional export value directed towards the EU; old share and new share refer to the country's share in total EU imports of critical goods before and after optimisation.

ENDNOTES

1. The Guardian (2025) - Trump vows to slap 25% tariffs on EU and claims bloc was 'formed to screw US'
2. Yale Insights (2024) - What the U.S. Has to Gain from Supporting Ukraine
3. RAND (2019) - *The United States and Europe Since World War II: A Mutually Beneficial Partnership*
4. Ikenberry G.J. (2005) - *Power and liberal order: America's postwar world order in transition*
5. FD (2026) - Trump claimt Venezolaanse olie en dat is slecht nieuws voor China
6. 119th Congress (2025) - *Make Greenland Great Again Act*
7. Yale Insights (2024) - What the U.S. Has to Gain from Supporting Ukraine
8. DenkWerk (2025) - *Kiezen én Delen*
9. DenkWerk (2022) - *Voorbij netto-nul naar planeet-positief*
10. Wennink P. (2025) - *Rapport Wennink, De route naar toekomstige welvaart*
11. CBS (2025) - 1989 Globalisering en Europese integratie na de val van de Muur
12. Friedman T. (2005) - *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*
13. Kremer M., Willis J., You Y. (2022) - *Converging to Convergence*
14. Our World in Data (2025) - The end of progress against extreme poverty?
15. OECD (2021) - *Global Value Chains and Resilience*
16. OECD (2019) - *Global Value Chains and Economic Clusters*
17. Barabási A., Albert R. (1999) - Emergence of scaling in random networks
18. Rathenau Instituut (2025) - Achter de macht van big tech
19. FT (2025) - WTO chief warns US bilateral tariff deals could put trade principle at risk
20. EEAS (2024) - EU Statement at the 9th Trade Policy Review of the People's Republic of China
21. IEA (2006) - *Natural Gas Market Review 2006*
22. AIV (2014) - De EU-gasafhankelijkheid van Rusland. Hoe een geïntegreerd EU-beleid dit kan verminderen
23. European Commission (2010) - *Report on Critical Raw Materials 2010*
24. BBC (2015) - US nuclear fears block Intel China supercomputer
25. Bloomberg (2025) - Dutch Align with US Export Controls on Some ASML Chip Tools
26. DenkWerk (2021) - *Globalanceren*
27. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2018) - Made in China 2025 factsheet
28. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2015) - Long-term macroeconomic forecasts

29. Farrell H., Newman A. (2019) - *Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion*
30. OECD (2019) - *Good Governance for Critical Infrastructure Resilience*
31. OECD (2019) - *Good Governance for Critical Infrastructure Resilience*
32. The Guardian (2025) - Armed by America: how Europe's militaries depend on the US
33. SIPRI (2024) - EU Member States' defence expenditure
34. BCG (2024) - *Building European Defence Capabilities for a More Uncertain World*
35. Omdia (2025) - Global cloud infrastructure spending rose 21% in Q1 2025
36. Abdelfattah A., Cordes K., Medina A., Cerny T. (2025) - Semantic Dependency in Microservice Architecture: A Framework for Definition and Detection
37. NOS (2025) - Te afhankelijk van Amerikaanse internetdiensten, kom nu met een plan B
38. Blot C., Creel J., Geerolf F., Ricco G. (2025) - Dominance in Transition? The Future of the Dollar and the Euro
39. World Gold Council (2025) - Gold Reserves by Country
40. Holland Gold (2025) - Duidelijkheid over Nederlands goud in New York nodig
41. Feng J., Cole B. (2025) - Map Shows How Much Gold Countries Store in US as Germany Mulls Exit
42. ITIF (2025) - How China Is Outperforming the United States in Critical Technologies
43. Garcia-Herrero A., Krystyanczuk M., Schindowski R. (2025) - Radical novelties in critical technologies and spillovers
44. WITS (2025) - Trade Statistics by Product
45. ECB (2025) - How vulnerable is the euro area to restrictions on Chinese rare earth exports?
46. Eurostat (2025) - Energy statistics - an overview
47. De Schumanverklaring (1950) - De geboorte van de EU
48. Eurostat (2025) - Social protection statistics - early estimates
49. Congressional Budget Office (2025) - Monthly Budget Review: Summary for Fiscal Year 2025
50. Bruegel (2025) - How much of a threat to US debt sustainability is Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act?
51. Atlantic Council (2024) - The IRA and CHIPS Act are supercharging US manufacturing construction
52. European Union Chamber of Commerce (2017) - China Manufacturing 2025
53. IMF (2025) - Fiscal monitor: fiscal policy under uncertainty
54. Taylor M., Garlick J. (2024) - 'Flexible' versus 'fragmented' authoritarianism: evidence from Chinese foreign policy during the Xi Jinping era

55. Europese Commissie (2025) - Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report
56. Europese Commissie (2025) - Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report
57. Guerrieri P., Padoan P.C. (2024) - European competitiveness and strategic autonomy
58. Von Daniels L. (2024) - Economy and National Security: US Foreign Economic Policy under Trump and Biden
59. Heldt E.C., Schmidtkeb H., Serrano Oswald O. (2025) - Multilateralism à la carte: how China navigates global economic institutions
60. IMF (2025) - Industrial policy in China: Quantification and impact on misallocation
61. OECD (2024) - Economic Survey of China
62. Freedom House (2025) - China: Freedom in the World 2025
63. Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR) (2024) - De herontdekking van de geopolitiek in de Europese Unie
64. Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2024) - Modern supply side economics: A new consensus?
65. Fang H., Li M., Lu G. (2025) - Decoding China's Industrial Policies
66. EU (2025) - Common Agricultural Policy
67. IMF (2024) - Industrial Policy in Europe: A Single Market Perspective
68. Zhang K.H. (2024) - Geoeconomics of US-China tech rivalry and industrial policy
69. Brandsaas E.E., Kurtzman R., Nichols J. (2025) - From Plans to Starts: Examining Recent Trends in Manufacturing Plant Construction
70. Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) (2025) - Industrial Policy through the CHIPS and Science Act
71. Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (2024) - Manufacturing Gains from Green Energy and Semiconductor Spending Since the CHIPS and Inflation Reduction Acts
72. Bruegel (2025) - How do Europe and the US compare on clean tech
73. European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) (2023) - Qualified majority voting in common foreign and security policy
74. Centre for European Reform (2025) - Does EU enlargement require voting reform?
75. EC (2025) - The 2025 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report
76. OECD (2025) - Education at a Glance 2025
77. EPRS (2024) - Current developments in consumer protection policy: Review of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation
78. Cauffman C., Goanta C. (2021) - A New Order: The Digital Services Act and Consumer Protection
79. Rungi A., Del Prete D. (2017) - The 'Smile Curve': where Value is Added along Supply Chains
80. DenkWerk (2021) - *Globalanceren*

81. EC (2024) - Science, Research and Innovation performance of the EU 2024
82. EC (2024) - Policy brief Cultural and Creative Industries
83. European Investment Bank (EIB) (2024) - The scale-up gap
84. SUERF (2025) - Innovation and innovation financing in Europe
85. EIB (2026) - Why innovative startups and scaleups relocate from the EU
86. EC (2023) - Semiconductors in the EU: State of play future trends and vulnerabilities of the semiconductor supply chain
87. MedTech Europe (2025) - The European Medical Technology Industry in Figures 2025
88. International Energy Agency (IEA) (2025) - Global Hydrogen Review
89. Bradford A. (2019) - *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union rules the world*
90. International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP) (2024) - Global Data Privacy Laws 2024: 144 Countries and Counting
91. Letta E. (2024) - *Much more than a market*
92. Draghi M. (2024) - *A competitiveness strategy for Europe*
93. IMF (2025) - Europe's Integration Imperative
94. EPRS (2024) - Deepening the single market in the light of the Letta and Draghi reports
95. EIB (2026) - Why innovative startups and scaleups relocate from the EU
96. NOS (2020) - Hoe ASML een grote gok waagde en daarmee monopolist werd
97. Medium (2025) - ASML: The Dutch Company That Dominates Tech
98. AP (2025) - China's C919 jet faces turbulent skies as US-China trade tensions add to delays
99. EASA (2025) - Easy Access Rules for Continuing Airworthiness
100. The Economy (2025) - China's Overproduction Paradox: A Crisis Driven by Weak Domestic Demand, Not Tariffs
101. Institut Montaigne (2025) - Autonomy or Indispensability? Identifying the EU's Semiconductor Lodestar
102. EC (2024) - Assessing Open Strategic Autonomy
103. ECB (2025) - Fiscal aspects of European defence spending
104. DenkWerk (2021) - *De datagedreven toekomst*
105. García-Herrero A. (2023) - China's concept of strategic autonomy is about dual circulation
106. The White House (2024) - Executive Order 14123: Establishing the White House Council on Supply Chain Resilience
107. EU (2023) - Strengthening the EU's semiconductor ecosystem - Chips Act
108. EC (2025) - Commission selects 47 Strategic Projects to secure and diversify access to raw materials in the EU

109. EC (2024) - A new European Defence Industrial Strategy

110. EC (2023) - Net-Zero Industry Act

111. The White House (2025) - National Security Strategy of the United States of America

112. European Policy Innovation Council (2025) - Draghi Observatory & Implementation Index: Only 1 in 10 Measures Implemented

113. EC (2024) - The Planning of Public Investments in EU Member States

114. Bruegel (2024) - Accelerating strategic investment in the European Union beyond 2026

115. IMF (2024) - Industrial Policy in Europe: A Single Market Perspective

116. Reuters (2022) - Nord Stream 1 pipeline to shut for three days in latest fuel blow to Europe

117. Arato L. (2025) - The EU has also entered the race for South American minerals

118. Number Three (2024) - Een studie naar de haalbaarheid van een nationaal programma voor de opslag van kritieke grondstoffen ter versterking van Europese waardeketens

119. IFRI (2024) - Europe's Black Mass Evasion: From Black Box to Strategic Recycling

120. Reuters (2025) - EU to introduce export restrictions on rare earth magnet waste in early 2026

121. EC (2025) - RESourceEU Action Plan

122. FT (2025) - China cracks down on foreign companies stockpiling rare earths

123. European Commission (2025) - White Paper for European defence - Readiness 2030

124. Bruegel (2024) - A European defence industrial strategy in a hostile world

125. OECD (2025) - Economic Outlook

126. Gineikyte-Kanclere V., Eggert M., Skyiotyte G. (2025) - European Software and Cyber Dependencies

127. GAIA-X (2025) - What is GAIA-X?

128. Eurostack (2025) - Deploying the Eurostack: What's needed now.

129. European Commission (2025) - RESourceEU Action Plan

130. McKinsey & Company (2025) - Powering the energy transition's motor: Circular rare earth elements

131. Chowdhury N.A., Deng S., Jin H., Prodius D., Sutherland J.W., Nlebedim I.C. (2021) - Sustainable Recycling of Rare Earth Elements from NdFeB Magnet Swarf: Techno-Economic and Environmental Perspectives

132. Chinwego C., Wagner H., Giancola E., Jironvil J., Powell A. (2022) - Technoeconomic Analysis of Rare-Earth Metal Recycling Using Efficient Metal Distillation

133. TNO (2024) - Maximising value from the urban mine: recycling critical raw materials

134. TNO Vector (2025) - Een blik onder de motorkap: sleutelen aan de technologiepositie van Nederland

135. NRC (2025) - We willen onze risico's beperken als het tot een groot conflict komt tussen China en de VS

136. Letta E. (2024) - *Much more than a market*

137. Draghi M. (2024) - *A competitiveness strategy for Europe & Indepth analysis and recommendations*

138. Eurostack (2025) - Deploying the Eurostack: What's needed now.

139. RLI (2025) - Deelnemen zonder dogma's

140. Ten Oever N., Milan S. (2022) - The Making of International Communication Standards: Towards a Theory of Power in Standardization

141. Nokia (2025) - Nokia and Ericsson host European industry and policymakers for urgent call to secure Europe's tech future

142. Reuters (2025) - Major telcos urge EU's Von der Leyen to ease merger rules to boost investments

143. Reuters (2024) - Vestager defends EU merger rules


IMPORT
TARIFFS

Denkend aan Holland zie ik breede rivieren traag door oneindig laagland gaan, rijen ondenkbaar ijle populieren als hooge pluimen aan den einder staan; en in de geweldige ruimte verzonken de boerderijen verspreid door het land, boomgroepen, dorpen, geknotte torens, kerken en olmen in een grootsch verband. de lucht hangt er laag en de zon wordt er langzaam in grijze veelkleurige dampen gesmoord, en in alle gewesten wordt de stem van het water met zijn eeuwige rampen gevreesd en gehoord. *HENDRIK MARSMAN, 1936*

DENKWERK