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امنیت اقتصادی از رهگذر سیاست تجاری: چارچوبی چندشاخصی برای بلوک‌های اقتصادی منطقه‌ای در اوراسیای بزرگ

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چکیده

سیاست تجارت خارجی- با افزایش تحریم‌ها، تشدید تعرفه‌های تجارت و رقابت بر سر نهاده‌های راهبردی- به یکی از ارکان اصلی امنیت اقتصادی تبدیل شده است، زیرا وابستگی متقابل اقتصادی، افزون بر ارتقای کارایی، به ابزاری برای اعمال فشار نیز بدل شده است. باوجوداین، پژوهش‌های حوزهٔ امنیت اقتصادی بیشتر دولت‌محور بوده و در این پژوهش‌ها ابزارهای محدودی برای ارزیابی حکمرانی تجاری مرتبط با امنیت در بلوک‌های همگرایی منطقه‌ای مطرح بوده است. این مقاله با هدف رفع این خلأ، در چارچوبی چندشاخصی تدوین شده و ابزارهای سیاست تجاری با آسیب‌پذیری‌های مرتبط با امنیت اقتصادی پیوند داده شده است. این چارچوب بر پنج بُعد استوار است: جایگاه در تجارت بین‌الملل، ساختار و کیفیت تجارت، عملکرد دفاعی، عملکرد توسعه‌ای، و پایداری و شفافیت رژیم تجاری. در این مطالعه، با استفاده از مورد اتحادیهٔ اقتصادی اوراسیا و بهره‌گیری از پایگاه‌های دادهٔ تجارت بین‌الملل و منابع پایش سیاست‌های تجاری، چارچوبی در بازهٔ زمانی ۲۰۲۰ تا ۲۰۲۳م عملیاتی شد. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد اتحادیهٔ اقتصادی اوراسیا، در کنار برخورداری از درجهٔ نسبتاً بالای گشودگی تجاری و سهم در خور توجه در منابع راهبردی، پس از ۲۰۲۱م، با افزایش تمرکز جغرافیایی صادرات، به‌ویژه منابع تأمین واردات با محتوای فناورانه، مواجه بوده است؛ درعین‌حال، همچنان الگوی صادراتی با محتوای فناورانهٔ آن پایین مانده است. همچنین، مجموعهٔ ابزارهای توسعه‌ای این اتحادیه، با شکاف در اجرا همراه بوده است، به‌گونه‌ای که با وجود افزایش فعالیت‌های مذاکره‌ای، پوشش تجارت ترجیحی همچنان محدود مانده و «دامنهٔ وابستگی» این بلوک در بازارهای کشورهای ثالث کاهش یافته است. شاخص‌های حکمرانی نیز نشان می‌دهد سطح بالای عدم‌قطعیت در سیاست تجاری و نبود انسجام کامل میان مواضع کشورهای عضو، اعتبار جهت‌گیری مشترک سیاست تجارت خارجی اتحادیه را محدود می‌کند. در این مقاله، رویکرد سنجش میزان مواجهه با مخاطرات با ظرفیت حکمرانی تلفیق شده، نقشه‌ای تشخیصی از مخاطرات امنیتی مرتبط با تجارت فراهم آمده، و جهت‌گیری‌های اجرایی در طراحی دستورکارهای تجارت خارجی امنیت‌محور، با تمرکز بر کاهش هزینه‌های تجاری، افزایش تاب‌آوری دالان‌های تجاری، بهره‌گیری مؤثر از ترتیبات تجارت ترجیحی و توسعهٔ نظام‌های پایش در منطقهٔ اوراسیای بزرگ و فراتر از آن پیشنهاد شده است.

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Economic security through trade policy: A multi-indicator framework for regional economic blocs in Greater Eurasia

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Abstract

External trade policy has become a core pillar of economic security as sanctions diffusion, tariff escalation, and competition for critical inputs turn interdependence into a channel of pressure as well as efficiency. Yet economic-security research remains largely state-centred and offers limited tools for evaluating security-relevant trade governance in regional integration blocs. This article addresses this gap by developing a multi-indicator framework that links trade-policy instruments to security-relevant vulnerabilities. The framework is structured around five dimensions: position in international trade, trade structure and quality, defensive performance, expansionary performance, and regime sustainability and transparency. Using the case of Eurasian Economic Union, the study draws on international trade databases and policy-monitoring sources to operationalise the framework for 2020–2023. The findings show that the EAEU combines relatively high openness and strategic-resource weight with a post-2021 increase in the geographic concentration of both exports and, especially, import sourcing, alongside a persistent technology-light export profile. The Union's expansionary toolkit also exhibits an implementation gap: negotiation activity intensifies, but preferential trade coverage remains marginal and the bloc's "dependence footprint" in third markets contracts. Governance indicators suggest that elevated trade policy uncertainty and incomplete unity of member positions constrain the credibility of a common external vector. The article contributes a measurement approach that integrates exposure with governance capacity, produces a diagnostic map of trade-related security risks, and outlines implementation-oriented directions for designing security-centred external trade agendas focused on trade-cost reduction, corridor resilience, usable preferences, and monitoring applicable to Greater Eurasia and beyond.

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1. Introduction

In the mid 2020s, external trade policy has moved from a predominantly economic instrument to a core pillar of economic security. Fragmented supply chains, expanding sanctions, and the global resurgence of protective measures have increased the strategic value of tariffs, non-tariff regulation, preferential agreements, export support, and border trade governance. Over the past 15 years, more than 47,000 protectionist trade measures have been introduced worldwide, excluding sanctions (GTA, 2025). States and regional economic blocs operate in an environment where cross-border interdependence remains a source of efficiency gains, but can also become an instrument of pressure. The weaponisation of trade links refers to deliberate use of interdependence as leverage; through tariff shocks and trade wars, extraterritorial restrictions, sanctions and secondary sanctions, as well as intensified competition over strategic resources expressed through export controls and supply constraints (EU, 2024; EC, 2023).

Recent country-level evidence confirms that these pressures extend beyond the economies directly involved in trade disputes. The 2025 US–China trade conflict affected logistics, energy markets, and resilience strategies across the Eurasian countries, demonstrating how bilateral tariffs can transmit economic costs through third-country supply chains (Huswatun Miswar, 2026). This trend is reinforced by the growing use of trade sanctions, as illustrated by the development of Iran–China economic cooperation under Western restrictions (Karimi Vala & Han, 2026) and by Russia's "turn to the East", where sanctions accelerated the diversification of foreign economic relations towards Greater Eurasian and other non-Western partners through bilateral trade arrangements and institutions such as BRICS, the EAEU, and the SCO (Sörensen, 2025).

In this environment, the ability to sustain access to markets, logistics routes, critical imports, and stable export revenues increasingly determines whether states and regional economic blocs can preserve economic sovereignty and policy autonomy under external pressure.

These dynamics are especially consequential for integration blocs that have delegated parts of trade governance to a supranational level. As of 2026, there are 16 active custom unions worldwide, with varying degrees of integration depth (3 bilateral and 13 multilateral) (RTA, 2026). External trade policy in such blocs performs several functions: it shapes their position in the world economy and global commodity markets, the resilience of member economies, and the reputation as a predictable partner. A persistent tension emerges between the need for a coherent supranational trade policy agenda and member states' preference to retain discretion over sensitive instruments. As a result, many blocs operate without a clearly articulated common external trade vector, even when external conditions require one.

The Eurasian Economic Union provides a revealing case for understanding how economic security is produced, or undermined, through external trade policy. Under intensified geoeconomic competition and post-2022 sanctions pressure, the Union has gained renewed salience for its members. The Union faces security-related vulnerabilities stemming from its geographic and commodity trade structure and uneven trade policy toolkit. These include concentrated trade directions, exposure to "unfriendly" markets, low survival of export relationships, limited significance of the bloc as a partner for third countries, bilateral trade imbalances, volatility of third countries' trade policy, and explicit external trade pressure (Surkova et al., 2025). In several areas, common member positions remain incomplete, and the supranational regulator lacks sufficient competence to implement a fully unified agenda.

Despite a growing policy discourse on economic security worldwide, the analytical and measurement gap at the level of integration blocs remains substantial. Much of the literature operationalises economic security at the national level, linking it to macroeconomic stability, competitiveness, supply resilience, and the protection of national interests. By contrast, integration level economic security is less systematically theorised and consistently measured, although the central threat for any bloc is ultimately its erosion of cohesion and viability. Existing quantitative approaches, including vulnerability and resilience frameworks used for small economies, are not designed to capture the governance logic of regional blocs where trade policy is jointly shaped, partially delegated, and politically contested.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: How can the effectiveness of external trade policy in advancing the shared trade interests and safeguarding the economic security of regional economic blocs across Greater Eurasia be assessed? and What does the case of the Eurasian Economic Union reveal about the capacity of such blocs to convert their geoeconomic potential into coordinated trade-policy outcomes while managing external vulnerabilities and divergent member-state interests?

2. Article's contribution

First, it extends the study of economic security from the national level to regional economic blocs by conceptualising security as the joint outcome of external trade exposure and supranational governance capacity. This approach explains why similar levels of trade openness may generate different security consequences depending on partner concentration, technological structure, institutional coherence, and the ability of member states to maintain a common external policy.

Second, the article makes a methodological contribution by developing a multi-indicator framework to assess how common external trade policy contributes to the economic-security capacity of a regional economic bloc. The framework links observable trade

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outcomes with the effectiveness of defensive and expansionary policy instruments and with the sustainability and transparency of the trade-policy regime. It moves beyond assessments based solely on trade volumes, openness, or macroeconomic vulnerability.

Third, the empirical contribution lies in applying this structured indicator system to the Eurasian Economic Union as a particularly revealing case. The practical purpose of this framework is to diagnose exposure, to evaluate whether the existing policy toolkit can mitigate threats arising from external dependence and from the potential weaponisation of trade links by third countries. Its practical value lies in producing two policy-relevant outputs: a diagnostic map of economic security threats rooted in external trade structure, and a set of actionable directions for strengthening the bloc's external trade policy as a security instrument.

The relevance of these conclusions extends beyond the EAEU. Among regional integration blocs in the Greater Eurasian space, the EAEU combines substantial geoeconomic potential— derived from its market size, resource base, transit position, and formal supranational trade competences— with a comparatively limited realisation of its common economic interests, strengthened by the asymmetry of member economies and the persistent risk that national economic interests, external dependencies, and responses to geopolitical pressure may diverge. These tensions are not unique to the EAEU. In different forms and to varying degrees, they also shape the external economic policies of the European Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, where differences in development levels, trade specialisation, partner dependence, and national policy priorities constrain the formation of a fully coherent regional external trade strategy.

3. Literature review

The concept of economic security has progressively expanded beyond a narrow macroeconomic interpretation and is increasingly treated as part of national security and, by extension, regional order. In broad security thinking, economic processes are not merely background conditions but can become decisive sources of vulnerability, leverage, and systemic resilience (Buzan, 1991; Ronis, 2011). This shift is particularly relevant for regional integration blocs, where economic governance is partially pooled and external shocks propagate through supranational decision-making and intra-bloc cohesion.

Foreign trade policy constitutes an integral element of state economic strategy, although not all integration blocs have developed a coherent and autonomous framework in this sphere. Such a framework incorporates goals, objectives, and guiding principles shaped by a country's or bloc's position in international economic relations. Trade policy measures affect not only welfare within the initiating economy or integration bloc, but also the interests of consumers and producers in partner countries, thereby illustrating the structural nature of trade interdependence. Therefore, the external trade policy orientation of major partners forms part of the economic interests of any state. In this regard, the United States, the European Union, and China occupy a particularly significant position, as their economic weight enables them to exert substantial influence over the direction and parameters of international trade policy.

From the perspective of integration theory, deeper integration implies a gradual transfer of selected policy competences to the supranational level and a move from coordination to joint rule-making (Balassa, 1981; Tinbergen, 1954). In the classical market view, integration is anchored in the creation of a unified free market, while the primary source of risk is excessive state intervention that disrupts price signals and the efficient allocation of resources (Aron, 1966; Cassel, 1932; Röpke, 1942). Accordingly, the economic security of an integration bloc is achieved through openness, predictable rules, and the minimisation of discretionary restrictions. In socialist interpretations, the focus shifts from market efficiency to coordinated development and joint planning of priority industries, with trade flows subordinated to broader industrial and technological objectives (Lenin, 1917). Under this approach, the economic security of an integration grouping depends on the capacity for inter-state coordination, collective self-reliance in strategic sectors, and joint shock absorption through mutual support arrangements. Dirigiste and neokeynesian approaches further strengthen the role of policy coordination by arguing that deeper integration requires both "negative" integration through barrier removal, and "positive" instruments that harmonise economic and social policies across members (Tinbergen, 1954; Sannwald & Stohler, 1961). In this view, trade policy is legitimate as part of a wider stabilisation and development toolkit, including coordinated standards, compensatory mechanisms, and common programmes that preserve social cohesion and political support.

External trade policy is one of the first domains where "unity" becomes observable: common tariff schedules, shared non-tariff regimes, and coordinated trade defense measures are typically established earlier than more politically sensitive areas. At the same time, even where formal delegation exists, the practical effectiveness of bloc-level trade governance depends on whether members share objectives, acceptable trade-offs, and enforcement priorities.

At the supranational level, common trade rules may increase policy predictability, although this effect depends on the depth of integration, the distribution of institutional competences, and the ability of member states to coordinate their interests.

4. Theoretical framework

The foreign trade policy of an integration bloc is conceptualised as a unified system of mechanisms and instruments applied by supranational bodies to improve the commodity and geographic structure of external trade, advance shared economic interests, and safeguard the bloc's economic security (Tinkova, 2024).

Two implications follow for an "economic security through trade policy" research agenda. First, bloc-level economic security cannot be reduced to trade volumes or openness alone. It is shaped by the trade structure and the policy regime that produces it. In a security framing, the central question becomes whether the bloc's trade policy toolkit can (a) prevent excessive dependence on a narrow set of partners, corridors, and product groups, (b) secure access to strategically important imports under adverse conditions, and (c) preserve the bloc's autonomous policy choices when third countries weaponise interdependence.

Second, "unity" is not an abstract normative claim but an operational condition for security-oriented trade governance. A genuinely common external trade vector implies alignment of objectives, instruments, and implementation rules among member states, and it should be reflected in legal acts, strategy documents, and systematic effectiveness evaluation (EEU, 2014).

If trade policy is treated as a safeguarding instrument, the threat landscape must be mapped by connecting vulnerabilities to observable trade patterns and policy capacity.

A security-relevant taxonomy can be organised into four interlinked clusters:

- Structural exposure threats arise from the commodity and geographic configuration of external trade. Even where concentration indices are not extreme, security concerns grow when (a) exports are dominated by a limited number of strategic commodity groups, (b) imports rely on a small set of suppliers for medium- and high-technology categories, and (c) market access hinges on a narrow corridor structure. In case of EAEU, exports remain heavily shaped by primary and resource-based groups, while import dependence is pronounced in several technology-intensive categories (ITC, 2025; UNCTAD, 2025).
- A bloc faces elevated risk when key partners pursue unstable, aggressive, or explicitly restrictive policies. At this level, the security issue is not only sanctions, but the broader spectrum of barriers, selective enforcement, and unpredictable policy shifts that increase transaction costs and erode predictability (Castellum.AI, 2024; EU, 2024; 2026; GTA, 2025).
- Economic security is undermined when trade relations are unstable and when the bloc is not perceived as a significant partner by third countries. A key indicator is low export-relationship survival, measured as the share of new product–partner export links that persist over time (World Bank, 2025). Low survival suggests weak competitiveness, insufficient

institutional support, or fragile logistics and payment arrangements, limiting the bloc's capacity to use trade diversification as a resilience strategy.
- Finally, security risks emerge when supranational trade policy lacks a comprehensive approach, member positions are fragmented, and statistical monitoring is insufficient to evaluate the real uptake and effect of trade policy instruments.

Trade and economic sanctions constitute a major form of external pressure that exploits asymmetrical interdependence by restricting access to markets, resources, technologies, finance, and logistics. Deep regional integration may mitigate such risks when member states possess coordinated trade-policy instruments and the institutional capacity to implement them collectively.

5. Methodology

To move beyond descriptive mapping, the study proposes a multi-indicator framework that evaluates trade policy effectiveness as a proxy for the capacity of a regional bloc to contribute to economic security. The selection of the governance-related dimensions is conceptually informed by the experience of the European Union, particularly its explicit codification of economic security and its institutionalised assessment of trade-policy effects. The EU has explicitly framed economic security as a Union-level strategic agenda via its European Economic Security Strategy and subsequent policy package developments (EC, 2023; 2024). It serves as a reference for identifying the importance of policy coordination, predictability, monitoring, and the alignment of trade instruments with economic-security objectives.

The framework consists of a structured set of indicators grouped into five blocks, each corresponding to a distinct dimension of economic security through trade policy:

The first block, position in international trade, captures how the bloc's scale, openness, and role in global trade translate into both leverage and vulnerability. It is operationalised through indicators reflecting both external dependence and systemic weight: the export quota as a share of gross domestic product, the bloc's share in world exports and imports, and in global strategic-resource exports. Demand- and welfare-sensitive exposure is reflected in the bloc's share in world imports of consumer goods. Relational leverage in partner markets is measured by the number of countries whose import dependence on the bloc exceeds 10% and the number of countries whose export dependence on the bloc exceeds 10%. Conceptually, a larger market and greater systemic relevance strengthen negotiating power, standard-setting capacity, and the credibility of retaliatory or corrective action, while high openness and dependence increase sensitivity to external disruptions, partner policy shifts, and corridor risks (Hirschman, 1945).

The second block, quality and structure of external trade, addresses the composition of exposure: commodity and geographic concentration, technology content, and the breadth of competitive specialisation. This block is measured using Herfindahl–Hirschman indices of the geographic concentration of export markets and import sources, together with commodity concentration indices for exports and imports (Herfindahl, 1950; Hirschman, 1964). To distinguish technological upgrading from the breadth of export specialisation, the framework includes two separate indicators: the share of medium-high-technology and high-technology exports and the number of product lines with revealed comparative advantage. The first captures technological intensity, while the second captures the range of products in which the bloc holds a relative export advantage (UNCTAD, 2025; Balassa, 1965). In economic-security terms, partner concentration increases exposure to targeted restrictions and bargaining asymmetries; concentration in a narrow export basket amplifies price-cycle volatility; and a technology-light export profile limits upgrading potential, while sustaining dependence on complex imports of machinery, equipment, and intermediate inputs.

The third block, defensive trade policy performance, moves from exposure to capability: whether the bloc can protect its internal market, address unfair trade, and secure access to critical imports. Here, economic security depends not on protectionism per se, but on calibrated instruments that prevent destructive import surges, counter dumping and subsidisation, and enforce origin rules and technical requirements while preserving production capacity and public welfare (WTO, 2009; 2025).

The fourth block, expansionary trade policy performance, treats diversification as a security instrument: the ability to broaden market access and reduce concentration through preferential and non-preferential agreements, facilitation, and the institutional mechanisms that translate negotiated outcomes into trade flows. Its indicators include the number of preferential trade agreements in force, the number of ongoing negotiations per year, and the share of external trade covered by such agreements (RTA, 2026). To capture influence and embeddedness beyond the preferential perimeter, we also include the bloc's share in the external trade of key non-preferential partners. In customs unions, this dimension requires coordinated external negotiation, shared priorities, and implementation mechanisms that ensure utilisation rather than formal coverage.

Finally, the fifth block, sustainability and transparency of the trade policy regime, captures governance quality: predictability, monitoring capacity, and the credibility of implementation. This block is measured by the average trade policy unpredictability index for the bloc's leading economies based on the Trade Policy Uncertainty methodology, and by the presence of an official external trade policy strategy indicating institutional readiness and medium- to long-term policy coherence (Caldara et al., 2019; TPU, 2025). This block matters because even a well-designed trade-policy toolkit becomes security-relevant only when stakeholders can anticipate rule changes, access reliable information, and observe consistent implementation across member states.

Methodologically, the underlying research combines categorisation of policy instruments; statistical analysis of trade flows of customs unions and key partners and expert assessment to derive priority directions for policy development. The empirical base includes: World Integrated Trade Solution indicators (WITS, 2025), International Trade Centre Trade Map (ITC, 2025) and export potential tools (ITC, 2024), UN Comtrade (UNSD, 2025), World Trade Organization tariff and trade profiles (WTO, 2025), Global Trade Alert measures (GTA, 2025), and official sources of integration blocs (EEU, 2014).

5.1. Sensitivity, robustness, and reliability checks

Sensitivity was assessed by varying the threshold used to identify partner dependence and by comparing alternative temporal specifications. Robustness was examined by calculating trade concentration through both the Herfindahl–Hirschman index and the aggregate shares of the leading trade partners. Reliability was supported through transparent indicator definitions, reproducible calculation procedures, and cross-checking of the principal trade indicators across international statistical databases.

The period from 2020 to 2023 was selected to capture both the pre-shock structure of the EAEU's external trade in 2020–2021 and the immediate reconfiguration that followed the extensive sanctions and trade restrictions introduced in 2022. This external shock tested the coherence of the Union's common economic interests and increased the urgency of redirecting trade flows, developing alternative logistics routes, and identifying new partners beyond traditional Western markets. The period therefore provides a clear basis for comparing the conditions before and after the shock and for identifying the resulting threats to bloc-level economic security. Data for 2024 were not included because that year represents a subsequent phase of adaptation and partial stabilisation shaped by the short-term measures adopted after 2022.

Conceptually, the EAEU is treated as a case where the economic-security meaning of trade policy is amplified by the transformation of external trade geography, heightened external pressure, and the need to redesign partner vectors within a broader Greater Eurasia agenda.

6. Findings

6.1. EAEU external trade and trade policy setting

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is the world's third-largest customs union by international trade volumes after the European Union and Gulf cooperation council. Established in 2015, it was a major development in the post-Soviet space, uniting five countries with a combined population of 183.8 million, and 14% of the world's land area, ranking first in gas production (20.2% of global production), oil (14.5% of global production), fourth in coal production (6.5%) and electricity generation. In its pre-2022 baseline, the EAEU displayed high external trade intensity and a pronounced sensitivity to price cycles in primary commodities. The geographical profile of exports was concentrated around the EU and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation area, with China and the Netherlands among the leading country destinations; import dependence was also visible in the supplier structure, with China and Germany among the main sources of goods. (EEC, 2022; ITC, 2025).

The EAEU's contemporary external trade is shock-sensitive and uneven, shaped by the pandemic period and a post-2022 trade reorientation of commercial routes and market access patterns were reconfigured. From February 2022 to 2025, more than 21,000 sanctions were imposed against the Russian Federation, of which more than 2,100 were imposed by the European Union, of which more than 25% were trade and economic (Castellum.AI, 2024; EU, 2024; 2026). While the overall trade balance remains structurally positive, this surplus coexists with persistent structural asymmetries: export revenues are still concentrated in a limited set of commodity groups, whereas the import profile reflects a stable need for machinery, equipment, and other higher value-added inputs essential for production and technological upgrading. External trade is also unevenly distributed among member states, with Russia accounting for the dominant share of aggregate imports and, together with Kazakhstan, forming the core of export capacity. The export basket is similarly concentrated, with a small number of product groups representing the bulk of extra-bloc shipments, implying that resilience gains from market diversification may be constrained by commodity dependence. In the post-2022 environment, the geography of trade has shifted towards non-European directions and selected Asian and Middle Eastern partners, yet the emerging pattern remains concentrated rather than broadly diversified.

During the post-2022 reconfiguration the EAEU's external trade, preferential trade diplomacy has become both a growth and risk-management instrument for bloc-level economic security. Tighter European Union trade restrictions on Russia and Belarus, has materially narrowed traditional market-access channels and raised transaction costs for cross-border trade, accelerating the Union's search for alternative outlets and supply routes. Against this backdrop, EAEU-level preferential arrangements create a "window of opportunity" for expanding access to Asian markets. For many potential partners, concluding new free trade agreements directly with states under extensive sanctions regimes can entail compliance and reputational risks, including exposure to extraterritorial elements of trade restrictions in allied sanctions systems. In contrast, engaging the Union as an integration platform allows trade cooperation to be framed as bloc-to-partner economic governance, rather than a politically charged bilateral track with a single sanctioned economy. This matters particularly for large Asian and Middle Eastern economies that tend to pursue cautious, multi-vector trade strategies, balancing diversified negotiating tracks and broader diplomatic equities.

In the early years of its creation, the EAEU focused primarily on developing import protection mechanisms. Issues of developing the Union's export potential were secondary: until the 2020s, no common roadmaps or concepts were published outlining targets for the development of the EAEU's foreign trade and trade policy mechanisms for achieving them. Against the backdrop of concentration risks and external pressure, the bloc's trade policy increasingly relies on negotiated preferential regimes and broader partnership formats as a diversification tool.

Table 1. Strategic documents defining the main directions of the Eurasian Economic Union's foreign trade policy

Document	Main directions
Annual decisions of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council (2016–present)	Overall priorities for international cooperation; priority geographic tracks including Egypt, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, India, Mongolia, Algeria, and other Commonwealth of Independent States countries.
Declaration on the further development of integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union (2018–2024)	Identification of a broad range of external partners to create new cooperation formats and to position the Eurasian Economic Union as one of the significant centers of global development.
Decision of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council dated 11 December 2020 No. 12	Improvement of customs regulation; development of cooperative projects; creation of export-oriented sectors of the economy. Cooperation with Egypt, Israel, India, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and others.
Declaration on the further development of economic processes within the Eurasian Economic Union up to 2030 and 2045 (25 December 2023)	Declaration "Eurasian Economic Path": implementation of measures to expand exports to third countries, development of economic relations, and neutralisation of adverse external challenges.

Source: summarized by author based on (EEC, 2018, 2020, 2023)

All of the documents mentioned in Table 1 refer to the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership as an integration framework for the EAEU, intended to bring together integration projects or initiatives and enhance their connectivity, cooperation, and global influence. At the same time, the Greater Eurasian Partnership remains more of a strategic vision and has not yet been articulated in a clear, formalised concept. Nevertheless, synthesising the provisions of these documents suggests that the Greater Eurasian Partnership could encompass the SCO, ASEAN, the EU, BRICS, as well as other interested states and groupings in Central Asia and the Middle East.

EAEU documents increasingly identify external restrictions, supply disruptions, trade concentration, and market loss as risks to integration stability. Yet, these threats remain outside a comprehensive economic-security or trade-policy strategy comparable to that of the European Union, and no fully coordinated supranational response system has emerged. The threats "securitization" also remains institutionally uneven, since many emergency economic measures and responses to sanctions remain within national competence.

Contemporary Union's expansionary trade policy toolkit centres on building a network of free trade areas, using observer and partnership formats, concluding economic cooperation agreements, and cross-border cooperation mechanisms within external trade policy architecture (EEC, 2025; Surkova et al. 2025). The strategy can be divided into few stages:

Stage 1. Launch of the free trade track: the first EAEU free trade agreement, concluded with Viet Nam in 2015, established the basic legal template for the Union's preferential trade policy (EEU, 2015).

Stage 2. Diversification of partners and legal formats. An interim preferential agreement with Iran (entered into force in 2019, extended in 2022) reflected a gradualist approach, using temporary preferences to stabilise market access and prepare a comprehensive arrangement (EEU, 2018a; 2018b; 2023a; 2023b). An agreement package with Singapore including a free trade agreement was signed in 2019 and remains pending entry into force following completion of internal procedures by the parties (EEU, 2019, Oct.1). A full free trade agreement with Serbia (signed in 2019, entered into force in 2021) broadened the Union's partner geography and consolidated practice across different institutional and regulatory contexts (EEU, 2019, Oct.25).

Stage 3. Upgrading and accelerated expansion toward Asia and the Middle East in 2025. A full-scale free trade agreement with Iran replaced the interim logic with a more comprehensive regime. An economic partnership agreement with United Arab Emirates and Mongolia (EEU, 2025, Jun. 27) and free trade agreement with Indonesia signal both deepening, through the Iran upgrade, and widening, through new agreements that expand the preferential perimeter of the Union's preferential trade network (EEU, 2025, Dec.1).

Despite this sequential strategy of widening and upgrading the preferential perimeter, EAEU preferential diplomacy has not yet translated into a substantial reweighting of export destinations or import sources: for many partner economies, bilateral trade volumes remain relatively small, and the EAEU's overall exposure profile continues to be shaped by a limited set of major markets and suppliers.

6.2. Assessing the trade policy effectiveness as a proxy for security capacity: Empirical application to the EAEU

The empirical application of the proposed multi-indicator framework to the Eurasian Economic Union, hereafter the Union, for 2020–2023 reveals a mixed profile of external trade policy effectiveness, in which relatively high openness and a strong position in strategic-resource exports coexist with rising trade concentration, limited technological upgrading, and a weak conversion of external negotiations into effective preferential coverage. To distinguish structural vulnerabilities from short-term disruption, a change observed only in 2022 is treated as shock-related, while a condition already visible in 2020–2021 is regarded as pre-existing and potentially structural. A post-2022 change that remains pronounced in 2023 is interpreted as a persistent post-shock effect, but not yet as conclusive evidence of a long-term structural trend.

The Union's position in international trade points to high exposure to external conditions and a limited, although not negligible, systemic weight. The export quota remains elevated, increasing from about 20.7% in 2020 to 24.0–24.8% in 2021–2022, before declining to 20.4% in 2023. This trajectory suggests that openness strengthened during the post-pandemic recovery and the initial external turbulence, then adjusted downward amid demand compression, logistical restructuring, and changes in the external environment. At the same time, the Union's global export share peaked at approximately 2.63% in 2022, but returns to around 2.07% in 2023, indicating that the temporary strengthening of global export presence was not sustained in the following year. On the import side, the Union's share in world imports remains lower and more volatile, decreasing from 1.45% in 2020 to 0.96% in 2022, before partially recovering to 1.18% in 2023. This pattern implies that the Union's role as a global demand pole is comparatively limited, reducing its bargaining leverage in supplier relationships while simultaneously reflecting constrained access to external supply channels.

A structurally important feature of the Union's global profile is its role in strategic resources. The share in world exports of strategic resources remained high at 8.1–9.9% and reaching a local maximum in 2022. This creates a dual effect for trade policy effectiveness and economic security. On the one hand, a strong resource position can provide external leverage and fiscal capacity. On the other hand, it reinforces exposure to commodity price cycles and increases the sensitivity of external trade performance to targeted restrictions, transport risks, and reputational or regulatory shocks concentrated on resource-linked corridors and counterparties. Meanwhile, the Union's share in world imports of consumer goods declines sharply from about 2.39% in 2020–2021 to roughly 0.48–0.54% in 2022–2023. While this decline may partly reflect structural substitution and changes in consumption patterns, the magnitude of the shift is also consistent with the tightening of import channels and the reconfiguration of supply routes, which is directly relevant for welfare stability and, by extension, the political sustainability of trade policy.

The quality and structure of external trade underscore the unfavourable upgrading profile and a marked increase concentration risk after 2021. The share of medium-high-technology and high-technology exports in the Union's total exports decreases from about 5.8% in 2020 to 5.6% in 2021, then falls to 3.2% in 2022, before recovering slightly to 3.7% in 2023. This trajectory indicates that the Union's export model remains weakly oriented toward higher value-added segments, which constrains long-term competitiveness and deepens dependence on imports of complex machinery, equipment, and intermediate inputs. At the same time, the number of revealed comparative advantage product lines increases from 189 in 2020 to 216 in 2022–2023, suggesting a broader set of competitively positioned goods. However, this improvement does not offset the technology signal and should be interpreted as breadth without necessarily implying sophistication, particularly when export concentration remains high.

Concentration metrics reveal the most security-relevant shift. The geographic concentration of export markets rises from 0.05–0.053 in 2020–2021 to 0.074 in 2022 and 0.126 in 2023, indicating a substantial narrowing of export destinations. Import-source concentration increased even more sharply from 0.091 in 2020–2021, to 0.179 in 2022 and further to 0.257 in 2023. This evolution implies that the Union's import resilience weakened markedly, with supply increasingly tied to a limited set of external partners. Such dependance elevates the risk of disruption from partner-specific policy shifts, corridor bottlenecks, and secondary restrictions. The sharp increase in import-source concentration is consistent with the accelerated substitution of European suppliers by China and a limited number of alternative Asian partners. The resulting pattern reflects successful short-term trade redirection, but not broad supplier diversification. By contrast, the import commodity concentration remained comparatively low and stable at 0.08–0.10, which suggests that vulnerability stems less from a narrow import basket and more by dependence on a constrained supplier geography. Export commodity concentration remained high and volatile: after a moderate decline from 0.328 in 2020 to 0.254 in 2022, it rises sharply to 0.412 in 2023. This pattern is consistent with a temporary broadening of export composition in the adjustment year followed by renewed reliance on a narrower set of export groups, which amplifies sensitivity to price and demand shocks and complicates diversification goals.

For defensive trade policy performance, the proxy indicator for the trade facilitation measures effectiveness displays a non-linear trajectory: it improves from 1.17 in 2020 to 1.23 in 2021, declines to 1.10 in 2022, and reached a period high at 1.28 in 2023. This suggests that administrative and procedural capacity, which is essential both for enforcement and for maintaining legal trade flows under stress, adapted after the initial shock. In economic-security terms, improved facilitation can strengthen risk management and compliance while avoiding the welfare costs of excessive friction. Nevertheless, the overall concentration trends indicate that procedural improvements alone cannot offset structural dependency created by narrowed supplier and market geographies.

The evidence on expansionary trade policy performance reveals an asymmetry between negotiation activity and realised diversification effects. Ongoing negotiations on preferential trade agreements increases from 4 in 2020–2021 to 6 in 2022–2023, signalling a clear intensification of external outreach. However, the share of external trade covered by preferential agreements remains very low and declines from about 2.0% in 2020–2021 to 1.0% in 2022, before a partial recovery to 1.5% in 2023. In parallel, one agreement entered into force annually in 2020–2021 and none in 2022–2023, which indicates that the expansionary toolkit has not yet produced a materially broader preferential perimeter in recent years. A modestly positive signal is the Union's share in the external trade of key non-preferential partners, which increases to 5% in 2023 from 3% in 2020–2022; however, this improvement remains limited in scale and does not fundamentally alter the exposure profile.

A particularly important security-related result concerns the Union's relational leverage measured through partner dependence. The number of countries whose import dependence on the Union exceeds 10% declines from 19 in 2021 to 12 in 2022 and 9 in 2023, while the number of countries whose export dependence on the Union exceeds 10% decreased from 8 in 2020 to 5 by 2022–2023. These dynamics indicate a contraction of the Union's "dependence footprint" in third markets, reducing its structural bargaining power and limiting the extent to which trade relations can serve as a stabilising mechanism in external negotiations.

Finally, the sustainability and transparency block highlights governance constraints. The trade policy uncertainty index for leading economies in the Union is high and volatile, decreasing from about 491 in 2020 to 334 in 2021, then rising to 577 in 2022 and remaining elevated at 439 in 2023. Such volatility is consistent with a policy environment in which trade rules, barriers, and administrative regimes are subject to frequent adjustment under stress, increasing planning costs and weakening credibility. The absence of an officially recorded

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long-term external trade policy strategy in the period further reinforces the impression of limited institutional anchoring, which matters because persistent uncertainty can undermine both defensive effectiveness and expansionary uptake even when individual instruments are available.

Overall, the empirical profile suggests that, during 2020–2023, the Union's trade policy effectiveness is shaped by a tension between adaptive administrative capacity and continuing structural fragility. Openness and strategic-resource weight provide some leverage, yet rising geographic concentration of both exports and, especially, imports, together with weak technology upgrading and minimal preferential coverage, generate material economic-security risks. The observed intensification of negotiations indicates recognition of the diversification challenge, but the limited effect on preferential trade coverage and the declining dependence of third countries on trade with the Union suggest that the expansionary dimension of the trade policy model has not yet produced a security-relevant rebalancing of external exposure.

7. Limitations and future research

The proposed framework has several limitations. Its empirical application covers 2020–2023, a period shaped by the pandemic and the post-2022 restructuring of the EAEU's external trade, so some observed changes may reflect short-term adjustment rather than stable structural trends. The study also relies on the EAEU as its primary case, while differences in integration depth, institutional design, and external exposure limit direct generalisation to other regional blocs. In addition, the availability of harmonised bloc-level data remains uneven, particularly for preference utilisation, export-relationship survival, participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, corridor resilience, and access to critical imports; some dimensions are therefore assessed through proxy indicators. The framework is primarily diagnostic and does not fully isolate the effects of trade policy from commodity prices, exchange-rate movements, domestic industrial policies, and wider geopolitical shocks. Future research should extend the time horizon, apply the framework comparatively to other integration arrangements in Greater Eurasia.

8. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that assessing trade policy effectiveness as a proxy for economic security at the integration level requires attention to both trade structure and supranational policy capacity. It addressed this gap by conceptualising bloc-level foreign trade policy as a unified system of supranational mechanisms that shapes the commodity and geographic structure of external trade in order to protect shared economic interests and preserve bloc cohesion. The key contribution is a multi-indicator framework that links trade outcomes to the effectiveness, coherence, and governability of the trade policy regime, thereby moving beyond approaches that treat economic security primarily as a national macroeconomic attribute.

The analysis of the EAEU's contemporary foreign trade policy mechanisms and the trade results indicates that, despite a relatively wide repertoire of tools, the Union has not yet achieved full harmonisation across a number of instruments, nor a stable unity of positions in external trade policy. The case reflects a broader structural dilemma faced by many regional integration blocs worldwide: a growing expectation that the bloc should act as a coherent external trade actor, alongside persistent political incentives for member states to retain discretion over sensitive instruments.

Beyond the EAEU case, these results carry implications for broader debates in security studies and international political economy. They suggest that the economic security of an integration bloc is best understood as an interaction between trade structure and governance capacity: openness becomes either a source of resilience or a source of vulnerability depending on concentration, upgrading potential, and the credibility of common rules. The findings also highlight that "unity" is not an abstract normative ideal but a functional condition for security-oriented trade governance: without a shared external vector and implementable supranational competence, the bloc's ability to manage the weaponisation of interdependence remains limited. In this sense, the article complements state-centred economic security approaches by specifying the distinct mechanism of vulnerability at the bloc level: erosion of cohesion through uneven exposure, fragmented policy preferences, and insufficient institutional capacity to convert instruments into measurable diversification and stability outcomes.

For external partners in Greater Eurasia, the findings imply that cooperation with the EAEU should be approached not only as a market-access agenda, but as a risk-managed economic-security arrangement in which the credibility of rules, the resilience of corridors, and the practical uptake of preferences matter as much as headline tariff reductions. Under conditions of widening sanctions practice and heightened compliance pressure, EAEU-level engagement can offer a comparatively neutral supranational interface for trade governance; however, the benefits for partners will materialise only if agreements are designed to reduce concentration risks, lower trade costs, and provide predictable implementation mechanisms rather than formal coverage alone.

Against this background, the study proposes practical measures structured around the five dimensions of the assessment framework.

First, integration blocs in Greater Eurasia should strengthen their position in international trade by identifying markets where members possess supplier or buyer leverage, expanding access to alternative destinations, and developing additional transport corridors.

Second, improving the quality and structure of trade requires targets for reducing geographic and commodity concentration, increasing technology-intensive exports, and broadening sustainable comparative advantages. Supranational institutions should monitor concentration indicators and support joint industrial, financial, certification, and logistics programmes.

Third, defensive trade policy should include common lists of critical imports and vulnerable industries, coordinated trade-defence measures, alternative supplier databases, and emergency customs and logistics procedures. These instruments would support rapid responses to supply disruptions, unfair trade practices, and corridor closures.

Fourth, expansionary policy should prioritise agreements that reduce trade costs and dependence on dominant partners. Their effectiveness should be assessed through utilisation rates, business participation, changes in trade flows, and diversification rather than the number of agreements signed.

Fifth, sustainable and transparent trade policy requires a common external trade strategy defining priority partners, sectors, corridors, institutional responsibilities, and performance indicators. A shared monitoring platform, regional export helpdesks, and accessible tariff and rules-of-origin databases would improve implementation and business awareness.

These measures would shift regional trade policy from formal institutional expansion towards measurable gains in diversification, resilience, predictability, and coordination. These recommendations are not specific to the EAEU context. They are potentially transferable to other custom unions in Greater Eurasia where economic security is pursued through collective trade governance under conditions of external volatility and asymmetric interdependence.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Appendix

Summary data for assessing the trade-policy contribution to economic security in the EAEU, 2020–2023

This appendix presents the complete indicator dataset used in the empirical analysis. The indicators are grouped according to the five-block assessment framework applied in the article.

Table A1. Position in international trade

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023
Export quota as a share of gross domestic product	%	20.68	24.01	24.84	20.43
EAEU share in world exports	%	2.07	2.31	2.63	2.07
EAEU share in world exports of strategic resources	%	9.03	8.14	9.87	8.34
EAEU share in world imports	%	1.45	1.39	0.96	1.18
EAEU share in world imports of consumer goods	%	2.39	2.39	0.48	0.54
Countries whose import dependence on the EAEU exceeds 10%	Number	12	19	12	9
Countries whose export dependence on the EAEU exceeds 10%	Number	8	6	5	5

Table A2. Quality and structure of external trade

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023
Share of medium-high-technology and high-technology exports in total EAEU exports	%	5.82	5.55	3.22	3.72
Product lines with revealed comparative advantage	Number	189	195	216	216
Geographic concentration of export markets (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index)	Index	0.053	0.050	0.074	0.126
Geographic concentration of import sources (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index)	Index	0.091	0.091	0.179	0.257
Commodity concentration of imports (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index)	Index	0.082	0.090	0.100	0.080
Commodity concentration of exports (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index)	Index	0.328	0.323	0.254	0.412

Table A3. Defensive trade policy performance

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023
Proxy indicator for the effectiveness of trade facilitation measures (average across EAEU member states)	Index	1.17	1.23	1.10	1.28

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Table A4. Expansionary trade policy performance

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023
Preferential trade agreements entering into force during the year	Number	1	1	0	0
Ongoing negotiations on preferential trade agreements during the year	Number	4	4	6	6
Share of external trade turnover covered by preferential trade agreements	%	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.50
EAEU share in the external trade of key non-preferential partners	%	3.00	3.00	3.00	5.00

Table A5. Sustainability and transparency of the trade policy regime

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average trade policy unpredictability index for the EAEU's leading economies	Index	490.73	333.51	577.14	438.81
Official external trade policy strategy in force (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Binary	0	0	0	0

Notes. All calculations exclude intra-EAEU trade. Percentage indicators are reported as percentages. Herfindahl-Hirschman Index values are unitless. Partner-dependence indicators count countries for which trade with the EAEU exceeds 10% of the partner country's total imports or exports. For the external trade policy strategy indicator, 1 denotes an official strategy in force and 0 denotes its absence.

Sources. Authors' calculations based on ITC Trade Map, EAEU macroeconomic indicators, World Bank Data, UNCTADstat, Trade Facilitation Performance, the Trade Policy Uncertainty Index, the WTO Regional Trade Agreements Information System, and official EAEU documents.

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