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Governing the Ambiguities of the EU's Competitiveness Agenda

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Abstract*

Over the past few years, the word competitiveness has become inescapable in the European debate. Invoked across institutional, economic and industrial domains, it functions simultaneously as a strategic objective and a political narrative. Yet its very ubiquity has rendered the concept increasingly ambiguous. This article argues that the EU's current competitiveness agenda does not rest on a single coherent doctrine but is structured around the coexistence of three distinct and partly overlapping interpretations. Competitiveness is framed, first, as economic growth, centred on productivity, investment, and Single Market integration. Second, it is understood as leadership in strategic technologies, emphasising innovation, industrial policy, and technological sovereignty. Third, it is increasingly associated with economic security, focusing on resilience, autonomy, and the management of strategic dependencies. The article shows how these interpretations are embedded in EU policies and institutional initiatives, and how their interaction generates structural tensions and trade-offs, amplified by divergent national interests among Member States. By analysing competitiveness as a plural and contested policy paradigm rather than a unitary concept, the article contributes to a clearer understanding of the strengths and limits of the EU's current strategic framework. It concludes that governing, rather than eliminating, the internal ambiguities of competitiveness is essential for transforming it from a rhetorical umbrella into a coherent guide for European policymaking.

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Governing the Ambiguities of the EU's Competitiveness Agenda

I. Introduction

Over the past few years, the word competitiveness has become inescapable in the European debate. It is invoked in Commission communications, European Parliament recommendations, Council conclusions, and the speeches of national leaders; it defines the framing of industrial policy, energy transition, digitalisation, and even security strategy. Hardly any other notions have succeeded in becoming so widespread and successful.

This ubiquity reflects both necessity and opportunity. After a decade marked by successive crises, the European Union has sought a unifying framework capable of guiding its transformation. Competitiveness has emerged as that framework: flexible enough to encompass multiple priorities, and ambitious enough to project a sense of collective direction.

Yet precisely because of its flexibility, competitiveness is also an elusive concept. Policymakers and analysts use the term to refer to very different realities: growth, innovation, industrial capacity, technological sovereignty, resilience, economic security. These interpretations often coexist, sometimes reinforce each other, and at other times collide. As a result, competitiveness has come to embody both the strength and the ambiguity of the EU's current policy direction, a unifying label that conceals internal tensions.

This paper takes that ambiguity as its analytical starting point. Its main argument is that the current EU agenda on competitiveness is not the expression of a single coherent doctrine, but rather the interplay of three distinct and partly overlapping interpretations:

- 1) Competitiveness as economic growth — focusing on productivity, investment, and market integration;
- 2) Competitiveness as leadership in strategic technologies — centred on innovation, industrial policy, and technological sovereignty;
- 3) Competitiveness as economic security — defined by resilience, autonomy, and protection against external risks.

These three interpretations together form the architecture of the EU's competitiveness agenda. Their coexistence explains why the concept has become so politically powerful, and also why it risks becoming strategically unstable. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how these dimensions are reflected in current EU policies, and what institutional challenges and trade-offs they generate. By examining its evolution and internal contradictions, this paper aims to contribute to a more precise understanding of what competitiveness means in today's Europe, and to how it can serve, not replace, coherent policymaking. The ambition is not to narrow the term but to clarify it: to turn the current narrative of competitiveness from a versatile slogan into a disciplined, actionable framework for Europe's next decade of integration and renewal.

II. Competitiveness is an elusive but useful concept

The EU's current agenda places competitiveness at the heart of its priorities. It is the overarching concept that the von der Leyen II Commission uses to frame its main initiatives. A

pair of signals are demonstrative. Firstly, the Commission labelled its roadmap for this legislative term the *Competitiveness Compass*. Second, the European Commission's recent proposal for the next EU budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), includes the key novelty of the proposed Competitiveness Fund.

This prominence is not new. The EU's attention to competitiveness is structural and recurrent. In the early 1990s, Jacques Delors made competitiveness a strategic cornerstone of European policymaking. It featured in his investiture speech for a third Commission, in his address to the European Council later that year, and in the Commission's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (Krugman 1994). What has changed today is not the return of the concept, but its scope. Competitiveness now spans nearly the entire policy spectrum, extending beyond the economic core into energy, defence, and foreign policy.

However, despite its long-lasting centrality in EU discourse, competitiveness remains a concept without a universally accepted definition. It oscillates between an economic indicator, a political slogan, and a strategic metaphor. This flexibility has both strengthened its mobilising power and weakened its analytical precision, as illustrated vividly by the European debate: while competitiveness provides a convenient umbrella under which diverse priorities can coexist, its analytical indeterminacy often conceals deep divergences in objectives, instruments, and time horizons. The EU's recurring invocation of competitiveness thus reflects both a strength and a limitation. It demonstrates Europe's capacity for renewal, but also its tendency to recycle familiar concepts without resolving their ambiguities.

If the relevance of the concept is not new, neither is its elusiveness. More than thirty years ago, Paul Krugman fa-

mously argued that “competitiveness” was a misleading term when applied to nations. Countries do not compete like firms; they trade, cooperate, and occasionally confront each other within complex interdependencies. According to Krugman, invoking competitiveness risks transforming a structural issue, namely productivity, into a zero-sum narrative of winners and losers. Yet, paradoxically, this same ambiguity explains why the term has been so successful politically. Indeed, Krugman identifies three main reasons for this success: first, competitive images are exciting, and thrills “sell tickets”; second, the idea that economic difficulties hinge crucially on failures in international competition somewhat paradoxically makes those difficulties seem easier to solve; third, the rhetoric of competitiveness turns out to provide a good way either to justify hard choices or to avoid them. In practice, the attraction of competitiveness lies less in its precision than in its narrative power. It allows policymakers to frame complex structural reforms in more accessible and mobilising terms. Talking about “winning the global race” resonates more than debating incremental productivity improvements. The concept provides a language of urgency and agency in a context where traditional economic levers such as fiscal and monetary policy are either constrained or fragmented at the EU level (Krugman 1994).

From a policy standpoint, this rhetorical utility has concrete consequences (Blyth 2002; Gofas and Hay 2010). By framing disparate measures, from cutting red tape to investing in frontier technologies, as contributions to competitiveness, the EU can aggregate political support across divergent interests. Member States with different economic models or fiscal capacities can all endorse “competitiveness” while interpreting it according to their own priorities. Southern countries may see it as a call for investment and structural funds;

Northern countries may link it to productivity and regulatory efficiency; Eastern countries may interpret it through the lens of industrial upgrading and convergence. At the same time, the very breadth that makes competitiveness politically effective also creates analytical risks. When a concept explains everything, it explains nothing (Sartori 1970). The proliferation of definitions dilutes accountability: if all policies are “for competitiveness,” it becomes difficult to measure success or failure. Furthermore, the rhetoric of competitiveness can mask trade-offs. Yet, abandoning the term altogether would be neither realistic nor desirable. Competitiveness serves as a policy paradigm (Hall 1993): it mobilises consensus, legitimises reform, and provides continuity across policy cycles.

The current prominence of competitiveness in the European Union’s policy agenda can therefore be seen as the outcome of a deliberate institutional strategy. After more than a decade of crisis management, the EU has been searching for a unifying policy narrative capable of linking growth, industrial renewal, and resilience within a single framework (Letta 2024). Competitiveness has become that frame, flexible enough to accommodate diverse national priorities and ambitious enough to express a shared European direction. In this sense, the institutionalisation of competitiveness represents an attempt to shift the Union’s governance model from reactive crisis containment to a more strategic posture. Yet it also reveals a deeper ambiguity. The European competitiveness agenda is not a single, coherent policy vision; rather, it is the aggregation of three distinct and partly overlapping interpretations of what competitiveness means.

First, competitiveness is understood as economic growth. The focus is on productivity, investment, and convergence within the Single Market. This interpretation relies on established economic metrics and underpins initiatives such as

the Omnibus Package on administrative simplification and the effort to advance a Savings and Investments Union.

Second, competitiveness is framed as leadership in strategic technologies. The emphasis falls on innovation, scale up, and the capacity to anchor critical value chains in Europe. This view shapes research and industrial policy and is reflected in the orientation of the next Horizon Europe programme and in the proposed Competitiveness Fund.

Third, competitiveness is increasingly associated with economic security. The objective is to strengthen supply chain resilience, reduce strategic dependencies, and protect critical infrastructure and technologies. This perspective underlies the Economic Security Strategy and the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

This is the central thesis of this paper. The EU's current competitiveness agenda is not built on one consistent understanding of the concept, but on the interaction of these three distinct logics. These three dimensions coexist within the EU's institutional agenda, often complementing but sometimes contradicting one another. Their coexistence has made the competitiveness narrative politically effective, but analytically fragile. What unites the European agenda is not a single definition of competitiveness, but a shared commitment to act under its banner, even when the objectives pursued differ substantially.

The following sections will explore each of these interpretations in turn. They will demonstrate that the tripartite structure of the EU's competitiveness agenda is not an analytical device but an empirical reality that runs across EU institutions, shaping legislative proposals and guiding strategic debates.

II.1. *Competitiveness as economic growth*

Among the three main interpretations of competitiveness shaping the current EU agenda, the idea of competitiveness as economic growth is the most traditional and institutionally entrenched. It reflects a long-standing conviction that Europe's global influence depends primarily on its capacity to generate sustainable growth through productivity, investment, and efficiency. In this view, competitiveness and growth are two sides of the same coin. A competitive economy is one that grows faster, attracts investment, and allocates resources more efficiently. This understanding underpins many of the Commission's initiatives framed under the competitiveness banner, even when their substance lies in traditional economic reform.

The 2024 Omnibus Package for Competitiveness is emblematic of this approach (Bertram 2025). The Commission's press release presented it as a package "to simplify EU rules, boost competitiveness, and unlock additional investment capacity". In practice, the package seeks to enhance the functioning of the Single Market by cutting compliance costs and accelerating administrative procedures, reinterpreting a classical deregulation and red-tape reduction exercise as a pro-competitiveness measure. This framing adds political salience: it presents efficiency reforms as essential to Europe's economic strength and global standing.

The Savings and Investments Union (SIU) proposal - advanced in the wake of the Letta Report - uses the same rhetorical structure. The Communication presented by the European Commission is titled "Savings and Investments Union – A Strategy to Foster Citizens' Wealth and Economic Competitiveness in the EU". It thus links financial integration, household savings, and growth performance under one

shared objective (Kaskarelis et al. 2025). In substance, the SIU aims to deepen European capital markets and mobilise private savings for productive investment within the Union. In form, it situates a long-standing and politically sensitive structural reform within the widely accepted and unifying language of competitiveness.

These initiatives illustrate how competitiveness operates as a political accelerator for reforms that would otherwise face resistance. The Omnibus Package has been criticised by several political groups in the European Parliament, while deepening the integration of capital markets continues to expose long-standing divisions among Member States. By presenting growth-oriented reforms as elements of a shared European competitiveness agenda, the Commission has sought to soften opposition, broaden coalitions, and reframe potentially divisive measures as contributions to a collective European good.

II.II. *Competitiveness as leadership in strategic technologies*

A second interpretation associates competitiveness with technological leadership. In this perspective, a competitive Europe is one that leads, or at least retains global relevance, in the development, production, and scaling of strategic technologies. Competitiveness is thus redefined not simply as economic performance, but as technological capacity: the ability to innovate, commercialise, and maintain control over the key industrial domains that shape the global economy.

This interpretation reflects a profound shift in the structure of global competition. Over the last decade, technologi-

cal progress has become the main determinant of economic and geopolitical power. The EU, long conceiving itself primarily as a regulatory power, now faces the challenge of transforming into a technological one. The narrative of competitiveness provides the political and institutional framework for this transformation. This evolution is visible in the future of flagship programmes such as Horizon Europe and in the latest proposals for the post-2027 European budget (Borrell-Damián 2025).

The Commission's proposal for the next Horizon Europe cycle (2028–2034) allocates more than 40% of its resources to Pillar II: Competitiveness and Society, a clear indication that research and innovation funding are now viewed primarily through a competitiveness lens. The explicit focus on technologies with "high industrial relevance and strategic potential", from advanced materials to digital infrastructure and biotechnologies, illustrates the link between innovation policy and the Union's broader geopolitical ambitions. In this sense, competitiveness functions as a mobilising concept, legitimising a more interventionist approach to industrial policy.

The same logic informs the proposal for a European Competitiveness Fund, announced in the context of the revised Multiannual Financial Framework. By integrating existing instruments under a single competitiveness heading, the proposal seeks to redirect resources toward innovation ecosystems and industrial clusters in strategic technologies, with inevitable implications for established spending priorities, including agriculture and cohesion.

These attempts have been highly controversial, since they imply a shift in both priorities and governance. The rhetoric of competitiveness offers the political justification for that shift. It allows the Union to select strategic sectors, to steer targeted industrial support, and to present such support not as protec-

tionism, but as a necessary reaction to market distortions and strategic dependencies in the global economy. It also allows policymakers to present a focus on high technology sectors not as a discretionary political choice, but as an unavoidable response to a pressing international environment.

II.III. *Competitiveness as economic security*

In recent years, the European Union has begun to interpret competitiveness also as economic security. In this view, a competitive Europe is one that can preserve and project economic strength in a world marked by systemic instability, coercive dependencies, and weaponised interdependence. This is the newest and most politically consequential meaning within the current agenda. It redefines what it means to be competitive in a context where global relations are shaped not only by markets, but also by strategic rivalry and security logics.

The conceptual shift from competitiveness as productivity to competitiveness as resilience began during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed Europe's dependence on external suppliers in critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, and medical equipment. The subsequent geopolitical shocks, from the war in Ukraine to the growing confrontation between the United States and China, transformed this awareness into a strategic doctrine (Guerrieri and Padoan 2024).

The EU's Economic Security Strategy, adopted in 2023, formalised this new paradigm. Its very first stated objective is to "enhance Europe's competitiveness and resilience," signalling the merger of two previously separate policy logics. Economic security is framed not as an alternative to competitiveness but as its essential precondition.

This approach has been operationalised through several concrete instruments. The STEP initiative (Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform), for example, integrates industrial, technological, and security objectives. It channels EU and national resources toward projects that reduce strategic dependencies, support critical raw materials, and strengthen the European industrial base. The 2024 Commission report on STEP explicitly states that “STEP strengthens Europe’s competitiveness by enhancing industrial resilience and innovation capacity,” making clear that economic security and competitiveness are now treated as mutually reinforcing goals.

The integration of economic security into the competitiveness narrative legitimises a more interventionist European role in areas previously considered the preserve of national governments. Framed in these terms, measures that were once seen as the remit of national competencies can now receive stronger coordination at the European level. The language of competitiveness creates both a political justification and a legal pathway for Union action, by anchoring new initiatives in the objectives of the Single Market and in the shared pursuit of productivity, innovation, and resilience.

III. A cross-dimension example: the Clean Industrial Deal

Together, the three interpretations explored in the previous chapter form the backbone of the EU’s current policy agenda. They coexist and interact within a single narrative framework, even as they pull in different directions. This coexistence has enabled the EU to advance a politically ambitious agenda, but it also creates internal contradictions that risk undermining its coherence. The challenge for poli-

cymakers is to find a sustainable equilibrium between these logics. These tensions become most visible in policy domains where all dimensions converge. The Clean Industrial Deal offers a clear example (Hermwille et al. 2025).

The political impulse behind the Clean Industrial Deal was twofold. Internally, it sought to accelerate Europe's green transition and industrial renewal. Externally, it aimed to respond to growing competitive pressure from global initiatives such as the United States' Inflation Reduction Act. In this context, competitiveness performs a unifying function. It allows the diverse instruments gathered under the Clean Industrial Deal to be presented as parts of a single European strategy, linking climate objectives, industrial modernisation, and strategic autonomy.

At its core, the Clean Industrial Deal retains a traditional economic growth dimension. Through measures designed to mobilise private capital, introduce greater state aid flexibility, and mitigate high energy costs, the Union seeks to reinforce productivity and sustain growth. Yet the initiative also carries a strong technological dimension. Proposals such as the Industrial Decarbonisation Bank, the revision of public procurement directives, and the Unions of Skills and Skills Portability aim not only to stimulate innovation, but to anchor industrial ecosystems in Europe. The goal is to translate technological excellence into industrial capacity, and industrial capacity into strategic influence. Finally, the inclusion of instruments such as the Clean Trade and Investment Partnership, the Trade Defence Instruments, and the Guidelines on the Foreign Subsidies Regulation demonstrates how the logic of competitiveness extends into the domain of economic security.

In this sense, the Clean Industrial Deal embodies both the ambition and the contradictions of the European competitiveness framework. It shows how a single policy domain

can combine the three dimensions of competitiveness within one overarching project. This multidimensional approach has allowed the Union to recast the green transition as a driver of competitiveness and to mobilise broad political support. At the same time, it has revealed the structural tensions that characterise the current policy architecture. Simply juxtaposing different objectives without resolving the points of tension is not enough to produce satisfactory results. Indeed, one year after its launch, the Clean Industrial Deal has struggled to produce tangible results or to trigger a genuine strategic reorientation of EU policy. It remains a blueprint more than a transformative programme.

IV. Internal tensions within the concept of competitiveness

The Clean Industrial Deal is a microcosm of the EU's competitiveness dilemma. It demonstrates how the flexibility of the concept can drive integration and ambition, but also how that very flexibility risks producing fragmentation and incoherence if not managed through clearer prioritisation and governance. The three dimensions of competitiveness – growth, technological leadership, and economic security – are, in fact, mutually dependent, but often mutually incompatible.

Several tensions are visible. The first one opposes growth-oriented competitiveness to security-oriented competitiveness (Rodrik 2012; Newman et al. 2021). For decades, the European model has been based on openness, efficiency, and specialisation within global value chains, which are classic drivers of productivity and growth. These same features have, however, created strategic vulnerabilities. Policies

designed to maximise efficiency, such as just in time production, reliance on low cost imports, and offshoring, increase exposure to external shocks and dependencies. Conversely, policies designed to enhance security, such as diversification of suppliers, reshoring of production, and strategic stockpiling, tend to raise costs and reduce productivity. The tension is therefore not simply between particular instruments but between two logics of competitiveness, one centred on efficiency and the other centred on resilience.

A second tension arises between growth and technological leadership (Borrás and Edquist 2013; Aiginger and Rodrik 2020). Policies that aim to foster broad-based growth differ fundamentally from those that seek to promote frontier innovation and industrial leadership in a few high-tech sectors. Investing heavily in frontier technologies can secure Europe's long-term position in global value chains but may deliver limited short-term returns in growth or employment. Conversely, policies that enhance productivity across the entire economy may generate broader economic results but can fail to build the technological edge necessary for future leadership. Both approaches are legitimate, but they compete for limited fiscal and political capital. The current budgetary instruments tend to balance these logics but often end up blending them without clear prioritisation. The risk is that Europe spreads its resources too thinly, pursuing both broad-based growth and technological excellence without committing fully to either.

A third tension lies between technological leadership and economic security (Acemoglu et al. 2014; OECD 2025). Innovation thrives on openness to ideas, investment, talent, and collaboration, while security requires control over strategic assets, data, and infrastructure. Balancing these imperatives is a delicate policy challenge. The rise of ex-

port controls, investment screening, and technology protection measures, even when justified by legitimate security concerns, can constrain the cross-border flows that sustain Europe's innovation ecosystem. In the same way, excessive reliance on foreign inputs, platforms or software can create strategic vulnerabilities.

These tensions are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They capture the most visible and structurally significant trade-offs in the current agenda, while other frictions also may arise. Nonetheless, these examples reveal a common pattern. The strength of the competitiveness framework lies in its ability to hold together multiple and sometimes contradictory objectives under a single narrative. This flexibility has allowed the EU to advance ambitious policies in a politically fragmented environment and to address cross-cutting challenges without reopening treaty debates. The same flexibility, however, requires continuous balancing and explicit prioritisation. The Union cannot pursue efficiency, resilience, and innovation with equal intensity across all sectors and timeframes. It must decide where to accept vulnerability for the sake of growth, where to concentrate resources to build technological leadership, and where to restrict openness to enhance security. The success of the competitiveness agenda will therefore depend less on expanding the concept than on governing its internal trade-offs and making them politically transparent. In this sense, the concept of competitiveness provides direction, but not necessarily alignment. Recognising and managing its internal tensions, including those that have yet to surface, is a precondition for turning competitiveness from a rhetorical umbrella into a coherent policy paradigm.

V. Differences among Member States ignite these tensions

The tensions analysed in the previous chapter become even more politically salient when viewed through the lens of national interests and capacities. The European Union's competitiveness agenda is shaped, implemented, and contested by Member States whose economic models, fiscal space, and strategic dependencies diverge profoundly. These divergences not only complicate coordination but also determine which dimension of competitiveness each Country privileges, thereby transforming conceptual tensions into political cleavages.

Europe's economic geography juxtaposes highly industrialised economies with economies that specialise in services and digital activities. These structural differences map directly onto divergent priorities. Manufacturing countries tend to assess competitiveness through the lens of industrial production, technological upgrading, and export performance. Service oriented countries often place greater weight on competition policy, market openness, and horizontal measures that support productivity across sectors, and are more cautious toward targeted industrial instruments that may distort the level playing field. Fiscal capacity deepens these asymmetries. Wealthier Member States can deploy national budgets to co-finance industrial investments or offer subsidies within the more flexible State aid framework introduced after the energy and inflation shocks. Countries with tighter public finances risk marginalisation in the emerging industrial race even while sharing a Single Market. Coalitions are therefore fluid. As Italy and Germany demonstrate, a pair of industrial economies can agree on the need for stronger industrial policy while disagreeing sharply on its financing, governance and conditionality.

Differences in technological specialisation add another layer. Member States want their national strengths to anchor the Union's technological strategy. Where two or more countries lead in a particular niche, they may compete to host European hubs, which can crowd out collaboration and limit spillovers to the wider Union.

Asymmetric vulnerabilities to external dependencies also shape preferences. Energy provides a clear example. Central and Eastern European countries with a legacy of dependence on Russian gas have adopted positions that differ from those of countries with more diversified energy mixes and stronger renewable capacity. Similar asymmetries appear in trade and supply chains. Economies deeply integrated into global value chains as exporters of capital goods perceive the openness versus protection balance differently from economies that are less trade intensive. These structural contrasts inform national views on screening, export controls, and the calibration of economic security measures.

The coexistence of these diverse national interpretations makes the EU's competitiveness agenda politically viable, but institutionally fragile. On the one hand, the flexibility of the competitiveness concept allows each Member State to see its own priorities reflected in the common discourse. On the other hand, this same flexibility can obscure underlying divergences, leading to coordination failures and fragmented implementation. The risk is a superficial consensus that masks divergent strategies rather than aligning them.

The divergences outlined above are not necessarily a weakness. They reflect the plurality of Europe's economic landscape, which has long been a source of both resilience and innovation. A uniform notion of competitiveness would be neither realistic nor desirable in a Union built on diversity. The key lies in recognising these differences openly and

designing governance instruments that convert diversity into complementarity rather than conflict. Still, the lesson from the past years is clear: when Member States interpret competitiveness through conflicting lenses, the result is not pluralism but paralysis.

VI. Conclusions

Over the past decade, “Competitiveness” has evolved into the EU overarching policy framework, a language through which almost every major initiative is now expressed. This transformation reflects both a political need and an institutional evolution: the need for a unifying narrative after years of crises, and the evolution of the EU’s governance toward more integrated, mission-oriented policymaking.

This paper has argued that the strength and fragility of this new framework stem from the same feature: its plural nature. The EU’s competitiveness agenda is not a single, coherent doctrine but rather the aggregation of three distinct and interdependent interpretations: competitiveness as economic growth, rooted in traditional measures of productivity and investment; competitiveness as leadership in strategic technologies, centred on innovation, industrial policy, and technological sovereignty; competitiveness as economic security, focused on resilience, autonomy, and the capacity to act in a volatile global environment.

These three dimensions coexist and often reinforce one another, yet their interaction also generates tensions that are structural rather than accidental. They arise from the very attempt to fuse multiple policy logics under a single conceptual banner. Moreover, these conceptual tensions are amplified by national diversity. Different Member States

interpret competitiveness according to their economic models, fiscal capacities, and vulnerabilities. The consensus on competitiveness can therefore operate both as an engine of integration and as a mirror of fragmentation. To sustain competitiveness as a credible and coherent policy paradigm, the EU will need to move from rhetorical convergence to strategic governance. This means developing institutional mechanisms capable of arbitrating and choosing among competing objectives, coordinating diverse national approaches.

Beyond these operational steps, this paper has broader conceptual implications. The rise of competitiveness as the EU's central framework signals the emergence of a new European policy paradigm that blends economic ambition with geopolitical awareness. It signals a Union that no longer defines itself primarily through rules and stability, but through its capacity to adapt, innovate, and project power in a competitive world. Yet this evolution also carries a warning. The more inclusive the concept of competitiveness becomes, the greater the risk of it turning into a catch-all term devoid of direction. Europe's future strategic credibility will depend on whether competitiveness can evolve from a rhetorical umbrella into a disciplined policy logic.

Ultimately, competitiveness will remain "everywhere" in Europe's discourse. The task now is to make it specific in policymaking. It should be anchored in clear priorities, supported by adequate instruments, and governed through a collective understanding of shared interests. Only under these conditions can competitiveness serve what it aspires to be, not a slogan of adaptation but the strategic grammar of Europe's renewal

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