

“It’s the economy, stupid!” and the integration of EU defence policy

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In the face of Russia’s war against Ukraine, Germany was not the only one to undergo “Zeitwende” in Europe. The European Union (EU) as a whole also witnessed an unprecedented surge in its determination to bolster its security and defence efforts. The events resulted, for instance, in EU countries’ reaching an agreement on allocating joint funds for providing lethal equipment to Ukraine. Until recently, financing transfers of this nature would have been inconceivable given the EU’s consensus-based approach to common defence and security. Furthermore, the EU Commissioner for Internal Market has pro-actively carried to the European capitals the message about the need for the “war economy mode.” To what extent do these and other relevant developments signify a paradigm shift in the EU’s self-perception and its approach to external policy? More concretely, can we realistically describe a stronger and more robust EU defence policy as being firmly rooted in a shared political and strategic vision? The paper examines relevant transformations, including recent developments, and argues that they are closely intertwined with the economic rationale, which is empirically distinct from a politico-strategic vision. This has implications for EU-NATO cooperation.

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