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Economic diplomacy in the context of great power competition for influence over global trade systems

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Abstract. *The study's relevance stems from the intensification of geoeconomic competition among leading states, driven by regulatory instability and the gradual fragmentation of the global trading system. After 2020, international trade has undergone significant structural changes, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, technological transformation, and the activation of industrial policy. In these conditions, economic diplomacy is becoming a key mechanism for coordinating foreign economic, security and innovation priorities of states.*

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of economic diplomacy tools in the context of intensifying international competition and assessing their impact on the functioning of the modern trading system. The methodological basis of the study is comparative and structural-functional methods of analysis, as well as systematization of data from the World Trade Organization, the UN Comtrade database, and Global Trade Alert.

The study revealed an increasing role of selective liberalization, an increased use of protective and compensatory measures, the intensification of industrial *policy, and the expansion of regulatory influence in the field of digital services and intellectual property. It is established that the combination of trade, industrial and technological instruments contributes to the formation of new models of international competition and increases the asymmetry of development between countries. The importance of integrating economic diplomacy with long-term strategies of innovative and digital development is substantiated.*

The practical value of the results lies in their use by state administration bodies, diplomatic institutions, and entities of foreign economic activity to develop effective strategies for international cooperation, minimize trade risks, and increase the competitiveness of the national economy. The results obtained can be used in the process of shaping national foreign economic policy, improving mechanisms of international cooperation, and developing strategies to adapt to changes in the global economic environment.

Keywords: *geoeconomic competition, trade regulation, industrial policy, digital markets, global value chains.*

Економічна дипломатія в умовах конкуренції великих держав за вплив на глобальні торговельні системи

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Анотація. *Актуальність дослідження зумовлена посиленням геоекономічної конкуренції між провідними державами внаслідок зростанням регуляторної нестабільності та поступової фрагментації глобальної торговельної системи. Після 2020 року міжнародна торгівля зазнала суттєвих структурних змін, пов'язаних із пандемією COVID-19,* *геополітичними конфліктами, технологічною трансформацією та активізацією промислової політики. У цих умовах економічна дипломатія перетворюється на ключовий механізм узгодження зовнішньоекономічних, безпекових та інноваційних пріоритетів держав.*

Метою статті є комплексний аналіз трансформації інструментів економічної дипломатії в умовах загострення міжнародної конкуренції та оцінювання їхнього впливу на функціонування сучасної торговельної системи. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять порівняльний і структурно-функціональний методи аналізу, а також систематизація даних Світової організації торгівлі, бази UN Comtrade, Global Trade Alert.

У результаті дослідження виявлено зростання ролі селективної лібералізації, посилення застосування захисних і компенсаційних заходів, активізацію індустріальної політики та розширення регуляторного впливу у сфері цифрових послуг і інтелектуальної власності. Встановлено, що поєднання торговельних, промислових і технологічних інструментів сприяє формуванню нових моделей міжнародної конкуренції та посилює асиметрію розвитку між країнами. Обґрунтовано значущість інтеграції економічної дипломатії з довгостроковими стратегіями інноваційного та цифрового розвитку.

Практична цінність отриманих результатів полягає у можливості їх використання органами державного управління, дипломатичними установами та суб'єктами зовнішньоекономічної діяльності для розроблення ефективних стратегій міжнародного співробітництва, мінімізації торговельних ризиків та підвищення конкурентоспроможності національної економіки. Отримані результати можуть бути використані у процесі формування національної зовнішньоекономічної політики, удосконалення механізмів міжнародного співробітництва та розроблення стратегій адаптації до змін у глобальному економічному середовищі.

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Ключові слова: *геоекономічна конкуренція, торговельне регулювання, промислова політика, цифрові ринки, глобальні ланцюги вартості.*

Problem statement. The international trade system after 2020 has undergone significant changes under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, and the accelerated digitalization of the economy. In these conditions, there has been a gradual transition from the model of multilateral trade liberalization, based on the principles of open markets, minimization of tariff barriers and dominance of World Trade Organization (WTO) mechanisms, to the model of strategic regulation, focused on protecting national interests, supporting key sectors, restricting access to critical resources and technologies and strengthening state control over foreign economic flows [1, p. 188]. The modern trade policy of leading states is characterized by an increased role of state intervention, the expansion of tariff and non-tariff restrictions, the development of industrial policy, and the active use of economic diplomacy tools. The leading role in shaping the new architecture of international trade is played by the United States of America (USA), the People's Republic of China (China) and the European Union (EU), whose trade strategies combine competitive pressure, regulatory mechanisms and the promotion of their own standards [2, p. 61]. Under such conditions, economic diplomacy becomes a key tool for coordinating the foreign economic, technological, and security priorities of states [3, p. 1289], which necessitates a scientific understanding of modern transformations in trade policy and their consequences for the global economy.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Modern research in the field of international trade and economic diplomacy focuses on the analysis of geoeconomic competition, the fragmentation of global markets, and the transformation of state regulatory instruments in conditions of growing geopolitical tension. In the works of R. Campos et al. The negative impact of geopolitical fragmentation on trade volumes and countries' welfare within the framework of the formation of trading blocs is substantiated [3, p. 1289]. F. Conteduca and colleagues prove that modern fragmentation is selective in nature and is combined with the preservation of specific strategic dependencies between the USA, the EU and China [4, p. 535]. The study by G. Gereffi et al. reveals the relationship between industrial policy and the transformation of global value chains in the context of an orientation towards economic security [5, p. 207]. B. Selwyn and co-authors focus on the long-term role of geopolitics in the formation of production networks and technological rivalry between leading states [6]. The issue of the institutional and reputational dimension of economic competition is considered in the work of V. Levit, who analyzes the importance of ESG strategies for increasing the investment attractiveness of territories [7]. A. Ilyina studies the investment climate as a factor of international competitiveness and the effectiveness of public policy [8, p. 162]. Y. Hasenko substantiates the role of greening logistics processes in strengthening countries' positions in global supply chains [9]. Y. Hrushko focuses on the influence of cross-cultural communications on the formation of trust and brand sustainability in European markets [10]. The geopolitical dimension of the transformation of economic processes is revealed in the study by N. Kantsedal et al., which analyzes the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine for global finance and supply chains [11, p. 664]. B. Hoekman and D. Nelson consider industrial policy in the context of international coordination as a mechanism for reducing the adverse effects of protectionism [12, p. 136]. S. James and L. Quaglia examine the use of EU financial instruments as part of their geoeconomic strategy [13, p. 490]. L. Bednarski et al. analyze the adaptation of supply chains to the technological rivalry between the USA and China [14, p. 3]. The work of I. Zherebiatnikova and colleagues reveal the impact of geopolitical conflicts on the transformation of international relations and diplomatic mechanisms [1, p. 187]. V. Ksendzuk and co-authors investigate the role of sanctions and digitalization of logistics in changing

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the international business environment [2, p. 61]. S. Armstrong et al. analyze the formation of Japan's economic security strategy and new industrial policy as a response to the risks of «armed interdependence» [15, p. 265]. The generalization of the results of the above studies indicates that modern economic diplomacy is formed at the intersection of trade, industrial, financial, and technological policies and serves as a key tool for helping states adapt to the conditions of increasing global geoeconomic competition.

Highlighting previously unresolved parts of the general problem. Despite significant scientific achievements in the fields of geoeconomics, trade policy, and industrial development, modern research still faces several unresolved issues in comprehensively assessing the interaction among economic diplomacy, regulatory mechanisms, and technological factors in the formation of the global trading system. Most existing work focuses on individual aspects of market fragmentation, supply chains, sanctions policy, or financial impact. In contrast, an integrated analysis of their combined impact on international competition remains underdeveloped. The issues of the ratio of protective and liberalization instruments, the role of digital and innovative resources in diplomatic practice, and the impact of institutional transformations on the sustainability of trade relations also remain insufficiently systematized. The problem of reconciling national economic interests with the requirements of global coordination amid growing geopolitical risks remains underexplored in the scientific literature. In view of this, this study aims to provide a holistic view of modern mechanisms of economic diplomacy, their evolution, and functional features in the context of intensified international competition. The value of the work lies in the systematization of empirical data, the generalization of modern approaches, and the identification of key trends in the transformation of trade policy in leading states.

Formulation of the article objectives. The purpose of the study is to analyze changes in economic diplomacy instruments in the conditions of increased

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international competition and assess their impact on the functioning of the modern trading system.

Presentation of the main material of the study. Geoeconomics increasingly shapes the nature of international relations and the functioning of the world trading system amid intensified global competition. Economic instruments of influence – trade, investment, technological standards and control of resources – are transformed into means of achieving strategic and political goals of states, subject to the logic of security and competitive dominance [1, p. 190]. Economic diplomacy plays an essential role in the implementation of geoeconomic strategies, promoting national interests through international agreements, negotiations, and regulatory mechanisms. Modern economic diplomacy combines elements of liberalization with selective protectionism aimed at protecting strategically essential sectors of the defense-industrial complex, the digital economy, energy and the production of critical materials [13, p. 495]. The strengthening of the state's role is also manifested in the activation of an industrial policy focused on the development of innovative industries, support for national production, and the reduction of dependence on external suppliers. In parallel, there is fragmentation of world trade, regionalization of supply chains and the formation of alternative economic blocs, which weakens the universal rules of the multilateral trading system [11, p. 665]. Therefore, the combination of geoeconomic strategies, economic diplomacy, industrial policy and processes of trade fragmentation forms a new architecture of the world economy. Under these conditions, the effectiveness of states' participation in global trade processes increasingly depends on their ability to reconcile economic, political, and strategic priorities through sound management decisions.

In view of this, the research methodology is based on a comprehensive information base comprising analytical reports from the WTO on the trade policies of the G20 countries, UN Comtrade statistical data, and Global Trade Alert resources [16; 17]. Comparative and statistical analysis assess differences in models of

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economic diplomacy and the dynamics of regulatory influence. At the same time, the structural-functional approach allows to identify relationships among institutional, economic, and political factors in the formation of the trading system.

The current dynamics of globalization indicate a transition from universal integration to a model of competitive interdependence, within which states combine the openness of markets with control of strategically essential flows of goods, services and technologies (fig. 1). The evolution of economic and political globalization in 1990–2024 indicates a transition from a period of intensive international interaction to a phase of increased instability caused by financial crises, pandemics, geopolitical conflicts and increased protectionism. Under these conditions, competition between major powers is shifting to the sphere of control over digital markets, innovative technologies, and data exchange infrastructure.

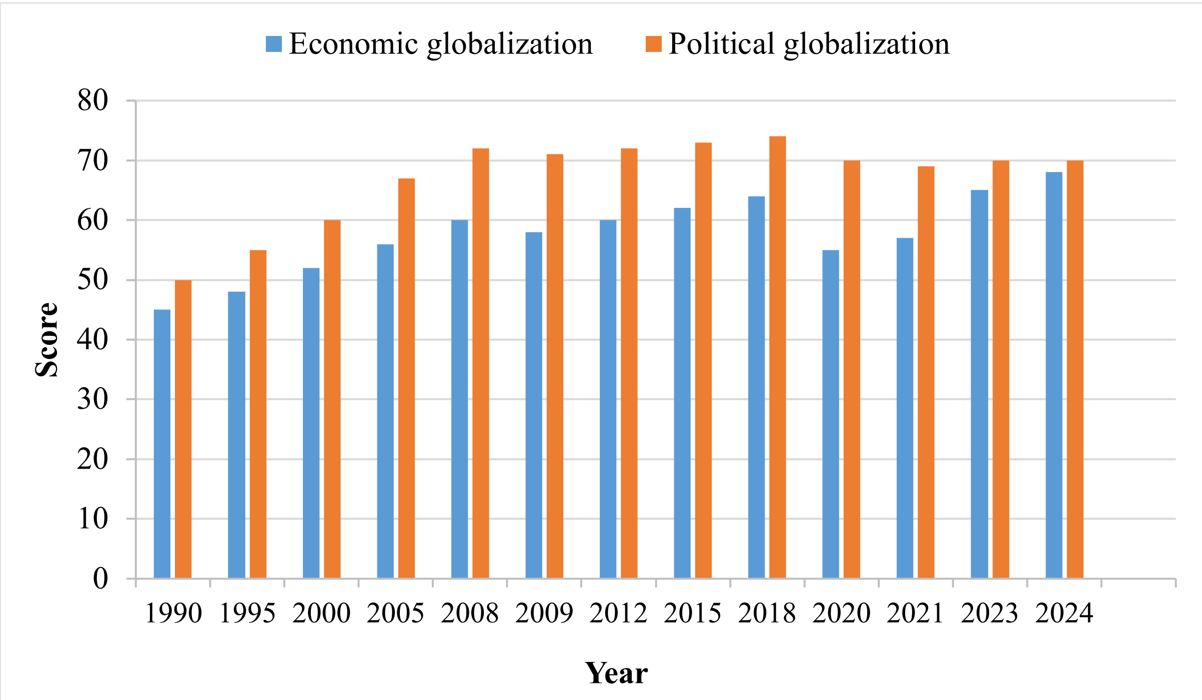

Fig. 1. Dynamics of economic and political globalization in the world economy, 1990–2024

Source: compiled based on [16]

Artificial intelligence, digital platforms and high-tech services play a decisive role in this process as new sources of growth and international influence. The

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forecast for world trade for 2026 reflects the deepening of technological and institutional differentiation between countries, within which digital resources become key instruments of geo-economic rivalry. In this regard, the role of state regulation is growing, and economic diplomacy is increasingly oriented towards combining liberalization with strategic control and selective protectionism. The regulatory instruments of economic diplomacy of the G20 countries are being shaped by global economic, political, and security challenges, which are driving the transformation of trade policy and international cooperation (table 1). The data presented show that the transformation of trade policy instruments over the past two decades has been influenced by systemic crises, geopolitical conflicts, and technological shifts, which have consistently strengthened the role of the state in regulating foreign economic activity.

Table 1

Key global events and their impact on the formation of trade policy instruments, 2008–2025

Period	Event	Main impact on trade	Government response	Analytical significance
2008–2009	Global financial crisis	Slowdown in globalization	Intensification of regulation, support for industry	Retreat from full liberalization
2014	Annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by the Russia	Politization of trade	Sanctions, investment restrictions	Institutionalization of sanctions
2018–2019	US–China trade war	Destabilization of value chains	Tariffs, export controls	Formation of trade blocs
2020–2021	COVID-19 pandemic and chip shortages	Supply disruptions	Localization, support for technologies	Focus on economic security
2022–…	Russian war against Ukraine, energy crisis	Fragmentation of markets	Sanctions, energy diplomacy	Geopoliticization of the economy
2023–2025	AI competition and G20 industrial policy	Technological differentiation	Subsidies, standardization	Increasing state intervention

Source: constructed from [1; 16; 17; 18]

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The departure from universal principles of liberalization, the growing importance of security and industrial priorities, and the intensification of sanctions and subsidiarity policies have led to the formation of a new model of economic diplomacy focused on the selective protection of national interests. In these conditions, a quantitative assessment of the scale of the regulatory influence of the world's leading economies on international trade becomes particularly relevant. Analysis of relevant indicators allows to identify the actual volumes of liberalization and restrictive measures, assess the level of concentration of regulatory pressure, and determine the directions of further transformation of the global trading system (table 2). The data presented indicate a significant increase in regulatory activity by the G20 countries in international trade during 2024–2025. Along with the expansion of trade facilitation measures, an even more intensive growth of restrictive instruments is observed, which reflects the transition to a model of selective liberalization combined with enhanced state control.

Table 2

Scale of regulatory influence of G20 countries on international trade in 2024–2025

Indicator	Current period	Previous period	Dynamics of changes	Analytical interpretation
Number of trade facilitation measures	184	132	+39 %	Selective liberalization of individual sectors
Number of other regulatory trade measures	185	117	+58 %	Strengthening state regulation
Trade volume covered by liberalization measures, USD billion	2 055	1 070	×1,9	Use of diplomatic incentives
Trade volume covered by restrictive measures, USD billion	2 900	829	×3,5	Formation of geoeconomic control mechanisms
Share of imports subject to restrictions, %	14,3	9,9	+4.4 percentage points	Strengthening protectionist tendencies

Source: based on [16; 17]

The significant expansion of trade volumes subject to regulatory restrictions, as well as the growth in the share of imports under protective measures, indicate the formation of a new configuration of the global market, in which economic diplomacy is increasingly used as a tool of geoeconomic influence. At the same time, the preservation of significant volumes of liberalization measures confirms the desire of leading states to combine competitive pressure with the maintenance of selective market openness.

Under such conditions, the analysis of specific mechanisms for implementing the trade policy of leading economies becomes particularly important, enabling the identification of priority areas of state intervention, sectoral accents, and strategic goals of foreign economic activity. A comparative characteristic of the main trade instruments of central states in 2025 is given in table 3.

Table 3

Main trade instruments of leading states and economic blocs in 2025

State	Main regulatory measures	Priority sectors of influence	Strategic purpose of the application
USA	Import tariffs (10–125%), special protective procedures, simplified regime for small imports	Metallurgy, automotive industry, mechanical engineering, electronics	Increasing competitive pressure and protecting the domestic market
China	Export control, tariff regulation of agricultural products, and licensing of strategic materials	Rare earth metals, energy, and high technologies	Ensuring control over strategic resources
EU	Mirror duties, technical and environmental standards, and border adjustment mechanisms	Industrial production, energy, transport	Protection of the domestic market and support for EU standards
Canada	Sectoral restrictions, tariff barriers, and special trade regimes	Metallurgy, automotive industry	Support for domestic producers
Republic of India	Selective tariff reduction, preferential agreements, and investment incentives	Mechanical engineering, electronics, infrastructure	Development of partnership trade relations

Source: based on [16; 17; 19]

The presented data indicate the growing differentiation in trade strategies

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among leading states, combining protective, stimulative, and regulatory instruments according to national development priorities. At the same time, a common trend is the strengthening of the roles of tariff regulation, technical standards, and the control of strategic resources as means of ensuring competitive advantage in the global economy. Such a transformation of trade policy leads to a more active use of special protective mechanisms to limit unfair competition and neutralize external economic threats. In these conditions, trade protection is increasingly becoming an instrument of geopolitical influence, through which states not only regulate the access of foreign goods to domestic markets but also wield pressure on trading partners. Anti-dumping, compensatory and special protective measures, as well as mechanisms of judicial diplomacy within international trade institutions are used to protect national producers, support strategic sectors and promote their own economic interests at the global level.

The data visualization shows a significant increase in the intensity of trade defense instrument use during periods of global economic instability and geopolitical tension (fig. 2). The increase in the number of anti-dumping and countervailing investigations in 2020 is particularly noticeable, driven by the pandemic crisis, which led to large-scale supply chain disruptions, a sharp decline in demand, and the need to support national producers in crisis conditions. The increase in relevant measures in 2024, in turn, is mainly associated with the exacerbation of geo-economic rivalry, the strengthening of sanctions policy, market fragmentation, and increased industrial support for strategic sectors.

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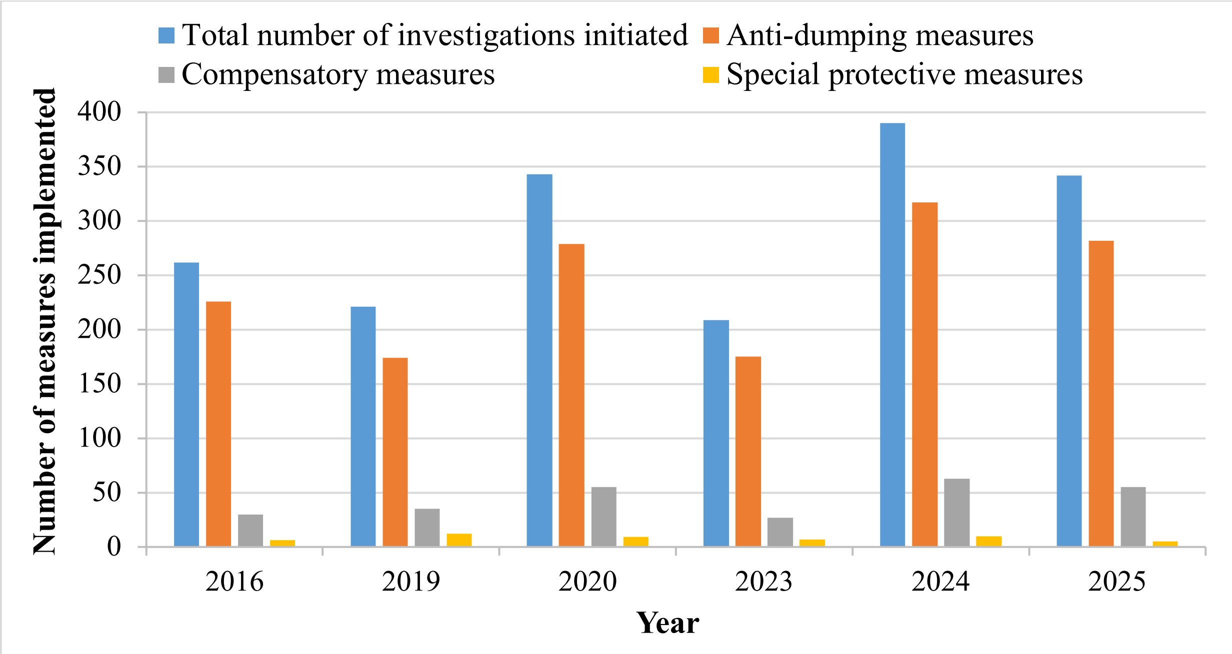

Fig. 2. Dynamics of the use of anti-dumping, countervailing, and safeguard measures in world trade, 2016–2025

Source: compiled based on [16; 17]

At the same time, the decrease in the number of protective investigations in 2023 can be explained by the gradual adaptation of enterprises to new operating conditions, partial stabilization of international logistics networks, as well as a temporary shift in the emphasis of state policy towards indirect regulation instruments, in particular subsidies and tax incentives. This indicates a transition from crisis response to more balanced mechanisms for supporting competitiveness. The fluctuation in the number of special protective measures reflects their use primarily as a situational tool to respond to short-term trade threats. In general, the growing role of trade protection indicates a gradual transition from passive liberalization to an active model of state intervention in international trade, within which legal and administrative mechanisms are increasingly used to ensure the strategic stability and competitiveness of national producers.

However, the effectiveness of such measures largely depends on their consistency with national strategies for innovative development, digital transformation and renewal of the production potential of strategically important industries. In this context, a logical continuation of trade protection policy is the intensification of industrial policy and increased control over strategic resources, aimed at building internal production capacity, reducing external dependence, and increasing the stability of national economies (table 4).

Table 4

Motives for the implementation of industrial policy in global trade, 2010–2024

Industrial policy motive	Share of total measures, %	Main content of implementation	Role in the system of economic diplomacy
Strategic competitiveness	Over 40	Support for national production, development of innovative industries, and export stimulation	Strengthening the positions of states in global markets
Economic stability and reliability of supply chains	Over 25	Diversification of suppliers, localization of production, and reduction of external dependence	Reduction of vulnerability to external shocks
National security	Over 20	Protection of strategic sectors, control of technologies and resources	Formation of geoeconomic influence
Climate and ecological transformation	Over 15	Development of "green" energy, decarbonization of production, and environmental standards	Increasing regulatory pressure and environmental diplomacy

Source: based on [15; 16; 17]

Thus, as the above data show, industrial policy in the modern world economy is shaped by a combination of economic, security, and environmental factors. The dominance of motives of strategic competitiveness and supply chain sustainability reflects states' desire to strengthen domestic production capacity and reduce dependence on external partners. At the same time, the growing role of national security and climate priorities indicates the expansion of the functions of industrial policy beyond purely economic tasks. In geoeconomic competition, industrial policy is increasingly integrated with the tools of economic diplomacy, forming complex mechanisms of influence on international markets, investment flows and technological development. However, state intervention in the production sphere is not limited to the material sector and is gradually extending to services, logistics, the

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digital economy, and intellectual property. In this context, the analysis of economic diplomacy in the spheres of services and intellectual property, which serves as an essential tool for creating intangible competitive advantages and ensuring long-term economic impact, becomes particularly relevant. The main directions and mechanisms of such diplomacy in 2025 are summarized in table 5.

Table 5

Key areas of economic diplomacy of leading states in the fields of services and intellectual property, 2025

Regulation direction	Leading countries	Main instruments of influence	Strategic goal of implementation
Aviation services	Saudi Arabia, USA, India	Intergovernmental aviation agreements, route network regulation, and transportation quotas	Control of international passenger and cargo flows
Digital services	USA, EU, Japan	Liberalization of access to markets, regulation of digital platforms, and data protection	Ensuring digital leadership
Copyright	China, EU	Legislation reform, strengthening law enforcement	Protection of digital and media content
Patent system	China, Australia	Simplification of registration procedures, digitalization of patenting	Stimulation of innovative activity
Trademarks	EU, Great Britain	Harmonization of standards, mutual recognition of rights	Deepening global integration

Source: based on [16; 17]

As can be seen, in 2025, economic diplomacy in the field of services and intellectual property is increasingly focused on the creation of intangible competitive advantages and control over strategically important segments of the global market. A special role is played by digital services, aviation infrastructure, and systems for the legal protection of intellectual property results, which become key sources of long-term economic impact. The strengthening of regulatory activity in the field of intellectual property and digital platforms indicates the desire of leading states to ensure technological leadership and strengthen their positions in global markets of knowledge and innovation. At the same time, the harmonization of standards and

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the development of international agreements in the field of services contribute to the formation of new institutional mechanisms for coordinating economic policy.

In general, the study's results show that modern economic diplomacy is gradually transforming from a tool for supporting international trade into a comprehensive mechanism for shaping states' geoeconomic influence. Along with traditional measures for regulating commodity flows, tools for controlling intangible assets, digital markets, and intellectual capital are becoming increasingly important. The combination of regulatory, protective and incentive measures within trade, industrial and technological policies deepens the differentiation between countries in terms of access to innovations, standards and global platforms. This, in turn, increases the asymmetry of development, changes the configuration of international competition and creates the prerequisites for the emergence of new models of geo-economic rivalry. The results obtained indicate that the effectiveness of states' participation in the modern system of international trade increasingly depends on their ability to integrate economic diplomacy tools with long-term strategies for innovative, industrial, and digital development, which determine the directions of further transformation of the global trade architecture.

Conclusions. The study found that the modern system of international trade operates in conditions of increased geo-economic competition, greater state regulation, and the fragmentation of the global economic space. Since 2020, trade policy has been characterized by a transition from universal liberalization to a model of selective openness with the active use of protective and incentive instruments. An analysis of the regulatory activity of the G20 countries shows a combination of liberalization and restrictive mechanisms aimed at supporting national producers and controlling strategic sectors. The increase in the use of anti-dumping and other protective measures confirms the strengthening of trade protection's role in foreign economic policy. Research on industrial and digital diplomacy has revealed the growing importance of innovative industries, digital markets, and intangible assets

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in shaping international competitiveness, thereby deepening technological differentiation between countries. In general, modern economic diplomacy combines trade, industrial, and technological instruments and is focused on building long-term strategic advantages in the global economy.

Prospects for further research concern the analysis of the impact of digitalization, artificial intelligence, and regional integration on the transformation of economic diplomacy.

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