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The WhatsApp World Order: Learning to Live with the New Global Political Economy

By David Henig, Director at ECIPE

Brussels, 1 June 2026 - Thirty years of intense technology-driven change has seen an economic and social transformation centred on an ever-expanding and changing set of international networks. This "WhatsApp World Order" of global markets for goods and services is however increasingly at odds with political leaders seeking to exert national control and avoid dependencies.

There is a growing risk that the gap between a resilient trading reality operating within corporate supply chains and global mistrust between major powers is going to lead to a prolonged period of economic conflict. European governments in particular are in danger of repeating President Trump's failures to reshape the world towards a nostalgic view of a manufacturing past long dated because of productivity gains.

"European policy debates are being undermined by a distorted view of today's inter-connected global economy", said David Henig, author of the study and Director at ECIPE. ***"In particular we must recognise that dependencies are a fundamental part of modern trade and avoiding damaging weaponisation the exact reason why we need WTO rules."***

Finding better solutions requires politicians to come to terms with today's political economy and how it emerged, as well as its many other effects including the rise of emerging economies including China, corporate concentration and personal insecurity. They must then start to construct appropriate solutions accompanied by telling a forward-looking story of how countries and economies can adapt successfully to the realities of global goods and services markets.

Restoring trust domestically and internationally is crucial to escaping today's period of turbulence, which is also associated with slow economic growth. This in particular requires strong adaptive institutions including a World Trade Organisation reflecting the original purpose of global rules, to avoid a global crisis of confidence.

“Grasping the changes unleashed by the recent technology revolution is particularly important as this process is likely to continue with the widespread deployment of AI”, added Henig. “Restoring optimism will come from demonstrating that economies and individuals have adjusted successfully to new realities and can do so again.”

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