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Trade Policy 3.0: Three Scenarios for Tomorrowland

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Brussels, 6 November 2025 - Global trade policy is undergoing one of the most profound shifts in decades. Once defined by liberalisation, comparative advantage and multilateral cooperation, trade policy has transformed to a strategic domain, where questions of security and resilience dominate the debate.

For much of the post-war period, trade policy evolved along a coherent path. Trade Policy 1.0 focused on lowering tariffs and integrating markets, while Trade Policy 2.0 captured the rise of global value chains and firm-level participation. Both rested on open, rules-based cooperation through the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Agreements. That continuity has now been disrupted. A new paradigm – Trade Policy 3.0 – is emerging, guided by economic security and strategic autonomy.

“Three powerful forces are driving this shift. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of supply chains and fuelled calls for self-sufficiency. The revival of industrial policy has blurred the line between economic and security policy. And digital technologies are pushing governments towards unilateral regulation”, said Lucian Cernat, author of the [new Policy Brief](#).

The paper outlines three possible futures for global trade. An Immunity Scenario envisions the system adapting, absorbing new priorities while maintaining openness. A Sclerosis Scenario foresees stagnation, persistent protectionism and weakened institutions. The most troubling outcome, the Contagion Scenario, would see widespread unilateralism and protectionism eroding multilateral norms. Which of these scenarios materialises will determine whether trade evolves, stagnates, or breaks apart.

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