Goods always find a way

How Global Trade Is Reorganizing – and Supply Chains Are Growing More Complex

If you run a logistics company that is more than 500 years old, you develop a certain perspective on disruption. You learn that the world was never truly stable. Stability is often just a temporary illusion created by periods of relative prosperity and peace. Trade routes have always shifted. Borders have changed. Wars have interrupted markets. Political systems have risen and disappeared. Yet goods kept moving.

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Wolfram joined the management board of his family's logistics company in 2005. From 2012 to 2018, he represented Austria's freight forwarding and logistics industry as president of its national association. Today, he is CEO of Gebrüder Weiss.

Goods are like water.
They always find a way.

Today, however, the perception of crisis feels different because everything happens simultaneously, instantly, and visibly. Every disruption becomes global news within minutes. Every conflict immediately triggers speculation about the "end" of globalization.

From tariffs and trade disputes to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, executives are navigating an environment of permanent geopolitical uncertainty. But from the perspective of logistics, one observation remains surprisingly consistent: Goods are like water. They always find a way.

The quiet engine of prosperity

That simple observation reflects one of the great strengths of the global economy. Over the past three decades, the fluid international exchange of goods has created unprecedented prosperity around the world. Global logistics did not just accompany this development; it enabled it. This is why today's debate about the "end of globalization" often misses the point.

This does not mean that current developments are harmless. The geopolitical fragmentation of the world is real. Costs are rising. Supply chains are becoming more complex. But complexity should not be confused with collapse. What we are witnessing is not the end of globalization. We are witnessing its reorganization.

For decades, companies optimized for cost, speed, and scale. Today they must optimize for resilience – and increasingly for individuality.

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Mass production is over

The old logic was scale through standardization. The new logic is scale despite individualization. Products are no longer merely made for an anonymous mass market; they are configured and assembled for specific customers or use cases. That creates value for customers – and complexity for supply chains.

This is where logistics becomes more than transportation. It becomes the discipline of making complexity manageable. At Gebrüder Weiss, we experience this every day: customers are asking for solutions that connect borders, transport modes, regulations, data and customer expectations into one functioning system.

The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, tensions in the Middle East, and trade disputes have accelerated this shift. Businesses are diversifying suppliers, sourcing markets and transport routes. But this is not deglobalization. It is adaptation.

The world economy remains deeply interconnected because modern prosperity is built on international exchange. People and companies understand that principle. Ecosystems cannot simply be rebuilt behind national borders. Autarky may sound tempting in political speeches. Economically, it is mostly an illusion.

Redirection, not standstill

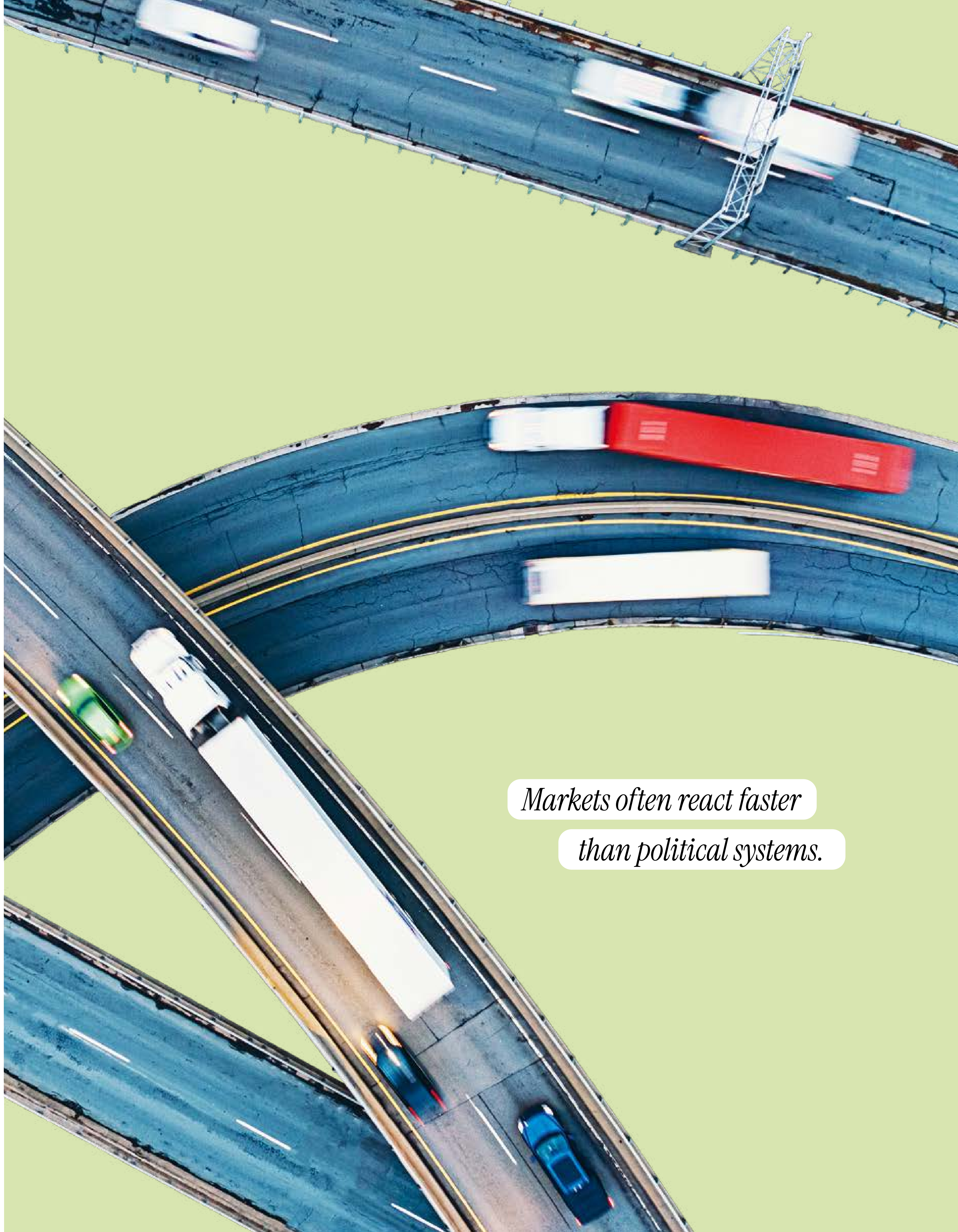
Even aggressive tariff policies ultimately struggle against economic gravity. Tariffs create friction. They increase costs. They generate uncertainty. But in most cases, they do not stop trade itself. Instead, they redirect flows, change sourcing structures or shift investments into different regions.

When traditional routes become unavailable, alternative corridors emerge almost instantly. In the Middle East, for example, geopolitical instability has forced companies to rethink established shipping lanes. The logistics industry developed alternative combinations of sea and land transport through neighboring countries. The supply chains continued functioning.

Global logistics networks are highly dynamic systems. They continuously reorganize themselves around political, economic and physical constraints. Markets often react faster than political systems.

At the same time, however, the economic environment has become more demanding. Energy costs remain elevated. Inflationary pressure has increased. Regulatory complexity continues to grow, especially in Europe.

For export-oriented economies like Germany or Austria, this matters enormously.



Markets often react faster than political systems.

Central Europe's winning formula

Central Europe became one of the world's industrial powerhouses because it combined engineering excellence, industrial productivity, political stability and open access to global markets. If industrial competitiveness weakens, logistics inevitably feels the impact as well.

Europe sometimes risks becoming too focused on managing risk instead of enabling growth. We analyze carefully, discuss intensely and regulate extensively. Meanwhile, other regions operate with greater speed and pragmatism.

Europe still possesses extraordinary strengths: industrial know-how, infrastructure, education, technological expertise, political stability, and highly specialized companies. But confidence and speed matter too. Economic strength is not only about capabilities. It is also about momentum.

Our industry reflects the real condition of the economy. It mirrors industrial activity, trade intensity and business confidence. When economies slow down, we feel it quickly. When optimism returns, we feel that too.

Adaptation is the real superpower

And despite everything, I remain fundamentally optimistic.

Not because current challenges are small, but because adaptation has always been humanity's greatest strength. Over centuries, trade has survived wars, revolutions, financial crises, technological disruptions and political fragmentation. The mechanisms continuously evolve, but the underlying logic remains surprisingly stable: people want to exchange goods, ideas, technologies and resources.

The world still runs on movement: raw materials, industrial components, pharmaceuticals, food, energy systems, and consumer products will never be equally dispersed.

Yes, the world is becoming more fragmented politically. Yes, supply chains are becoming more complex. Yes, costs are rising. But global trade itself remains remarkably resilient. Goods continue to move. Markets adapt. New routes emerge.

Like water, trade flows ultimately seek the path of least resistance.

The real question is therefore not whether globalization survives. It will. The more important question is whether Europe retains the confidence, speed and entrepreneurial mindset necessary to remain one of its central engines.

I believe it can.

But optimism alone is not enough. It requires investment, competitiveness, openness to innovation and a willingness to embrace change rather than merely manage it.

The world is not standing still. And neither should we.

Adaptation has always been humanity's greatest strength.