

1 ARTICLE XII OF THE MARRAKESH AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION 1

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1 ARTICLE XII OF THE MARRAKESH AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

1.1 Text of Article XII

Article XII

Accession

1. Any State or separate customs territory possessing full autonomy in the conduct of its external commercial relations and of the other matters provided for in this Agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements may accede to this Agreement, on terms to be agreed between it and the WTO. Such accession shall apply to this Agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements annexed thereto.
2. Decisions on accession shall be taken by the Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial Conference shall approve the agreement on the terms of accession by a two-thirds majority of the Members of the WTO.
3. Accession to a Plurilateral Trade Agreement shall be governed by the provisions of that Agreement.

1.2 Article XII:1

1.2.1 "Any State or separate customs territory ... may accede to this Agreement"

1. The terms of accession are contained in individual accession protocols agreed by the acceding government and World Trade Organization (WTO) Members. 36 Members have negotiated terms of accession to the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO Agreement).

2. In addition, Grenada¹, Papua New Guinea², Qatar³, St. Kitts and Nevis⁴ and the United Arab Emirates⁵ completed accession in 1995-96 under Article XII of the WTO Agreement through simplified procedures.⁶

1.2.2 Working parties on accession

1.2.2.1 Continuation of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1947 (GATT 1947) accession working parties

3. The General Council agreed, at its first meeting of 31 January 1995, upon the following:

"[A]s and when requests for the WTO accession under Article XII were made by states and separate customs territories for whom a GATT 1947 working party already existed, the existing working parties should continue their work as WTO accession working parties, with standard terms of reference and their respective current chairpersons".⁷

1.2.2.2 Establishment, terms of reference and customary procedures

4. A Technical Note by the Secretariat provides comprehensive information on WTO practice on accession procedures, as observed by the Secretariat.⁸

5. The General Council/Ministerial Conference establishes a working party on accession in response to a formal request by a State or separate customs territory seeking accession. The General Council/Ministerial Conference sets the terms of reference for a working party on accession. The terms of reference are typically the following: "to examine the application for accession to the WTO under Article XII and to submit to the General Council/Ministerial Conference recommendations which may include a draft Protocol of Accession".⁹

1.2.2.3 Completed accession processes

6. Of the working parties on accession carried over from the GATT 1947, accessions have been completed for the following 20 countries: Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Croatia, Ecuador, Estonia, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal,

¹ [WT/L/96-97](#) and [WT/Let/59](#).

² [WT/L/98-99](#) and [WT/Let/84](#).

³ [WT/L/100-101](#) and [WT/Let/46](#).

⁴ [WT/L/94-95](#) and [WT/Let/58](#).

⁵ [WT/L/128-129](#) and [WT/Let/70](#).

⁶ [WT/L/30](#).

⁷ [WT/GC/M/1](#), section 4.I(g). At the same meeting, the General Council applied this treatment to Belarus.

⁸ Document [WT/ACC/22/Rev.1 and Addenda 1 and 2 to document WT/ACC/22](#). The WT/ACC/22-document series updated and replaced document WT/ACC/1 of 24 March 1995.

⁹ [WT/ACC/22/Rev.1](#), paras. 4 and 5.

North Macedonia, Panama, Russian Federation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Chinese Taipei, and Ukraine.¹⁰

7. Of the working parties on accession established by the WTO General Council/Ministerial Conference since 1 January 1995, accessions have been completed for the following 16 countries: Afghanistan, Cabo Verde, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Liberia, Montenegro, Oman, Samoa, Seychelles, Tajikistan, Tonga, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, and Yemen.¹¹

1.2.2.4 Ongoing accession processes

8. Four working parties on accession carried over from the GATT 1947 are still active, i.e. for the following countries: Algeria, Belarus, Sudan, and Uzbekistan.

9. The General Council/Ministerial Conference has established 20 ongoing accession working parties for the following countries: Andorra¹², Azerbaijan¹³, Bahamas¹⁴, Bhutan¹⁵, Bosnia and

¹⁰ Document references: Albania (Working Party established 10 December 1992 decision [WT/ACC/ALB/52](#) adopted 17 July 2000); Armenia (Working Party established 17 December 1993, decision [WT/L/506](#) adopted 10 December 2002); Bulgaria (Working Party established November 1986 and February 1990, decision [WT/ACC/BGR/6](#) adopted 2 October 1996); Cambodia (Working Party established 21 December 1994, decision [WT/MIN\(03\)/18](#) adopted 11 September 2003); People's Republic of China (Working Party established March 1987, decision [WT/L/432](#) adopted 11 November 2001); Croatia (Working Party established 27 October 1993, decision [WT/ACC/HRV/60](#) adopted 17 July 2000); Ecuador (Working Party established October 1992, decision [WT/ACC/ECU/5](#) adopted 16 August 1995); Estonia (Working Party established 23 March 1994, decision [WT/ACC/EST/29](#) adopted 21 May 1999); North Macedonia (Working Party established 21 December 1994, decision [WT/L/494](#) adopted 15 October 2002); Jordan (Working Party established 25 January 1994, decision [WT/ACC/JOR/34](#) adopted 17 December 1999); Latvia (Working Party established December 1993, decision [WT/ACC/LVA/34](#) adopted 14 October 1998); Lithuania (Working Party established February 1994, decision [WT/ACC/LTU/53](#) adopted 8 December 2000); Moldova (Working Party established 17 December 1993, decision [WT/ACC/MOL/39](#) adopted 8 May 2001); Mongolia (Working Party established 8 October 1991, decision [WT/ACC/MNG/10](#) adopted 18 July 1996); Nepal (Working Party established 21 June 1989, decision [WT/MIN\(03\)/19](#) adopted 11 September 2003); Panama (Working Party established 8 October 1991, decision [WT/ACC/PAN/20](#) adopted 2 October 1996); Russian Federation (Working Party established July 1993, decision [WT/MIN\(11\)/24](#) adopted 16 December 2011); Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Working Party established July 1993, decision [WT/L/627](#) adopted 11 November 2005); Chinese Taipei (Working Party established 1 October 1992, decision [WT/L/433](#) adopted 11 November 2001); and Ukraine (Working Party established December 1993, decision [WT/L/718](#) adopted 5 February 2008).

¹¹ Document references: Afghanistan (Working Party established 13 December 2004; see [WT/GC/M/90](#); decision [WT/MIN\(15\)/39](#) adopted 17 December 2015); Cabo Verde (Working Party established 17 July 2000, see [WT/GC/M/57](#); decision [WT/L/715](#) adopted 18 December 2007); Georgia (Working Party established 18 July 1996, see [WT/GC/M/13](#); decision [WT/ACC/GEO/32](#) adopted 6 October 1999); Kazakhstan (Working Party established 6 February 1996, see [WT/GC/M/10](#); decision [WT/L/957](#) adopted 27 July 2015); Kyrgyz Republic (Working Party established April 1996, see [WT/GC/M/11](#); decision [WT/ACC/KGZ/28](#) adopted 14 October 1998); Lao PDR (Working Party established 19 February 1998, see [WT/GC/M/26](#), decision [WT/L/865](#) adopted 26 October 2012); Liberia (Working Party established 18 December 2007, see [WT/GC/M/112](#); decision [WT/MIN\(15\)/38](#) adopted 16 December 2015); Montenegro (Working Party established 15 February 2005, see [WT/GC/M/92](#); decision [WT/MIN\(11\)/28](#) adopted 17 December 2011); Oman (Working Party established 26 June 1996, see [WT/GC/M/12](#); decision [WT/ACC/OMN/27](#) adopted 10 October 2000); Samoa (Working Party established 15 July 1998, see [WT/GC/M/29](#); decision [WT/MIN\(11\)/27](#) adopted 17 December 2011); Seychelles (Working Party established 11 July 1995, see [WT/GC/M/5](#); decision [WT/L/994](#) adopted 10 December 2014); Tajikistan (Working Party established 18 July 2001, see [WT/GC/M/66](#), decision [WT/L/872](#) adopted 10 December 2012); Tonga (Working Party established 15 November 1995, see [WT/GC/M/8](#); decision [WT/L/644](#) adopted 15 December 2005); Vanuatu (Working Party established 11 July 1995, see [WT/GC/M/5](#), decision [WT/L/823](#) adopted 26 October 2011); Viet Nam (Working Party established 31 January 1995, see [WT/GC/M/1](#); decision [WT/L/662](#) adopted 7 November 2006); Yemen (Working Party established 17 July 2000, see [WT/GC/M/57](#); decision [WT/MIN\(13\)/24](#) adopted 4 December 2013).

¹² [WT/GC/M/23](#).

¹³ [WT/GC/M/21](#).

¹⁴ [WT/GC/M/66](#).

¹⁵ [WT/GC/M/48](#).

Herzegovina¹⁶, Comoros¹⁷, Curaçao¹⁸, Equatorial Guinea¹⁹, Ethiopia²⁰, Iran²¹, Iraq²², Lebanese Republic²³, Libya²⁴, Sao Tome and Principe²⁵, Serbia²⁶, Somalia²⁷, South Sudan²⁸, Syrian Arab Republic²⁹, Timor-Leste³⁰, and Turkmenistan.³¹

1.2.3 Observer status for applicants for accession

10. At its first meeting on 31 January 1995, the General Council decided to grant observer status to governments for which accession processes had already begun³², as was the practice under the GATT 1947.³³

11. Governments may seek observer status in the General Council and its subsidiary bodies before they make an application to accede. The status is granted for five years and observer governments are expected to take a decision on requesting accession within that period of time. It is possible to request an extension of the observer status.³⁴

1.2.4 Accession by least-developed countries

12. At the High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for Least-Developed Countries' Trade Development on 27-28 October 1997, Members recommended that the WTO take steps to assist least-developed countries (LDCs) in the process of accession.³⁵ Pursuant to paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, in 2002, the Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries established a work programme including a mandate from ministers to "facilitate and accelerate negotiations with acceding Least-Developed Countries."³⁶

13. On 10 December 2002, the General Council adopted a decision on the Accession of Least-Developed Countries³⁷ to facilitate and accelerate negotiations with LDCs through simplified and streamlined accession procedures. The decision set out guidelines in the following broad areas: Market Access, WTO Rules, Process, and Trade-Related Technical Assistance and Capacity Building. The Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration noted the following in this connection:

"We stress the importance of facilitating and accelerating the accession negotiations of least-developed countries, taking due account of the guidelines on LDC accession adopted by the General Council in December 2002."³⁸

14. In July 2012, the General Council adopted a Decision³⁹ to strengthen, streamline, and operationalize the LDC accession guidelines. WTO Members agreed to follow certain principles and benchmarks in market access negotiations on goods and services with acceding LDCs. This Decision is an Addendum to the 2002 LDC accession guidelines.

¹⁶ [WT/GC/M/45](#).

¹⁷ [WT/GC/M/110](#).

¹⁸ [WT/GC/M/182](#).

¹⁹ [WT/GC/M/113](#).

²⁰ [WT/GC/M/78](#).

²¹ [WT/GC/M/95](#).

²² [WT/GC/M/90](#).

²³ [WT/GC/M/40](#).

²⁴ [WT/GC/M/87](#).

²⁵ [WT/GC/M/95](#).

²⁶ [WT/GC/M/92](#).

²⁷ [WT/GC/M/165](#).

²⁸ [WT/MIN\(17\)/SR/6](#).

²⁹ [WT/GC/M/126](#).

³⁰ [WT/GC/M/165](#).

³¹ [WT/GC/M/196](#).

³² [WT/GC/M/1](#).

³³ See GATT Analytical Index, pp. 1017-1028.

³⁴ Document [WT/L/161](#) (Rules of Procedure), Annex 2.

³⁵ [WT/LDC/HL/23](#), the section dealing with Thematic Round Table A, para. II(b).

³⁶ See [WT/COMTD/LDC/11](#), Section (f), para. 18(iii).

³⁷ [WT/L/508](#).

³⁸ [WT/MIN\(05\)/DEC](#), para. 59.

³⁹ [WT/L/508/Add.1](#).

1.3 Article XII:2

1.3.1 Decision-making procedures on accession

15. Regarding decision-making procedures applicable to requests for accessions to the WTO, see the document on Article IX of the WTO Agreement (Practice).

1.4 Article XII:3: Acceptance of or accession to a Plurilateral Trade Agreement

16. Article XXIV of the Agreement on Government Procurement provides for accession "on terms to be agreed between that government and the Parties". Article 9.1 of the Agreement on Civil Aircraft addresses accession.

17. The International Bovine Meat Agreement and the International Dairy Agreement were terminated and deleted from the WTO Agreement.

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