

Session 2: transition from accession to membership: maximizing the benefits of WTO membership and global integration:

“LDC Proposal on Post-Accession Work Programme”:

Since this is my first intervention, I would like to first thank the Government and people of Tajikistan for hosting this Round Table meeting. Equally, I would like to thank the sponsor, the Government of China, as well as the organizer WTO for convening this timely forum, and of course for inviting me.

As far as this session framework on post accession phase is concerned, my intervention is meant to introduce “LDC Proposal on Post-Accession Work Programme” as one component of interest to recently acceded LDCs. However, I shall expand the subject matter –a little- with Chair permission, to cover other related matters. I see my presentation also as complementing the one presented by Maika earlier during this session. Therefore, I should observe, with thanks to Accessions Division Director Mr. Osakwe and his excellent team, the introduction –for the first time- of a new section V to WTO DG 2014 Annual Report on Accessions that contained a special focus on Post-Accession phase. This was a clear reminder of the exceptional needs of recently acceded countries, in particular WTO members including LDCs. That section laid out very pertinent issues for the whole membership to watch for and address accordingly. More importantly, it also reminded on the 3 key immediate post-accession operational support, i.e. focus on obligations’ implementation, internal coordination and information dissemination. All are of highest priority to recently acceded Members, including LDCs.

Now, going back to the “LDC Proposal on Post-Accession Work Programme”, as some of you may recall, especially Maika, whom we worked with very closely in the reparation stage starting from December 2010 – as she indicated, before she joined Accessions Division. The final product initiative was formally distributed as WTO document number WT/CONTD/LDC/W/50 dated 21 April 2011 under the full title “Proposal for the Establishment of a Work Programme on Post-Accession for Recently Acceded LDCS”. Today, one may wonder why after 4 years this subject is re-introduced during this RT meeting! The simple and direct answer is that this topic is still very relevant as it was back in 2011. Second, the proposal was not really followed through or acted upon as a standalone initiative, as was meant initially.

I still recall the fifty-ninth session of the Sub-Committee on LDCs meeting when the proposal was formally communicated by the LDC Group Coordinator then, Bangladesh. I also recall on that meeting, some initial questions and discussion took place with a view to continue the dialogue on this proposal at later time. However, NO focused follow up was made to that effect within that particular initiative framework. Before touching upon on what happened next, let me quickly refer to the substance of the proposal.

The submission contained 3 parts. A short Background on LDCs accession history, when -at that time- only 3 LDCs acceded to WTO, namely Nepal, Cambodia and Cape Verde, in that historical order, C.V. immediately graduated from LDC status after completion of its accession process in January 2008, as Mr. Shark, who was the WP Chair, knows very well on that accession history. Since 2011 4 LDCs managed to accede to WTO, namely Vanuatu, Samoa, Lao PDR and Yemen, again in that historical order. The first 2 LDCs were on the path for graduation from LDC status, which Samoa achieved last year. I hope that other recently acceded LDCs shall achieve the same goal in the near future, including my own country.

Currently, there are 7 LDCs lining up in the accession process (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Liberia, and the Sudan). In addition, 2 LDCs are in their very initial steps of accession process (South Sudan and Timor Leste). Last Thursday, Mr. Osakwe informed the Informal Group on Accession that Somalia also showed keen interest in becoming a WTO member. This is a welcomed step to stabilize and rebuild the crisis emergent LDC.

I hope that soon we shall also witness the conclusion of the accession process of 2 LDCs by MC10, namely Afghanistan and Liberia, in addition to Kazakhstan. As explained earlier by Mr. Shinwari, Afghanistan next and hopefully final WP meeting could take place after WTO summer break. We look forward to that moment. Still, 3 LDCs have not -yet- taken the initial decision to apply for accession to WTO (Eretria, Kiribati, and Tuvalu). Hence, LDCs represent the greatest number of countries who are not member of WTO, yet. That fact also illuminate the importance of the 2011 proposal.

What I am trying to say in mixing reference to the proposal background in 2011 and the situation today is that the cheer number of recently acceded LDCs and those in the pipeline merits special attention to post accession phase of LDCs, and indeed other recently acceded developing countries. WTO Membership and development partners need to take good note of that serious matter to smoothly enable LDCs to integrate –in a meaningful manner- into the global economy.

Second, the 2011 proposal provided the rationale for submitting such initiative, namely the “different but equally enormous challenges faces LDCs up on or immediately after accession” as the proposal confirmed. Two areas were identified in that respect, one to do with implementation of commitments undertaken during the long and complex accession process, most notably in meeting first set of notification and transparency requirements, implementing different Action Plans within, tight rather time framework, as well as upgrading laws and regulations. All require special institutional arrangements and capacity that are still lacking in most -if not all- recently acceded LDCs. Therefore, almost all WP Reports contain references to the importance of technical assistance and capacity building needs. The underlining assumption, always, that such support could be provided by WTO Members and Secretariat as well as other regional and international organizations. The second rationale was on how to participate in the work of the WTO when becoming a member, in order to maximize the benefits of their respective membership, as the title of this session rightly suggests. This in turn would need developing special strategies for effective participation as well as both offensive and defensive interests and articulating different negotiating positions. Technical assistance and capacity building continue to be key ingredient during this second phase.

The proposal, at the end, suggested including 3 elements/pillars to achieve its principal objective, namely “to assist the recently acceded LDCs in consolidating their accession to membership” and “to maximize the benefits of the multilateral trading system, including by building on the implementation of their accession commitments”. The 1st. pillar focused on implementation of commitments, including Action Plans, notifications and transparency obligations, revision of laws and regulations, and establishment of institutions with trained staff to deal with trade remedies. The 2nd. Pillar focused on maximizing the benefits of the WTO membership, including through identification of issues of interest in trade negotiations and WTO regular work, formulation and implementation of trade policy for effective global economic integration, outreach to private sector and civil society, and partnership with EIF and Aft. Last, utilize this initiative as a platform for further discussion on post-accession experiences and consider possible means of assisting recently acceded LDCs facing new challenges.

The overriding assumption was that the afore-mentioned elements clearly need technical assistance and training to truly produce results during life after accession. Therefore, it was recommended at the end of the proposal to place the said initiative as a standing item on the Sub-Committee on LDCs meetings, provide annual reports on implementations to the GC through the Committee on Trade and Development, including possible action.

By the way, while we were preparing for this proposal, there were similar attempt made by a group of WTO members who were called “friends of Accession” attempting to develop another more general proposal focused on transparency in WTO accession. However, we thought that LDCs case need to be distinguished and dealt with as a special case and not be diluted through general proposals.

Nevertheless, immediately after the submission of this proposal, we were fully engaged in different negotiation process, that is the preparation for implementing MC8 Decision on LDCs accession, which partially explains why we did not follow up on the 2011 proposal initiative at that time. Besides, LDCs accession was the prime concern of several delegations, including my own. Therefore, implementation of MC8 Decision “to develop recommendations to further strengthen, streamline and operationalize the 2002 LDC Accession Guidelines, was the overriding objective, which resulted in Addendum1 to the 2002 GC Decision on Accession of LDCs.

The outcome of 25 July 2012 GC Decision included some of the elements sought in the April 2011 Proposal initiative. Transparency in accession negotiations was enhanced through several measures, as well as holding periodic dialogues under the aegis of the Sub-Committee on LDCs. The latter aspect is currently considered as part of LDC Group Post-Bali Work Programme under discussion in Geneva. Dialogue between WTO members and acceding LDCs is a good practice that was initiated, I must say by Accessions Division since 2009, and we look forward to collaborating with Mr. Osakwe and his team when an agreed date is established. Technical assistance and capacity building were equally included in the 2012 Decision with a view not only to assist acceding LDCs but also to “implement their commitments and to integrate them into the multilateral trading system”, i.e. in post accession phase. Technical assistance framework plans, entrusted to be drawn up by WTO Secretariat, to include assistance required to implement the Action Plans are meant to be assisted by WTO members during the transitional periods, as envisaged agreed during LDCs respective accession process. However, fact remains that such support is demand-driven and initialization rests -as always- with recently acceded LDCs.

My personal conclusion is that although many elements were covered - theoretically, at least- within LDCs accession guidelines both 2002 and 2012, the 2011 initiative remains a good tool to develop this important aspect further. Therefore, I propose to this RT meeting including a recommendation to reactivate and pursue this proposal further within LDC Group and the Sub-Committee on LDCs. Of course, a well-revised proposal could be developed based on new facts on the ground including 2012 revised guidelines.

Last, Chair, allow me to quickly share Yemen post-accession short but difficult experience. After all, accession is not an end by itself but rather a means to benefiting from such membership as well as to enable recently acceded countries to meaningfully integrate in global economy. Last year, I was in capital participating in a preparatory exercise for post-accession national work programme among other issues. A detailed implementation overall Action Plan matrix covering Yemen commitments and obligations within the timeframe established in Yemen WP report. A council of Ministers draft decision

were drawn defining steps and responsibilities of different relevant entities. Later in the year, due the security reasons, special training on notification obligations was convened in Geneva with WTO assistance. Unfortunately, in January this year a situation aroused in capital whereby the government could not function and deliver on its WTO commitments and obligation, for the time being! This situation equalizes a “force majeure” state of affairs. Nevertheless, we are very much hopeful that this situation shall end soon and we go back where we left-off few months ago. As far as Geneva participation is concerned, Yemen is a member of several groups within WTO negotiations and regular work affairs, namely 2 regional groups the Arab and Asian groups as well as the LDC group. Most of Yemen delegation activities in Geneva is closely coordinated and carried out within the last group, as LDCs group is the only formally recognized group by the UN system and WTO with clear classification. Of course, as a freshly acceded LDC, we also take high interest in the accession process notably of LDCs, as LDC Group Focal Point on Accession to WTO.

Chair, one last comment related to implementation if I may, I have noted with great interest the quite elaborate matrix plan developed by Tajikistan, which was presented by First Deputy Minister Mr. Nazriev, titled “Program of Adjustment of the Economy of the Republic of Tajikistan related to the Membership in the World Trade Organization”. The 9 sections contained in the document does not only covering implementation issues but also expand further into other equally important developmental areas. I sincerely think recently acceded WTO members can learn from this experience.

I shall end here, chair, and will be glad to discuss any matter related to this presentation today or anytime during our stay in beautiful Dushanbe.