

**UNECE/WTO TRADE POLICY FORUM ON CENTRAL ASIA AND THE MULTILATERAL
TRADING SYSTEM**

OPENING REMARKS BY CHIEDU OSAKWE, DIRECTOR, ACCESSIONS DIVISION, WTO

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- On behalf of WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all participants to this Trade Policy Forum for the Chief Trade Negotiators from Central Asia, the Caspian Region and Iran.
- This is the first WTO activity in Turkmenistan and we are honoured to co-organize it with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE).
- On behalf of the DG, I would like to thank the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting this joint event with the UNECE.
- Last year in Tajikistan, many here will remember that the WTO organized the Third China Round Table in Dushanbe. This Trade Policy Forum builds on that foundation. It reinforces the WTO's partnership with the region, which is of the strategic importance in the rapidly changing global economy.
 - There is a concentration of trade policy and trade negotiating wisdom in this room. This is why it is evident that this Forum will provide a golden opportunity for the sharing of experiences and for the Government of Turkmenistan to hear directly the experiences of WTO accessions – concluded and on-going accessions – and ask questions.
 - Yesterday, the WTO met with the representatives of the Inter-Agency Commission on WTO Accession, which is the body established in 2013 by Presidential Decree to study WTO accession, to engage in a dialogue.
 - One of the most frequently asked questions is what is the experience of our neighbours in WTO accessions"? I hope that the representatives of the Inter-Agency Commission, who are here in this room, will take full advantage of this rich gathering.
- Central Asia is a strategically important region. It is the region of priority for the WTO and for WTO Director General Roberto Azevêdo. Of the 5 countries of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan was the first Member, followed by Tajikistan. And last year, the WTO concluded the Accession of Kazakhstan – in a virtual 20-year marathon and without question the most complex accessions that the system has dealt with since GATT 1947. The results from the Accession of Kazakhstan significantly enriched the rules-based trading system, through improvements in market access, strengthening of the rules and fostering regional and international cooperation. The focus now turns to Uzbekistan with a legally established Accession Working Party and to Turkmenistan, studying the situation, improving its understanding and contemplating its next course of action.
- This month, the Director General Roberto Azevêdo will visit Kazakhstan. It will be the first time officially a WTO Director General will visit the region. He will join President Nazarbayev and other world leaders at the Astana Economic Forum.
 - He has met with representatives from this region this year, starting with the Foreign Minister Meredov in February. This week alone, the DG is meeting the representatives of Azerbaijan and Iran in Geneva.



- WTO Members are keen on the results and outcomes from this Trade Policy Forum, which would provide useful insights in improving the understanding of the region and formulating partnership with the region.
- In this regard, the WTO would also like to welcome the representative of the World Bank, who we believe can work together in supporting the region's integration agenda.
- A key advantage of this Forum is that it brings together the Chief Negotiators and expert officials who have been long, directly and deeply, engaged in the WTO accession processes.
 - We have gathered not only the governments that have negotiated or are negotiating the WTO accessions. But also, we have been able – indeed, very lucky - to have experienced and talented individuals here with us in the room today. There are many friends gathered here in the room today. Deputy Minister and Chief Negotiator of Azerbaijan Mamaguliyev; Nazriev; Nurgul, Alia, Sasha, Cecilia Klein, peerless in experience of accession negotiations. In many ways, the world of accession negotiations is the world she created in her over 30 years of government services in the USTR!!

So over the next few days, my colleague Maika and Oshikawa and I look forward to interacting with you and together moving forward to continue with the trade integration of Central Asia and its neighbours in a rapidly changing global economy.
