



WTO Accessions Newsletter

...safeguarding and strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system

IGA-AGENDA:

The 1st meeting of the Informal Group on Accessions (IGA) in 2015 took place today, 27 January. The meeting was chaired by the Director of the Accessions Division. IGA Members were briefed on: (i) concluded accession: Seychelles; (ii) the developments on the Accessions of Kazakhstan and Liberia; (iii) LDCs' accessions; (iv) the state-of-play in active non-LDCs' accessions; (v) accession WPs under "maintenance"; and, (vi) accession-specific technical assistance and outreach. The Secretariat consulted IGA Members on the updated ECAM: Evolving Calendar of Accession Meetings for 2015 (annexed). H.E. Ambassador Vesa Himanen (Finland), Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Kazakhstan, and H.E. Ambassador Joakim Reiter (Sweden), Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Liberia, reported to Members on item 2.



Approval of the Accession Package of the Republic of Seychelles by the General Council and the Signing Ceremony - 10 December 2014
(WTO Secretariat Photo / Souda Tandara-Stenier)

CONCLUDED ACCESSION: SEYCHELLES

The Accession Package of Seychelles was approved by the General Council on 10 December 2014. On 15 December 2014, the WTO Secretariat de-restricted Seychelles' accession documentation, in line with the Ministerial Council Decision WT/L/452 of 14 May 2002. Seychelles will become a WTO Member 30 days after it notifies the WTO of its acceptance of its accession terms and conditions. The WP Chairperson, Ms Hilda Al-Hinai (Oman), and Secretariat have been invited to Victoria, at the end of March, for a Parliamentary engagement to explain Seychelles' Terms and Conditions of WTO Membership, and associated benefits and obligations. Director Accessions conveyed to Members DG Azevêdo's appreciation for bringing this accession over the finish line. Every accession was yet another sign of the continued importance and health of the multilateral trading system.

ACCESSIONS - TOOLBOX

- > Click here for a list of current [Accession Working Parties](#) and [Accession Working Party Chairpersons](#)
- > Evolving Calendar of Accession Meetings (ECAM)
- > Secretariat Accessions Team
- > [WTO Director-General Annual Reports on Accessions](#)
- > Find all Article XII Members' specific accession commitments and related information provided in the Working Party Reports and Accession Protocols - in the [Accession Commitments Database \(ACDB\)](#)
- > [Handbook on Accessions to the WTO](#)
- > WTO Accessions Internship - "[China Programme](#)"
- > [Accession-Related Technical Assistance Activities](#)
- > For all official (de-restricted) documents relating to the accession processes of Article XII Members, click [here](#)
- > Accession Portal on the WTO Website ([En](#), [Fr](#), [Es](#))
- > All earlier [WTO Accessions Newsletters](#) are available on the Accession Portal of the WTO website, in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).
- > For enquiries related to the contents of the WTO Accessions Newsletter, send an e-mail to: Acceding-Government-Newsletter@wto.org

ACCESSION OF KAZAKHSTAN

H.E. Ambassador Vesa Himanen (Finland), Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Kazakhstan, briefed IGA Members on the state-of-play on the accession of Kazakhstan.

The accession of Kazakhstan was close to conclusion. Since the 2014 November Cycle, there had been continuing intensive engagement by Kazakhstan and Members, in various formats in Geneva, Astana and capitals. Negotiating efforts had focused on highly specific remaining questions on Agriculture, SPS and Tariff Adjustment. H.E. Minister Aitzhanova, Chief Negotiator, was in Geneva this week for a final round of consultations with Members, with the objective of resolving the remaining questions.

Ambassador Himanen urged Members to show pragmatism and lend support to Kazakhstan in the last leg of the accession journey.

As soon as the remaining issues are resolved and the inputs are submitted by Astana to the Secretariat, the Secretariat would be requested to incorporate them into the Draft Accession Package. The goal was to circulate the Draft Accession Package - consisting of three documents: (i) the Draft Working Party Report; (ii) the Draft Goods Schedule; and, (iii) the Draft Services Schedule - in the first week of February. The Draft Goods Schedule would first be circulated to the 29 Signatory Members, the Russian Federation and the Delegation of Kazakhstan, for technical verification, before circulation to all Working Party Members. The Director Accessions would be asked, in accordance with practice, to hold a Technical Verification Meeting on the Draft Goods Schedule, in mid-February. Thereafter, the next meeting of the Working Party would be convened, in mid-March.

The calendar with specific dates would be confirmed in WP Chairman's official communication to the WP Members, after the receipt of the final inputs from Astana. The WP Chairman informed Members that he would address his communication to them, shortly.



IGA meeting - 27 January 2015
(WTO Secretariat Photo / Souda Tandara-Stenier)

ACCESSION OF LIBERIA

H.E. Ambassador Joakim Reiter (Sweden), Chairman of the Working Party on the Accession of Liberia, reported to IGA Members on the state-of-play on the accession of Liberia.

The accession of Liberia was a priority for a 2015 conclusion, as set by H.E. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia in her communication to DG Azevêdo. Ambassador Reiter paid tribute to DG Azevêdo's leadership on the accession of Liberia. The WP Chairman was in steady coordination with Minister Axel Addy, the Chief Negotiator on the Accession of Liberia and Members to focus on the substance of Liberia's accession.

On Rules, the inputs had been circulated by the Secretariat on 28 November 2014. These included: Liberia's responses to Members' questions; the Legislative Action Plan (LAP) and the accompanying legislation; the Questionnaire on Import Licensing Procedures, and the SPS/TBT Action Plans. The immediate objective, based on substantial inputs submitted, was to prepare a Factual Summary (FS) which, if solid, could transform into a Draft Working Party Report (DWPR), over the next few weeks. As in all accessions, progress and conclusion were substance-driven. But the focus was for a 2015 conclusion.

The Initial Offers on Goods and Services had been circulated on 11 November. The Offers provided a substantive platform for the final offer by Liberia to all WTO Members on an MFN basis. The WP Chairman expressed his appreciation to WP Members for abiding by the suggestion on the Cover Note of the circulated offers that all Expressions of Interest (EOI) for bilateral market access be conveyed to the Secretariat and the WP Chairman, no later than 31 December 2014. At the close of the established timeline, six (6) Members had expressed their interest in bilateral negotiations with Liberia. The WP Chairman informed Members that he had formally advised Liberia to proceed, urgently, to negotiate and conclude the 6 bilateral market access negotiations and deposit the signed bilateral market access agreements with the Director-General. As soon as this was done, the Secretariat would proceed with the consolidation of the results. The indicative timeline was to circulate the consolidated market access results by end-June 2015.

The Liberian Negotiating Team was in town, led by the Chief Negotiator, to engage intensively with Members. Members were urged to support and assist Liberia as it proceeds with its negotiations.

Ambassador Reiter informed Members that he was deeply honoured by his appointment, by the UN Secretary-General, to serve as Deputy Secretary-General at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He would assume his new responsibilities on 1 April. In consultation with the Director-General and Members, a new WP Chairman would be designated. Ambassador Reiter assured Members that he would work to ensure, from his new position, that all essential resources were mobilized to support the 2015 conclusion of Liberia's WTO Accession.

LDCs' ACCESSIONS

Afghanistan: The Draft Accession Package, circulated on 3 March, remained stable. In November 2014, Afghanistan resumed its contacts with the Secretariat. Since the formation of the new Government, Kabul was in the process of drafting, adopting and enacting the remaining legislation which it was required to enact, in accordance with practice, prior to its WTO membership. Before the final WP meeting, Afghanistan would also need to update its Legislative Action Plan (last circulated on 3 March 2014), to reflect the most recent legislative developments. When the decision on the timeline of the accession is taken, Kabul would contact the Secretariat regarding the date of the next WP meeting; envisaged as the final. Members would be updated on any substantive developments and on calendar matters in relation to the date for the next meeting of the Working Party. Members requested ample time of no less than four to six weeks to review documentation before the next meeting was convened.

ACCESSION WORKING PARTIES (WP) IN FOCUS

Serbia: As part of the WTO Academic Support Programme, the Secretariat participated in the seminar: "Towards Serbia's WTO Membership - End game: Process, Management & Rules", organized by the Faculty of Economics of the University of Belgrade, from 15 to 17 December 2014. In parallel, meetings were held with Senior Officials in Belgrade with competence for Serbia's WTO Accession negotiations: (i) Mr Stevan Nikčević, State Secretary of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications; (ii) Mr Danilo Golubović, State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection; and (iii) Ms Bojana Todorović, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia and Serbia's WTO Accession Chief Negotiator. The meeting with the State Secretaries provided an opportunity to review the negotiating state-of-play and explore possibilities for moving ahead. Officials in Belgrade strongly reaffirmed the fundamental priority attached by Serbia to WTO accession, linked to its overall strategy for integration into the rules-based global economy. Questions remained to be addressed, and the government was working on them. Belgrade confirmed that it would stay in touch with the Secretariat and revert with essential updates and Next Steps, as soon as possible.



Seminar "Towards Serbia's WTO Membership - End game: Process, Management & Rules", Faculty of Economics of the University of Belgrade, 16 December 2014



Meetings with Ms Bojana Todorović, Serbia's WTO Accession Chief Negotiator; Mr Stevan Nikčević, State Secretary of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications; and Mr Danilo Golubović, State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection - Belgrade, 17 December 2014

MAINTENANCE WORK

The Secretariat reported on the technical state-of-play on several active accessions:

Azerbaijan: The revised draft Working Party Report had been circulated on 26 January, completing the set of inputs transmitted to Members, last year, namely the: Revised Agriculture Supporting Tables; Customs Valuation Questionnaire; Subsidies Checklist; Replies to Members' Questions; Revised Goods Offer; updated Legislative Action Plan; and the accompanying legislation. The revised services offer was yet to be submitted. The next cycle of WP meetings was envisaged for the first week of March. The meetings would include the Agriculture Plurilateral (5 March) and the 12th WP Meeting (6 March).

Belarus: On 9 January, Minsk had submitted inputs to update the Factual Summary and the LAP, which had last been updated in November 2012. The new inputs took account of recent developments at the domestic level and the level of the EAEU. Following consultations by the WP Chairman, Members would be informed on the Next Steps on the accession of Belarus.

OUTREACH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Preparatory work had started on the Second Global Seminar on WTO Accessions. The Seminar was planned to take place as part of the events to mark the 20th Anniversary of the WTO, in parallel to the WTO Public Forum, from 30 September to 2 October.

As part of the Seminar, on 30 September, WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo would launch the Accessions Book: "WTO Accessions and Trade Multilateralism: Case Studies and Lessons for the WTO at Twenty".

The Global Seminar would be structured around five high-level panels of former negotiators and international experts. Participation would be funded from Acceding Governments. Geneva-based officials from Article XII Members would also be invited to participate. The Secretariat would update Members on the progress in preparing for the Global Seminar.

ANNEX

EVOLVING CALENDAR OF ACCESSIONS MEETINGS (ECAM)¹

Date	Working Party	Meeting	Status	Room
Thursday, 29 January 2015	Informal Meeting at the level of Heads of Delegation			
[Friday, 20 February 2015]	General Council			
[Thursday, 26 February 2015]	IGA	2 nd 2015 Informal Group on Accessions (AM)	Convening Notice pending	E
[Thursday, 5 March 2015]	Azerbaijan	Plurilateral Meeting on Agriculture (PM)	Convening Notice pending	D
[Friday, 6 March 2015]	Azerbaijan	12 th Working Party Meeting (AM)	Convening Notice pending	D
[TBC – Final TVM]	Kazakhstan	Ongoing Technical Verification Meeting on Goods Schedule with Signatory Members (AM/PM)	Convening Notice pending	TBC
[TBC]	Kazakhstan	20 th and Final Working Party Meeting (AM/PM)	Convening Notice pending	TBC
[1 st /2 nd Quarter 2015]	Liberia	2 nd Working Party Meeting	Convening Notice pending	TBC
[TBC]	Afghanistan	5 th Working Party Meeting	Convening Notice pending	TBC

Note:

Enquiries related to this calendar should be addressed to: accessions@wto.org

¹ Dates are suggested to assist planning by Members, Acceding Governments and the Secretariat. However, listed meetings are not automatic and will only go ahead on the basis of inputs from Acceding Governments, received with sufficient time for review by Members, normally a period of at least four weeks. Scheduling and confirmation of meetings also take account of the distribution of meetings in any particular period, and hence, the capacity of Members and the Secretariat alike to cope.