



WTO ACCESSIONS NEWSLETTER

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WTO ACCESSION DEVELOPMENTS – SECRETARIAT REPORT TO MEMBERS

Ninth Session of the Informal Group on Accessions (IGA) – 28 October 2015

Agenda:

- ✚ Progress Report on LDCs' Accessions in 2015 Focus: **Afghanistan and Liberia**
- ✚ Accession Working Parties under Maintenance: **Belarus, The Bahamas, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon.**
- ✚ 2015 Director General's Annual Report on Accessions
- ✚ Accession-Specific Technical Assistance, Outreach and "WTO Post-Accession Support": 2015 Overview

Chaired by the WTO Secretariat (Director of the Accessions Division)

Progress Report on Accessions in 2015 Focus

Least-Developed countries (LDCs)

Afghanistan: H.E. Ambassador Roderick van Schreven (Netherlands), Chairperson of the Working Party on the Accession of Afghanistan, reported to IGA Members on the positive developments on the accession of Afghanistan. The recent decision by the Government of Afghanistan to proceed to conclude the accession of Afghanistan at MC10, had brought this accession to the threshold of conclusion. All WTO Members gave strong, unqualified and unanimous support to conclude this accession, as part of the overall support by the international community for the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to establish a solid foundation for its national (economic) prosperity and security. WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo was in direct communication with H.E. President Ghani. On the substance of the Draft Accession Package of Afghanistan, the WP Chairman recalled that the initial Draft Package had been circulated to WP Members on 3 March 2014. In light of the recent decision, the initial 2014 Draft Package had been updated by the WTO Secretariat in coordination with the Delegation of Afghanistan led by the Chief Negotiator, Mr. Mozammil Shinwari, Deputy Minister of Commerce and Industries. The updated Draft Accession Package of Afghanistan had been re-circulated to all WP Members, on Monday, 19 October 2015. The Draft Package consisted of the three standard components: (i) the draft Report of the Working Party; (ii) the draft Schedule of Concessions and Commitments on Goods; and, (iii) the draft Schedule of Specific Commitments on Services. The updated Legislative Action Plan was also re-circulated. The Director General Roberto Azevêdo had now convened the Fifth and final WP meeting of Afghanistan (airgram: WTO/AIR/ACC/6), for 11 November 2015. At the meeting, WP Members would be invited to consider and adopt the Draft Accession Package of Afghanistan, *ad referendum*, for transmission to the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference in December, for formal action.

The WP Chairman informed Members of the priority that the WTO Director-General attached to Post-Accession support for Afghanistan. The World Bank and the International Trade Center (ITC) were working with the WTO on Post-Accession Support for Afghanistan (and Liberia) in response to the request by the Director-General. Other development agencies were engaged. The Director-General had underscored the importance of ensuring that Afghanistan maximizes the gains from WTO membership and integration to the global market economy.

The WP Chairman praised the Government of Afghanistan for the strong leadership it had exercised in deciding on domestic reforms that had made possible the imminent conclusion of this accession. He expressed appreciation to Members for their support. Several Members intervened: Saudi Arabia, European Union, India, United States, China, Bangladesh (on behalf of LDCs), Yemen, Brazil and Chinese Taipei. They were unanimous in their support for the WTO Accession of Afghanistan and welcomed the imminent conclusion of the process. They expressed support for the Director-General's initiative on Post-Accession. The European Union and the United States are providing considerable long term support. China offered to provide such post-accession support to Afghanistan to complement the coordination of this support already underway. On behalf of the Director-General, Director Accessions thanked Members for their "full engagement". He stressed that the Afghan Draft Accession Package was of "high-quality and responded to Afghanistan's needs to improve its business environment and integrate into the global economy.



9th IGA Meeting – 28 October 2015
(WTO Secretariat Photo / Souda Tandara-Stenier)

2015 Accessions Maintenance

Belarus: Members were informed that the Secretariat and Belarus were actively and professionally engaged. The Secretariat had met with the recently appointed Ambassador of Belarus, H.E. Mr Yuri Ambrazevich. Secretariat / Belarus exchanges were under way as a prelude to the re-start of the Accession Negotiations of Belarus. Updated negotiating inputs on rules and market access would be a requirement, as would be a work calendar to assist the navigation of the process. Updated Negotiating Inputs would have to take account of developments in the Eurasian Economic Union and commitments undertaken by the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. A customized training session for negotiating officials would be organized.

The Bahamas: The Secretariat had reviewed Nassau's latest Negotiating Inputs which included: (i) the updated draft Factual Summary, (ii) an updated Legislative Action Plan and, (iii) three pieces of legislation (Value Added Tax Act 2014; Value Added Tax Regulations 2014; and Protection of Revenue Order). The review process had revealed that more technical work was required by Nassau. Feedback had been provided to Nassau and the WP Chairman, H.E. Mr. Wayne McCook (Jamaica), including advice on the way forward in this accession (updated roadmap, nomination of a Negotiating Team).

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The recently appointed Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. Mrs. Ljubic-Lepine, had recently met with WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo, on 26 October. She re-confirmed her Government's commitment to WTO Membership. The ball remained in the court of Sarajevo for the re-activation of its accession and expedited conclusion. DDG David Shark was consulting, on behalf of the General Council Chairman, to fill the chairmanship of this Working Party. On behalf of the Secretariat Team, the Director Accessions thanked Ambassador Istvan Major (Hungary), the former WP Chairman, for his contributions and dedication to this accession.

Lebanon: Beirut had submitted updated inputs in September (updated replies to Members' questions and three pieces of draft legislation). Technical exchanges with Beirut were on-going. Outstanding inputs included factual updates to the draft Report of the Working Party to reflect developments since 2009, an updated Legislative Action Plan (LAP) and, updated initial market access offers on goods and services.



Briefing on Accessions for GRULAC – 28 October 2015
(WTO Secretariat Photo / Souda Tandara-Stenier)

LDCs accessions (cont'd)

Liberia: Members had adopted, *ad referendum*, the Draft Accession Package of Liberia at the 4th and Final WP Meeting, which had taken place on 6 October 2015. The Accession Package had been re-issued under the double symbol of WT/ACC/LBR/23 and WT/MIN(15)/2, on 9 October. It would be transmitted to MC10 for formal action by Members. The Director Accessions invited Members to offer post-accession support to Monrovia in the areas of SPS, TBT and the creation of a "Single Window for Business and Trade Facilitation".

Comoros: Technical exchanges with Moroni were ongoing regarding inputs received on 18 September 2015 (replies to Members' questions on the MFTR, initial market access offers on goods and services, a draft LAP, completed questionnaires on import licensing, customs valuation, TBT, STEs, SPS and TRIPS). The first meeting of the Working Party would be convened in the first half of 2016, after the current set of negotiating inputs had been completed to WTO standards and Members would have had, at the minimum, four weeks to review the updated inputs.

Director-General's Annual Report on Accessions

The IGA was informed that in accordance with practice, there would be the standard standing item at the last General Council of the year: - "Annual Report of the Director-General on Accessions". Under this item, after the presentation of the Director-General's Report, Members would intervene with comments and questions. The plan was to circulate the Report in mid-November.



Mission to Washington, D.C. - 13-16 October 2015

Accession-Specific Technical Assistance and Outreach Activities: 2015 Overview

- ✚ On behalf of the Director-General Azevedo, Director Accessions thanked Members for their participation and contributions to the series of activities in the [WTO 20th Anniversary Accessions Programme](#), which was held from 28-30 September 2015.
- ✚ In October, the Secretariat had launched the "[e-lecture/webinar](#)" format to reach out to participants across the globe. The first two of these e-lecture series, co-organized with ITTC's eLearning Unit, had taken place on 7 and 14 October. The first lecture had been on "The Power and Relevance of the WTO" by Chiedu Osakwe; and, the second on, "Macro WTO and Micro GPA Accessions" by Rob Anderson and Anna Müller.
- ✚ [An outreach mission to Washington, D.C.](#) had taken place on 13-16 October. The programme included: (i) a Carnegie Endowment 'policy discussion session' on "The Future of Trade Multilateralism"; (ii) lecture at the American University; and, (iii) inter-agency meetings with the World Bank and the IMF. The US trade policy community welcomed the outreach, which had "contributed to the efforts by many to enhance the understanding of policy makers outside Geneva on the work and relevance of the WTO. There was more to the WTO than Doha!"
- ✚ The [Annual Outreach Cycle](#) with WTO Regional Groups had started. Outreach engagements had been concluded with the Least developed countries in the context of the LDCs' Sub-Committee and with GRULAC. Others had been or were being scheduled with the African Group, Arab Group, Asian Group of Developing Members, the Informal Group of Developing Countries and, the LDCs Consultative Group.
- ✚ The [4th China Roundtable](#) would take place in Nairobi, on 13-14 December, back-to-back with MC10. The focus would be on "Domestic Reforms for Competitiveness and Deeper Trade Integration in the Global Economy". Invitations had been sent to all African and LDCs' Ministers. Confirmations had been received from 25 Ministers. The programme was available on the WTO Website.

EVOLVING CALENDAR OF ACCESSIONS MEETINGS (ECAM)

DATE	WORKING PARTY	MEETING	STATUS	ROOM
Wednesday, 28 October 2015	IGA	9 th 2015 Informal Group on Accessions (9:00-10:00)	Convening fax dated 22/10/2015 refers	E
Wednesday, 11 November 2015	Afghanistan	5 th and Final Working Party Meeting (AM)	WTO/AIR/ACC/6 dated 28/10/2015 refers	W
[Tuesday, 24 November 2015]	IGA	10 th 2015 Informal Group on Accessions (9:00-10:00)	Convening Notice pending	S2
[30 Nov – 1 Dec 2015]	General Council			
[13-14 December 2015]	4 th China Round Table - Nairobi, Kenya			
[15-18 December 2015]	10 th Ministerial Conference – Nairobi, Kenya			
2016				
[First Quarter 2016]	Comoros	1 st Working Party Meeting	Convening Notice pending	TBC

ACCESSIONS TOOLBOX

- ✚ [Accession Working Parties](#)
- ✚ [Accession Working Party Chairpersons](#)
- ✚ [WTO Director-General's Annual Reports on Accessions](#)
- ✚ [Handbook on Accessions to the WTO](#)
- ✚ [Accession-Related Technical Assistance Activities](#)
- ✚ Accession Portal on the WTO Website ([En](#), [Fr](#), [Es](#))

- ✚ Evolving Calendar of Accession Meetings (ECAM)
- ✚ [Accession Commitments Database \(ACDB\)](#)
- ✚ WTO Accessions Internship - "[China Programme](#)"
- ✚ Accession processes of Article XII Members, click [here](#)
- ✚ [WTO Accessions Newsletters](#)

✚ Contact the WTO Accessions Secretariat: accessions.newsletter@wto.org