11TH China Round Table on WTO Accessions

WTO Accessions AND TRADE INTEGRATION: Stories from THE Asia-PacifiC

A Retrospective of 10 Years of Lao PDR's Membership in the WTO

1-3 February 2023, Vientiane, Lao PDR

Concept Note and Draft Programme

Background

2023 marks 10 years since Lao PDR became the 158th Member of the World Trade Organization on 2 February 2013, following 15 years of accession negotiations. This is the most recent of the WTO accessions from the Asia-Pacific Region. In total, 10 Members from region have acceded to the WTO pursuant to Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement: **Mongolia** in 1997; **China** in 2001; **Chinese Taipei** in 2002; **Nepal[[1]](#footnote-1)\*** and **Cambodia\*** in 2004; **Viet Nam** and **Tonga** in 2007; **Samoa\*** and **Vanuatu\*** in 2012; **Lao PDR\*** in 2013. These countries and territories constitute 28% of all completed accessions and 55% of LDC accessions to date, representing a second largest group of Article XII Members (after ones from Eurasia) and the largest share among Article XII LDCs, and contributing to expansion of WTO rules by 12.5 % of world trade.[[2]](#footnote-2) With several large economies actively pursuing WTO membership and regional integration, the Asia-Pacific Region continues to be a strong source of strength and dynamism for the rules-based multilateral trading system.

Currently, two more LDCs from the Asia-Pacific Region – **Bhutan\*** and **Timor-Leste\*** – are in the process of acceding to the WTO. While Bhutan's accession is yet to be activated, Timor‑Leste's accession is one of the most actively moving, with the prospect of conclusion in 2023. When concluded, together with Comoros, it would be the first LDC accession since 2016, when Afghanistan and Liberia last joined the Organization. Both Timor-Leste and Comoros contribute to the establishment of the updated LDC accession and post-accession best practices, in terms of substance (including novel accession commitments) and procedure.

11TH CHINA ROUND TABLE

Since 2012, the China Round Table (CRT) has served a platform for stakeholders' dialogue on WTO accessions, aiming to sustain discussions on the integration of new members in the rules-based multilateral trading system. To date, 10 Round Tables have been hosted in four continents: CRT-01 in Beijing, China (2012); CRT-02 in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR (2013); CRT-03 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2015); CRT-04 in Nairobi, Kenya (2015); CRT-05 in Siem Reap, Cambodia (2017); CRT-06 in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2017); CRT-07 in Astana, Kazakhstan (2018); CRT-08 in Moscow, Russian Federation (2019); CRT-09 in Geneva, Switzerland (2020) and CRT-10 in a virtual format (2022). These Round Tables have provided a forum for experience sharing on best practices on WTO accession and post-accession, especially for developing countries and LDCs, and for exploring how WTO accessions could continue strengthening the multilateral trading system.

On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of WTO Accession of Lao PDR, the China Round Table is once again hosted in Lao PDR. Building on the success of the 2nd Round Table, which took place after Lao PDR's accession, the 11th Round Table titled "**WTO Accessions and Trade Integration: Stories from the Asia-Pacific**" will discuss the role and contributions of the Asia-Pacific economies to the rules-based multilateral trading system, and the latest best practices for LDC accessions and post-accession. Following the results of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12), the Round Table will also explore the evolvement of multilateral discussions in ongoing WTO accessions and the potential implications of the latest multilateral and plurilateral outcomes and initiatives on the evolving accession negotiating *acquis*.

The highlight of the Round Table will be the High-Level session on Lao PDR's 10-Year Anniversary and the launch of the study "**Lao PDR: a Retrospective on 10 Years of WTO Membership**" which aims to assess the impact and results of Lao PDR's integration into the multilateral trading system.

# PROGRAMME

The programme of the 11th China Round Table is structured into the following sessions:

* Session 1: WTO Accessions and Trade Integration: Stories from Asia-Pacific - Experiences, Lessons Learned and Way Forward;
* Session 2: LDC Accessions and Post-Accession – Latest Experiences and Best Practices;
* Session 3: Lao PDR Anniversary: 10 Years OF WTO Membership – Looking Back and Looking Ahead;
* Session 4: Launch of the study: "A Retrospective of 10 Years of Lao PDR's Membership in the WTO"; and,
* Session 5: WTO Accessions *Aquis*: Latest Developments.

The sessions are spread across 3 days. To enable a lively exchange during the Round Table, all participants are invited to actively participate in the discussions and be ready to fill one or more designated roles, such as that of a panellist, a commentator, or a moderator.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

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| **DAY 1 – WEDNESDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 2023****OPENING SESSION**  |
| **8:30 – 9:00** | **Registration** |
| **9:00 – 10:00** | ***Moderator:*** *Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO***Welcome remarks:*** Opening remarks by Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen, WTO Deputy Director-General
* Welcome remarks by *Minister/Vice Minister of Industry and Commerce of Lao PDR - TBC*
* Introductory remarks by *representative of China - TBC*
 |
| **10:00 – 10:30** | **Group photo and Coffee Break** |
| **SESSION 1: WTO ACCESSIONS AND TRADE INTEGRATION: STORIES FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC - EXPERIENCES, LESSONS LEARNED AND WAY FORWARD** |
| **10:30 – 12:30** | **Moderator:** *TBC***Round Table discussion:** * *Representatives of China; Lao PDR; Mongolia; Nepal; Cambodia; Viet Nam; Tonga; Samoa; Vanuatu* - *TBC*

**Commentators:** * *WTO Members and Observers, incl. ones from the Region – TBC*
* *Representatives of int. organizations and regional blocs incl. ASEAN - TBC*

*Followed by open discussion* |
| **12:30 – 14:00** | **Lunch Break** |
| **SESSION 2: LDC ACCESSIONS AND POST-ACCESSION: LATEST EXPERIENCES** **AND BEST PRACTICES**  |
| **14:00 – 15:30** | **Moderator:** *TBC***Presentation by the WTO Secretariat on LDC accessions** *- TBC***Speakers:** * **WTO/ASEAN accessions as pathway to Timor-Leste's regional and global economic integration: state of play and prospects** – H.E. Mr Joaquim Amaral, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Chief Negotiator for WTO Accession, Timor-Leste
* *Representative of Comoros* **–** *TBC*
* *Chairpersons of the Working Parties on the WTO Accessions of Comoros and Timor-Leste – TBC*

**Commentators*:**** **Mobilizing support: Engagement with international stakeholders and development partners** – *Representatives of the EIF/ITC/WBG/UNESCAP/ADB/g7+ – TBC*
* *Representatives of WTO Members - TBC*

*Followed by open discussion* |
| **15:30 – 16:00** | **Coffee break** |
| **16:00 – 17:30** | **Moderator:** *TBC***Presentation by the WTO Secretariat on post-accession** *- TBC***Round Table discussion**:* Representatives of LDC acceding governments and LDC Article XII Members - *TBC*

**Commentators**: * *Representatives of development partners – TBC*

*Followed by open discussion* |

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| **DAY 2 – THURSDAY, 2 February 2023****Session 3:** **HIGH-LEVEL Session - Lao PDR Anniversary: 10 years of WTO Membership – Looking back and looking ahead** |
| **9:00 – 10:00** | **Moderator:** *DDG Xiangchen ZHANG, WTO (TBC)** Minister / Vice Minister of Industry and Commerce*,* Lao PDR
* Minister of Commerce, China - *TBC*

*Interventions by partners - TBC* |
| **10:00 – 10:30** | **Coffee Break** |
| **10:30 – 12:00** | **Moderator:** Ms Vilayphone Xindavong, Deputy Director General, Department of Foreign Trade Policy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Lao PDR***Presentations/Speakers:*** * Lao PDR – WTO Accession Negotiations and 10 Years of WTO Membership in Perspective - *H.E. Mrs. Khemmani Pholsena, former Minister of Industry and Commerce and Chief Negotiator, Lao PDR*
* Private Sector – Government-Business Partnership – Examples in the context of Lao PDR accession negotiations
* WTO and ASEAN: Lao PDR's accession and membership
* Lao PDR's participation in the ITA/ITA-II

*Followed by open discussion*  |
| **12:00 -13:30** | **Lunch** |
| **SESSION 4:****LAUNCH OF STUDY: A retrospective on 10 years of Lao PDR's WTO Membership** |
| **13:30 – 15:30** | **Moderator:**Ms Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO* **Launch of the study: A retrospective on 10 years of Lao PDR's WTO Membership -** *Patrick Low - TBC*

**Speakers:*** The Role of Lao PDR in the WTO - *Mr Saysana Sayakone, Director General, Department of Foreign Trade Policy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Lao PDR*
* Lao PDR's Trade Policy Review - *TBC*

**Commentators -** *TBC**Followed by open discussion* |
| **18:00** | **Official Dinner/Reception hosted by Government of Lao PDR** |

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| **DAY 3 – FRIDAY, 3 February 2023****Session 5:** **WTO ACCESSIONS *aquis* – latest developments** |
| **09:00 – 10:30** | **Moderator:** *TBC** **Presentation by WTO Secretariat -** *TBC*

**Speakers -** *TBC:** State of Play on Joint Initiatives - E-Commerce; Investment Facilitation; Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) and Domestic Regulation in Services
* WTO Plurilateral Agreements – latest accession experiences;
* Multilateral Outcomes - MC12 results and impact on WTO Accessions

**Commentators:*** *Article XII Members/acceding governments – sharing experience - TBC*

*Open discussion* |
| **10:30 – 11:00** | *Coffee Break* |
| **CLOSING SESSION** |
| **11:00 – 12:00** | **Moderator:** *TBC***Concluding remarks*** *Representative of China - TBC*
* Report on the Outcome of the 11th China Round Table – Mr Saysana Sayakone, Director General, Department of Foreign Trade Policy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Lao PDR
* Ms Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO
 |
| **12:00 -13:30** | **Lunch** |
| **From 13:30** | ***Cultural visit – cultural programme*** |

**Participants**

**LDC Acceding Governments [Minister/Chief Negotiator + 2] - Funded**

1. Bhutan
2. Comoros\*
3. Ethiopia
4. Sao Tomé and Principe\*
5. Somalia\*
6. South Sudan
7. Sudan
8. Timor-Leste

*[\* Subject to Category II/III Administrative Measures]*

**LDC Article XII Members [Minister/Chief Negotiator] - Funded**

1. Mongolia
2. China
3. Nepal
4. Cambodia
5. Viet Nam
6. Tonga
7. Samoa
8. Vanuatu
9. Lao PDR (Host country) – *10 participants (coffee break/lunch only)[[3]](#footnote-3)*
10. Yemen
11. Afghanistan

**Members - non-funded**

1. Australia
2. New Zealand
3. European Union
4. United States
5. Singapore
6. Japan
7. Korea
8. Thailand

**External Experts/Resources – Funded as speaker**

1. Amb. Rui Macieira (Portugal), Working Party Chair on the Accession of Timor-Leste,
2. Amb. Omar Zniber (Morocco), Working Party Chair on the Accession of Comoros,
3. Mr Zulkifli Hasan, Minister of Trade, Indonesia (as ASEAN Chair),
4. Mr Yi Xiaozhun, former DDG, WTO; former Chairperson on the Working Party on the Accession of Lao PDR,
5. Mr Patrick Low, former Chief Economist, WTO,
6. Mr Mozammil Shinwari, former Deputy Minister of Industry and Commerce, Chief Negotiator on Afghanistan's WTO Accession,
7. Mr Axel Addy, former Minister of Commerce and Industry, Chief Negotiator on Liberia's WTO Accession.

**International Organisations and partners – Non-funded**

1. ASEAN Secretariat
2. PIFS Secretariat
3. UNESCAP
4. Asian Development Bank
5. International Trade Centre (ITC)
6. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
7. World Bank (WB)
8. EIF
9. g7+

**ROUND TABLE FOCAL POINTS**

**Government of China**

1. Mr Yu Yongbing (yuyongbing@mofcom.gov.cn)

**Government of Lao PDR**

1. Ms Vilayphone Xindavong, Deputy Director General, Department of Foreign Trade Policy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, email: v.xindavong@laoftpd.com
2. Ms. Souvipha Inthavong, Deputy Director of Multilateral Trade Division, Department of Foreign Trade Policy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, email: s.inthavong@laoftpd.com.

**WTO Secretariat**

1. DDG Xiangchen Zhang (xiangchen.zhang@wto.org);
2. Ms Maika Oshikawa (maika.oshikawa@wto.org);
3. Ms Anna Varyanik (anna.varyanik@wto.org);
4. Mr. Dimitar Bratanov (dimitar.bratanov@wto.org);
5. Ms Souda Tandara-Stenier (souda.tandara-stenier@wto.org);
6. Mr. Souksana Sisomphone (souksana.sisomphone@wto.org)

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1. \* Least-developed country (LDC). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As of 2020. Source: [WTO | Trade Statistics - Trade profiles](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/trade_profiles_list_e.htm). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *In addition, Lao PDR is planning to invite 50 government officials/private sector representatives on Day 2 (non-funded).*  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)