12TH China Round Table on WTO Accessions

ARAB PERSPECTIVES ON WTO ACCESSIONS AND THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM

24-25 February 2024, Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre[[1]](#footnote-1)

Concept Note and Preliminary Programme

introduction and Background

The [China Round Table (CRT)](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/pillar2_e.htm) is an annual high-level gathering of acceding governments and WTO members interested in accession to discuss the integration of new members in the rules-based multilateral trading system. Since the first Round Table ([CRT-1](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/beijingroundtable_e.htm)) was held in Beijing, China in 2012, ten more have been held in various locations around the world, including on the margins of the WTO Ministerial Conferences (MCs). These include: [CRT-2](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/prog_chinaroundtable13_e.pdf) in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR (2013); [CRT-3](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/beijingroundtable2015_e.htm) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2015); [CRT-4](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/chinaround2015_e.htm) in Nairobi, Kenya (2015), on the margins of MC10; [CRT-5](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/chinaround2017_e.htm) in Siem Reap, Cambodia (2017); [CRT-6](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/6th_chinaround2017_e.htm) in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2017) on the margins of MC11; [CRT-7](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/progseventhchinaround_e.htm) in Astana, Kazakhstan (2018); [CRT-8](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/8thcrt_e.htm) in Moscow, Russian Federation (2019); [CRT-9](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/9thcrt_e.htm) in Geneva, Switzerland (2020), [CRT-10](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/10thcrt_e.htm) in a virtual format (2022) and [CRT-11](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/acc_0102202309_e/acc_0102202309_e.htm) in Vientiane, Lao PDR (2023). Various topics have been covered in Round Table discussions, ranging from systemic contributions that WTO accessions make in strengthening the multilateral trading system to experience sharing on best practices on WTO accession and post-accession, especially for LDCs or with a regional focus.

The 12th China Round Table (CRT-12) will take place on **24-25 February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE),** on the margins of the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13). This is the first Round Table organized in the Arab region. The focus of this Round Table will be *Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System*.

The Arab region is one of the most under-represented in the WTO. Of the 22 members of the Arab League, only 13 are members and nine are observers of different types. Out of the 13 members, the Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen joined the WTO through the accession process pursuant to Article XII of the Agreement Establishing the WTO (the Marrakesh Agreement) between 2000 and 2014. Today, Algeria, Comoros, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic are in the Article XII accession process, while Palestine has had an ad hoc observer status in the WTO Ministerial Conferences since 2005. The eight Arab acceding governments have been in the process, on average, for close to 20 years, while some of the processes have been inactive for many years. Together with Timor‑Leste, Comoros is a candidate to join the WTO at MC13.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala highlighted during the 2nd High Level Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Arab Region: "With several Arab acceding governments expected to step up engagement at the WTO this year, especially in the case of Comoros, we should step up our joint efforts to support them. One potentially useful point of action could be to put together a study detailing the accession and post-accession experiences of Article XII members from the region. This could serve as a guide for Arab countries working to revive their accession negotiations and would yield insights for how best the international community could support Arab accessions or Arab countries' participation in the WTO more generally." On Trade for peace, the Director-General noted that "The Trade for Peace agenda has brought to light how reforms associated with the WTO accession process can help Arab countries build resilience and foster prosperity, peace and stability."

The 12th China Round Table will aim to:

* draw from the experiences of original WTO and Article XII Arab members to help better equip Arab acceding governments to navigate the accession process through lessons learned. The importance of trade in Arab economies including how to best utilize WTO membership to ensure economic policy coherence will also be explored.
* explore how Arab acceding governments could benefit from economic growth and development by accelerating their accession process to the WTO, drawing on the key findings from the study "Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going accession in the region", prepared by the WTO, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Islamic Development Bank.
* host a special pre-launch of the upcoming publication provisionally entitled "Trade for Peace: An Integrated Perspective on the Role of Trade to Support Peace and Economic Development", edited by Mr. Patrick Low, former WTO Chief Economist.
* host a high-level session " Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System" with the participation of Arab ministers.

# structure of the PROGRAMME

The programme of the 12th China Round Table is structured into the following sessions:

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| **Day 1: Saturday, 24 February 2024** | |
| Session 1 | Arab Participation in the WTO: Past, Present and Future |
| Session 2 | Joint-Arab study: "Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going accessions in the region |
| Special Event | Pre-Launch of Book "Trade for Peace: An Integrated Perspective on the Role of Trade to Support Peace and Economic Development" |
| **Day 2: Sunday, 25 February 2024** | |
| High-Level Session | Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System |

**DRAFT PROGRAMME**

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| **DAY 1 – SATURDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2024** | |
| **9:00 – 9:30** | **Registration** |
| **9:30 – 10:00** | **Opening Ceremony**  **Moderator:** Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO  **Opening remarks:**   * Representative of UAE * Ambassador LI Chenggang, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO (TBC) * Official Opening of the 12th China Round Table, Ambassador ZHANG Xiangchen, WTO Deputy Director-General |
| **10:00 – 10:30** | ***Group photo and Coffee break*** |
| **SESSION 1: Arab Participation in the WTO: Past, Present and Future**  *Eight Arab countries joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and subsequently the WTO. Four Arab countries joined the WTO under Article XII of the Agreement Establishing the WTO (the Marrakesh Agreement) between 2000 and 2014. These 13 countries represent approximately 8% of total WTO membership and 5% of world trade. This session will assess the participation of Arab members in the WTO with a focus on benefits from WTO membership.* | |
| **10:30 – 12:30** | **Moderator:** Mr Dimitar Bratanov, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Ambassador Saqer Abdullah AlMoqbel, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the WTO, Coordinator of Arab Group and Chair of Working Party on the Accession of Iraq to WTO (TBC) * Representative of the Arab League * Speakers from Arab Original Members, Article XII and Acceding Governments   *Followed by open discussion* |
| **12:30 – 14:00** | ***Lunch*** |
| **SESSION 2: "Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going accessions in the region**  *"Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Countries: Lessons from Past and On-going Accessions" is a joint study with the collaboration of four partner organizations (WTO, the Arab Monetary Fund, the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Center for Trade Development which aims at providing factual accounts of past and on-going Arab accessions, as well as the post-accession performance of Article XII Arab members, including their participation in the WTO. This session will present the main findings and recommendations of the Joint Arab Study for WTO Accessions. This will be followed by an open discussion among participants.* | |
| **14:00 – 16:30** | **Moderators:**  Ms. Mena Hassan, Economic Affairs Officer, Accessions Division, WTO and Ms. Souda Tandara-Stenier, Divisional Coordinator, Accessions Division, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Mr. Hamid Mamdouh, Senior Counsel, King & Spalding LLP and Former Director of Trade in Services and Investment Division, WTO (TBC) * Dr. Linda F. Kassem, International Trade Lawyer & Public Policy Consultant (TBC)   **Commentators:**   * Representatives of Observer Governments and Article XII Members   *Followed by open discussion* |
| **16:30 – 17:00** | ***Coffee break*** |
| **SPECIAL EVENT:** **Pre-Launch of Book "Trade for Peace: An Integrated Perspective on the Role of Trade to Support Peace and Economic Development"**  *The session will present the preliminary findings from the forthcoming publication entitled "Trade for Peace: An Integrated Perspective on the Role of Trade to Support Peace and Economic Development". The new publication showcases the linkages between trade and peace through revisited economic evidence and cases studies, and more specifically, highlights the socio-political, governance and macro-economic determinants that are needed to allow trade and trade policy to make a positive contribution to peace.* | |
| **17:00 – 18:00** | **Moderator:** Mr. Mustapha Sadni Jallab, Chief, Knowledge Management Section, Knowledge Management Division, WTO  **Speakers:**  - Mr. Patrick Low, former Chief Economist, WTO (TBC)  - Mr. Alan Wolff, former Deputy Director-General, WTO (TBC)  - Ms Anna Varyanik, Legal Affairs Officer, WTO |
| **18:00** | **Official Reception (TBC)** |

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| **DAY 2 – SUNDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2024**  **HIGH-LEVEL Session** | |
| **08:30 – 9:00** | **Welcome Coffee** |
| **Opening Session of the High Level Session** | |
| **09:00 – 10:00** | **Moderator:**Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO  **Opening remarks**   * Dr. Ngozi OKONJO-IWEALA, Director-General, WTO - TBC * H.E. Mr. WANG Wentao, Minister of Commerce, People's Republic of China (TBC) * Dr. Thani bin Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade, UAE and Chairperson of the 13th Ministerial Conference (TBC)   **Special remarks**   * H.E. Mr. Azali Assoumani, President, Union of Comoros (TBC) * H.E. Mr. Xanana Gusmâo, Prime Minister, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (TBC) |
| **10:00 – 10:30** | ***Group Photo – Heads of Delegation only*** |
| **High-Level Session: Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System**  *This high-level session will draw from the experiences of original WTO and Article XII Arab members to help better equip Arab acceding governments to navigate the accession process. The session will also highlight the importance of trade in Arab economies including how to best utilize WTO membership to ensure economic policy coherence. The findings and recommendations of the Joint Arab Study for WTO Accessions will also be presented.* | |
| **10:30 – 12:30** | **Moderator:** Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen, Deputy Director-General, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Minister of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Coordinator of the Arab Group * Arab Ministers from original WTO Members * Arab Ministers from Article XII Members * Additional speakers from the Arab region including Acceding Governments   *Followed by open discussion* |

**Participants[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**Participation is open to all acceding governments, Article XII members and interested WTO members.**

**Acceding Governments (24)**

1. Algeria
2. Andorra
3. Azerbaijan
4. Bahamas
5. Belarus
6. Bhutan\*
7. Bosnia and Herzegovina
8. Comoros\*
9. Curaçao
10. Equatorial Guinea
11. Ethiopia\*
12. Iran
13. Iraq
14. Lebanese Republic
15. Libya
16. Sao Tomé and Principe\*
17. Serbia
18. Somalia\*
19. South Sudan\*
20. Sudan\*
21. Syrian Arab Republic
22. Timor-Leste\*
23. Turkmenistan
24. Uzbekistan

**MC13 observer governments**

1. Palestine

**Article XII Members**

1. Afghanistan\*
2. Albania
3. Armenia
4. Cabo Verde
5. Cambodia\*
6. China
7. Ecuador
8. Georgia
9. Jordan
10. Kazakhstan
11. Kyrgyz Republic
12. Lao People’s Democratic Republic\*
13. Liberia\*
14. North Macedonia
15. Moldova
16. Mongolia
17. Montenegro
18. Nepal\*
19. Oman
20. Panama
21. Samoa
22. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
23. Seychelles
24. Tajikistan
25. Chinese Taipei
26. Tonga
27. Russian Federation
28. Ukraine
29. Vanuatu
30. Viet Nam
31. Yemen\*

**CRT-12 is open to all interested Members**

**External Experts/Resources**

1. Mr Patrick Low, former Chief Economist, WTO
2. Mr Alan Wolff, former Deputy Director-General, WTO
3. Mr. Hamid Mamdouh, Senior Counsel, King & Spalding LLP and Former Director of Trade in Services and Investment Division, WTO
4. Dr. Linda F. Kassem, International Trade Lawyer & Public Policy Consultant
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**International Organisations and partners**

1. Arab Monetary Fund (AMF)
2. Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)
3. International Trade Centre (ITC)
4. International Monetary Fund (IMF)
5. World Bank (WB)
6. EIF
7. g7+

**ROUND TABLE FOCAL POINTS**

**WTO Secretariat, Accessions Division**

1. Ms Maika Oshikawa, Director (tel: +41 22 739 5643; e-mail: [maika.oshikawa@wto.org](mailto:maika.oshikawa@wto.org))
2. Mr Dimitar Bratanov, Counsellor (tel: +41 22 739 6023; e-mail: [dimitar.bratanov@wto.org](mailto:dimitar.bratanov@wto.org))
3. Ms Anna Varyanik, Legal Affairs Officer (tel: +41 22 739 6231; e-mail: [anna.varyanik@wto.org](mailto:anna.varyanik@wto.org))
4. Ms. Mena Hassan, Economic Affairs Officer (tel: +41 22 739 6522; e-mail: [mena.hassan@wto.org](mailto:mena.hassan@wto.org))
5. Ms Souda Tandara-Stenier, Divisional Coordinator, (tel: +41 22 739 6321; e-mail: [souda.tandara-stenier@wto.org](mailto:souda.tandara-stenier@wto.org))

**Government of China**

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2. Ms. YANG Tian, Third Secretary (tel: +41 22 909 7678; email: [yangtian@mofcom.gov.cn](mailto:yangtian@mofcom.gov.cn))

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1. The event will be broadcasted live. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \* LDC, as of 1 December 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)