Second CENTRAL ASIA TRADE POLICY FORUM: Economic Integration through wto accession and membership

Hotel Dostyk (TBC)

3-5 June 2024, Almaty, Kazakhstan

**DRAFT PROGRAMME (as of 16 April 2024)**

The Secretariat of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in partnership with the Government of Kazakhstan, will organize the second Central Asia Trade Policy Forum in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 3-5 June 2024. The thematic focus of the Forum is *"Economic integration through WTO accession and membership".*

This Forum will bring together senior government officials responsible for WTO‑related issues from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan became members of the WTO in 1998, 2013 and 2015, respectively. Uzbekistan has intensified its WTO accession negotiations with the aim of achieving WTO membership soon. Azerbaijan reactivated its accession process in 2023 with the intention to accelerate. Turkmenistan initiated WTO accession negotiations in 2022.

Representatives of selected international organizations and the private sector will also be invited.

The objectives of this Forum are to:

* promote the integration of Central Asia into the multilateral trading system through WTO accessions; and
* share experiences and lessons learned on WTO accessions and post-accession with a view to enhancing participants' knowledge of the policy implications of WTO accession and membership.

| **TIME** | **SESSION** |
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| **DAY 1, MONDAY, 3 JUNE 2024** |
| **09:00-09:30** | **Registration** |
| **09:30-10:00** | **Opening ceremony*** Opening remarks by the WTO
* Welcome remarks by Kazakhstan
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| **10:00-10:30** | **Group photo**  |
| **SESSION 1: WTO ACCESSION: PROCESS AND ACQUIS**This session will explain in detail the process of joining the WTO by distilling the multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral tracks of WTO accession negotiations. It will also review the accession "acquis" based on the experience of the 36 Article XII Members, including the benchmarks set by WTO accession commitments in the areas of WTO rules and market access. |
| **10:30-12:30** | **Presentation** by [WTO resource persons TBC] **Commentators: TBD****Open discussion**  |
| **12:30-14:30** | **Lunch break** |
| **SESSION 2: DOMESTIC PREPARATION AND COORDINATION IN ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS: PERSPECTIVES OF NEGOTIATORS**The WTO accession process typically involves domestic structural reforms encompassing a wide range of national trade and economic policies. This requires efficient coordination and management of domestic inter-ministerial and inter-agency processes, in addition to consultations with other stakeholders such as the parliament, business and academia. Enhanced internal coordination has, therefore, the potential to provide a significant boost to domestic economic and institutional reform efforts.  |
| **14:30-16:00** | **Presentation** by [WTO resource persons TBC]**Panel discussion****Moderator:** [WTO resource person TBC]**Speakers*** Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic (TBC);
* Representative of Kazakhstan (TBC);
* Representative of Tajikistan (TBC);
* Representative of Azerbaijan (TBC);
* Representative of Turkmenistan (TBC);
* Representative of Uzbekistan (TBC).
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| **16:00-16:15** | **Coffee break** |
| **SESSION 3: SUPPORT FOR ACCESSION AND POST-ACCESSION: PARTNERSHIP AND OUTREACH**Technical assistance plays a key role in WTO accession and post-accession. Furthermore, coordination of technical assistance efforts by development partners remains critical to meet the evolving technical‑assistance needs of acceding governments in a timely and tailor-made manner. This session will bring together the representatives of acceded and acceding governments from Central Asia as well as the representatives of development partners to exchange views on accession and post-accession technical‑assistance. |
| **16:15-17:30** | **Presentation** by [WTO resource persons TBC]**Speakers:** * Representative of ADB (TBC);
* Representative of CAREC (TBC).
* Representative of EBRD (TBC);
* Representative of IMF (TBC);
* Representative of IsDB (TBC);
* Representative of ITC (TBC);
* Representative of WEF (TBC);
* Representative of WB (TBC)

**Open discussion** |
| **DAY 2, TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2024** |
| **SESSION 4: CENTRAL ASIA IN THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM: THE CASE FOR WTO ACCESSION**Sitting at the heart of ancient trade routes, Central Asia is gradually reasserting its role in global commerce. The economies of Central Asia have become active participants in the multilateral trading system through accession to the WTO. The Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan became members of the WTO in 1998, 2013 and 2015, respectively. Uzbekistan has intensified its WTO accession negotiations with the aim of achieving WTO membership soon. Turkmenistan initiated WTO accession negotiations in February 2022. In addition, countries from the region have also begun to demonstrate a leadership role in the system post-accession with Kazakhstan chairing the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2022. This session will bring together representatives of the Central Asian countries as well as Azerbaijan - another WTO acceding country - to discuss the opportunities of WTO accession and membership, and the challenges that lie ahead for individual countries and for the region as a whole. |
| **9:30-12:00** | **Keynote address** (speaker TBC)**Panel discussion****Moderator:** Ms. Zhanar Aitzhan, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the WTO and other international economic organisations**Speakers*** Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic (TBC);
* Representative of Kazakhstan (TBC);
* Representative of Tajikistan (TBC);
* Representative of Azerbaijan (TBC);
* Representative of Turkmenistan (TBC);
* Representative of Uzbekistan (TBC).
 |
| **12:00-14:00** | **Lunch break** |
| **14:00-15:30** | **SESSION 5: BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS ON WTO ACCESSION** This session will serve as a "one-stop shop" for currently acceding governments (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) to seek a series of bilateral meetings with the acceded members from Central Asia (the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) as well as with the WTO Secretariat.  |
| **15:30-15:45** | **Coffee break** |
| **15:45-17:30** | **SESSION 5 (continued): BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS ON WTO ACCESSION**  |
| **DAY 3, WEDNESDAY, 5 JUNE 2024** |
| **SESSION 6: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIVITY THROUGH TRADE FACILITATION**The pandemic and recent geopolitical tensions have revealed vulnerabilities in the global supply chains. These continue to disrupt international trade, including in Central Asia, the Caucasus and beyond. In this new reality, governments and businesses are seeking ways to diversify trade and transportation routes, including by reinvigorating the so-called Middle Corridor, which spans from China to Europe and crosses multiple countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Scaling up investment in hard and soft infrastructure is key to this endeavour. Developing hard infrastructure relies on investment, increased public and private partnership, and closer collaboration between the two sectors. Enhancing soft infrastructure requires simplification, and harmonization of customs procedures and regulatory frameworks to make trade easier, faster and cheaper for private operators. Implementation of multilaterally agreed rules on trade and transit, including through accession to the WTO and application of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, could significantly contribute to achieving these objectives.  |
| **9:30-12:00** | **Moderator:** [WTO resource person TBC]**Speakers:*** Representative of ADB (TBC);
* Representative of CAREC (TBC).
* Representative of EBRD (TBC);
* Representative of IMF (TBC);
* Representative of IsDB (TBC);
* Representative of ITC (TBC);
* Representative of WEF (TBC);
* Representative of WB (TBC).
 |
| **12:00-14:00** | **Lunch break** |
| **SESSION 7: Closing session**  |
| **14:00-15:00** | * Closing comments by participants
* Report on the Outcome of the Central Asia Trade Policy Forum - Ms. Zhanar Aitzhan, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the WTO and other international economic organisations
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# Participants

**Invited Governments** (3 officials each)

1. Azerbaijan
2. Kazakhstan (host, no funding required)
3. Kyrgyz Republic
4. Tajikistan
5. Turkmenistan
6. Uzbekistan

**Resource persons**

Anastasia Smirnova, Dimitar Bratanov (TBC)

**International Organisations**

1. Asian Development Bank (TBC);
2. Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (TBC);
3. European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (TBC);
4. International Monetary Fund (TBC);
5. International Trade Centre (TBC);
6. Islamic Development Bank (TBC);
7. World Bank (TBC);
8. UNSPECA (TBC) […]

# FOCAL POINTS

**Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the WTO**

1. Mr Yerkebulan Abdrassil (tel: +41227304174; e-mail: y.abdrassil@kazakhstan-geneva.ch)

**WTO Accessions Division**

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