**13TH CHINA ROUND TABLE ON WTO ACCESSIONS**

**Advancing Arab Economies: from Strategic Accessions to Global Trade Integration**

**Programme**

**Muscat, Sultanate of Oman**

**12-14 May 2025**

The 13th China Round Table is funded by the Government of China and organized by the WTO Secretariat, as part of the agreed activities under the China-WTO MOU[[1]](#footnote-1).

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Venue:

**TBC- Muscat, Sultanate of Oman**

**Interpretation services will be provided from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English**

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 Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) 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, eleven 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); [CRT-11](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/acc_0102202309_e/acc_0102202309_e.htm) in Vientiane, Lao PDR (2023); and [CRT-12](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/acc_2402202409_e/acc_2402202409_e.htm) in Abu Dhabi (2024). Various topics have been covered in Round Table discussions, ranging from systemic contributions that WTO accessions make in strengthening the multilateral trading system and regional integration to experience sharing on best practices on WTO accession and post-accession, especially for LDCs.

The Arab region is one of the most under-represented in the WTO. Of the 22 members of the Arab League, only 14 are WTO Members and eight are observers of different types. Out of the 14 Members, the Union of the Comoros, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Yemen joined the WTO through the accession process pursuant to Article XII of the Agreement Establishing the WTO (the Marrakesh Agreement) between 2000 and 2024. Today, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic are in the process of Article XII accession, while Palestine has had an ad hoc observer status in the WTO Ministerial Conferences since 2005. The seven Arab acceding governments have been pursuing accession, on average, for approximately 20 years, with some of the accession processes being inactive for a long time. It is worthy to note that Comoros joined the WTO as its 165th Member in August 2024.

Following CRT-12 in Abu Dhabi, the first Round Table organized in the Arab region, the 13th China Round Table (CRT-13) will convene on **12-14 May 2025 in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman**. This event, building on the achievements and outcomes of the previous Round Table, will further delve into Arab perspectives on WTO accessions and the multilateral trading system, with particular insights from Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)[[2]](#footnote-2), all of which are either Original Members or Article XII Members. The CRT-13 aims to leverage the momentum and insights gained to support Arab acceding governments in navigating the accession process, utilizing WTO membership to foster economic policy coherence, and achieving economic growth and development through accelerated accession. The focus of this Round Table will be *Advancing Arab Economies: From Strategic Accessions to Global Trade Integration.* Additionally, with the recent accession of Comoros and active efforts by other countries, there is some momentum toward greater WTO representation for the region and beyond. This Round Table will explore post-accession progress and how such experiences can inform the strategies of other acceding countries.

The 13th China Round Table will comprise the following special events and sessions:

* High Level Session: Commemorating Oman's 25th Anniversary of WTO Membership
* Special Event: Oman's Economic Diplomacy: Leveraging Trade for Regional Prosperity
* Session 1: Economic Visions of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Role of Trade: Strategies for Diversification and Global Integration
* Session 2: Publication Launch: Joint-Arab study: "Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going accessions in the region"
* Session 3: Regional Economic Integration and WTO Accession
* Session 4: Road to MC14: State of Play of Ongoing Accessions
* Session 5: The Private Sector’s Role in Arab WTO Integration

**DRAFT PROGRAMME**

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| **DAY 1 – Monday, 12 May 2025**  **OPENING SESSION** | | |
| **8:30 – 9:30** | | **Welcome Coffee and Registration** |
| **9:30 – 10:15** | | **Opening Ceremony**  **Moderator:** Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO  **Keynote Speaker:**  H.E. Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC)  **Speakers :**   * H.E. Sheikh Khalifa Al Harthy, Undersecretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (TBC) * H.E. Dr. Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) * Amb. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director General, WTO (TBC) * H.E. Ambassador Li Chenggang, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO (TBC) |
| **10:15 – 10:45** | | **Coffee Break and Media Engagement** |
| **HIGH LEVEL SESSION:**  **Commemorating Oman's 25th Anniversary of WTO Membership**  This panel session aims to commemorate Oman's 25th Anniversary of WTO Membership. Since joining the WTO in 2000, Oman has demonstrated exemplary commitment to integration into the multilateral trading system by using the accession process and WTO membership to transform and modernize its economy and trade regime. This session will also share experiences with other Article XII Members and Acceding Governments. | | |
| **10:45-12:15** | | **Moderator:**  Dr. Yousuf Hamed Al Balushi, Chief Economist, Oman Vision 2040 Taskforce  **Speakers:**   * H.E. Dr. Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) * H.E. Azzan Al Busaidi, Undersecretary, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (TBC) * H.E. Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) * H.E. Yan Dong, Vice Minister, Ministry of Commerce, China (Video, TBC) |
| **12:15-14:00** | | ***Lunch*** |
| **SESSION 1: Economic Visions of the GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL and the Role of Trade:**  **Strategies for Diversification and Global Integration**  This panel will explore how Gulf economic visions, including Oman Vision 2040, Saudi Vision 2030, Qatar National Vision 2030, and the UAE 2031 Vision, integrate trade as a key driver of economic transformation. Through experience sharing, speakers will discuss strategies for economic diversification, private sector development, and global trade integration, highlighting the role of WTO membership, regional trade agreements, and investment policies in fostering sustainable growth. The session will also examine challenges and opportunities in enhancing supply chain resilience, increasing non-oil exports, and attracting foreign investment to position GCC economies as competitive players in global trade. | | |
| **14:00-15:30** | | **Moderator:**  Mr. Muhanna Al Lawati, Junior Economic Affairs Officer, Accessions Division, WTO / Sheikh Faisal Ali Zaher Al Hinai, Deputy Permanent Representative of Oman to the WTO  **Speakers: (or alternative WTO representatives)**   * H.E. Idris Al Khanjari, Permanent Representative, Sultanate of Oman (TBC) * H.E. Ambassador Saqr AlMoqbel, Permanent Representative, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Chair of the General Council, WTO (TBC) * H.E. Ambassador Abdulla Abdulatif Abdulla, Permanent Representative, Kingdom of Bahrain (TBC) * H.E. Dr. Hind Al Muftah, Permanent Representative, State of Qatar (TBC) * H.E. Ambassador Jamal Jama Al Musharakh, Permanent Representative, United Arab Emirates (TBC) * H.E. Ambassador Nasr AlHayen, Permanent Representative, State of Kuwait (TBC) |
| **15:30-16:00** | | ***Coffee break and Networking Session*** |
| **DAY 2 – Tuesday, 13 May 2025**  **SESSION 2: Publication Launch: Joint-Arab study: "Best Practices in WTO Accessions for Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going accessions in the region"**  Presented at the 12th China Round Table on the margins of MC13 in Abu Dhabi, the Joint-Arab Study is the result of an in-depth research on how different Arab Article XII and original members could be an exemplary to Arab acceding governments, as well as the importance of technical assistance and capacity building in harvesting the full benefits of WTO membership. The panel will assess the progress made in translating the Arab Study’s findings into tangible support mechanisms and identify areas where further efforts are required. By engaging directly with these institutions, the session aims to explore the successes and challenges in building capacities and facilitating technical assistance that can propel Arab states toward full integration into the multilateral trading system. | | |
| **8:30 – 9:30** | | **Welcome Coffee** |
| **9:30 – 11:00** | | **Moderator:**  Dr. Mena Hassan, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Dr. Linda F. Kassem, Director, Digital Strategy and Transformation, PwC Middle East (TBC) * Mr. Nazar Mohamed Eltahir Diab, Senior Regional Integration Specialist, Cooperation and Capacity Development Department, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) (TBC) * Ms. Latifa Elbouabdellaoui, Director-General, Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT) (TBC) * Dr. Abdelkrim Guendouz, Senior Economist and Studies and Statistics Division Chief, Economic Department, Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) (TBC) * (ITTC Head of Regional Desk) /Mr. Samer Seif El Yazal, Chief of Section, Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC), WTO (TBC) * Mr. Yarub Abdullah Al Yarubi, Senior Advisor to Executive Director, World Bank Group * Representative from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (TBC) * Representatives of Arab Acceding Governments (Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan) * Representatives of Arab Article XII Members (Comoros, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman) |
| **11:00- 11:30** | | ***Coffee Break*** |
| **SESSION 3: REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND WTO ACCESSION**    Regional economic integration can play a positive role for WTO accession by helping acceding governments adopt trade-friendly policies, improve institutional capacity, and enhance their negotiating strategies. The Arab region, with its strategic geographical positioning and rich natural resources, holds immense potential for economic integration and diversification. However, intra-Arab trade remains below its potential due to regulatory misalignment, trade barriers, and infrastructure gaps. This session will explore strategies to enhance regional trade integration, focusing on harmonizing trade policies, reducing barriers, and strengthening supply chains to unlock economic opportunities. This session will draw from the experiences of Article XII Members to discuss the benefits of regional integration as a stepping stone to WTO membership and help better equip Acceding governments to navigate WTO accession through regional integration. | | |
| **11:30-13:00** | **Moderator:** Ms. Sajda Al Ghaithi, Communication and Media Director, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) / Mr. Muhanna Al Lawati, Junior Economic Affairs Officer, Accessions Division  **Speakers:**   * H.E. Ambassador Sheikh Humaid Almaani, Head of the Diplomatic Academy * Mr. Khalid Ibrahim Al Sheikh, Director-General, Office of Economic and Development Affairs, Gulf Cooperation Council (TBC) * Dr. Ali Al Maliki, Assistant Secretary General; Head of Economic Affairs Sector, Arab League (TBC) * Representatives of Article XII Members (Comoros, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Oman) * Representatives of Acceding Governments (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) | |
| **13:00-14:00** | ***Lunch*** | |
| **Session 4: ROAD TO MC14: state of Play of OnGOING Accessions**  This interactive session will focus on the state of play of active WTO accessions, including the most advanced processes which are envisaged for conclusion before or at the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14). It will provide for an exchange of views on the accession roadmaps, negotiating achievements and specific challenges, as well as possible ways to facilitate and expedite conclusion. The session will also provide an opportunity for an exchange of experiences in concluded and ongoing WTO accession processes, to update best practices. | | |
| **14:00-15:30** | | **Moderator:**Ms.Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhan, former Chief Negotiator for Kazakhstan's Accession to the WTO * Representatives from Acceding governments (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) * Representatives from Article XII Members (Comoros, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia ) |
| **15:30 – 16:00** | | ***Coffee break*** |
| **DAY 3 – Wednesday, 14 May 2025**  **Special Event:**  **OMAN’S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY: LEVERAGING TRADE FOR REGIONAL PROSPERITY**  As the international economic order is undergoing unprecedented challenges and the multilateral trading system has come under pressure, this panel will examine how Oman utilizes trade and economic diplomacy to enhance WTO engagement, regional stability and economic development. The discussion will highlight Oman's strategic approach to leveraging its trade policies, WTO engagement, and economic partnerships to strengthen ties with neighbouring countries and foster a conducive environment for sustainable growth. Speakers will explore how WTO accession can serve as a catalyst for economic diversification, investment, and stronger institutional frameworks. This session will offer insights into the role of trade in advancing economic resilience and long-term peace and prosperity. | | |
| **8:30 – 9:30** | | **Welcome Coffee** |
| **9:30 – 11:00** | | **Moderator:** Mr. Serge Stroobants, Director of Europe and the MENA region, Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (TBC)  **Guest Speaker:** Ambassador Alan Wm. Wolff, Senior Fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), Washington DC and Former Deputy Director General, WTO (TBC)  **Speakers:**   * H.H. Sayyid Faris Al Said, Assistant Professor, Sultan Qaboos University (TBC) * H.E. Sayyid Dr. Munther Al Busaidi, Vice-Chairman, Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit (TBC) * H.E. Ms. Ibtisam Al Farooji, Undersecretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) * H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (TBC) |
| **11:00-11:30** | | ***Coffee Break*** |
| **Session 5: THE PRIVATE SECTOR’S ROLE IN ARAB WTO INTEGRATION**  The extent and mechanisms of private sector engagement in the accession process vary across the Arab region. This panel seeks to identify best practices and lessons learned from successful private sector involvements, aiming to provide actionable insights for countries still on the path to WTO membership. It will explore how the private sector can serve as a catalyst for economic reform, leverage investment in trade-related infrastructure, and foster an ecosystem conducive to sustainable economic growth and diversification in the Arab world. Panellists will explore mechanisms for effective public-private partnerships, capacity building for trade-related infrastructure, and the enhancement of trade facilitation measures that align with WTO rules. | | |
| **11:30 – 13:00** | **Moderator:** Dr. Mena Hassan, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO  **Speakers:**   * Dr. Yousuf Hamad Al Balushi, Chief Economist, Vision 2040 Taskforce (TBC) * Mr. Faris Al Farsi, Economic Advisor, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (TBC) * Ms. Hilda Al Hinai, Secretary General, Arab – Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TBC) * Representative from International Trade Centre (ITC) (TBC) * Dr. Khaled Hanafy, Secretary General, Union of Arab Chambers (TBC) | |
| **CONCLUDING REMARKS** | | |
| **13:00 – 13:30** | | * H.E. Dr. Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (TBC) or H.E. Idris Al Khanjari, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Sultanate of Oman (TBC) * Amb. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director General, WTO (TBC) * Mr. Han Changtian, Deputy Director, Ministry of Commerce, China (TBC) |
| **13:30- 14:30** | | ***Lunch*** |

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1. In July 2011, the Government of the People's Republic of China signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the WTO Secretariat on the China's LDCs and Accessions Programme ("The China Programme"). The Programme has been extended on a yearly basis, with the latest signed in December 2022. The China Programme has five pillars, including the WTO Accessions Internship Programme and the annual Accession Round Table, designed to build capacity and technical skills in trade policy, including on accession negotiations, for acceding governments and Article XII Members, especially from least-developed countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)