

STAGES OF THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS ON UZBEKISTAN'S ACCESSION TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Ahmedova (Jabborova) Nilufar Ikboljon kizi

teacher-assistant, Ferghana State University, Ferghana, Uzbekistan

Nilufarikboljonovna@gmail.com

Abstract: This article is devoted to the study of the stages of the negotiation process for Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization, the resumption of the membership process in the organization and the meetings of the working group.

Keywords: World Trade Organization, negotiation process, working group meetings, renewal of the membership process, economic cooperation, economic integration, trade principles.

Introduction. The Republic of Uzbekistan on the way of formation and development of economic cooperation has joined the ranks of equal members of prestigious international organizations. It is necessary to recognize the role of international organizations in the processes of economic integration. In subsequent years, our country has achieved significant results in conducting a deeply thought-out, mutually beneficial and practical foreign policy, development of friendly and mutually beneficial relations with foreign countries.

A candidate country to apply for accession and to join the WTO must first of all obtain observer status by sending a letter to the Director General of the WTO. The request received is decided by consensus.

WTO accession is a three-step process consisting of the following:

1. A country joining the WTO prepares a memorandum detailing its trade policy measures as well as its foreign trade institutions;
2. Multilateral negotiations are conducted, among them a working group meeting in Geneva. During the negotiations, issues about the trade policy of the WTO-acceding country are clarified;
3. Bilateral negotiations on tariff concessions, services and agricultural subsidies.

The second and third stages usually take place in parallel. A country joining the WTO must comply with the WTO rules set out in the basic laws and trade principles of the organization, as well as meet the requirements of other members of the organization.

Aims, objectives, materials. The purpose of the research work is to analyze the evolution of the stages of accession to the WTO of Uzbekistan. In the study and used official data of the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In order to ensure the fulfillment of priority and quality implementation of tasks on the accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the World Trade Organization, the Interdepartmental Commission was approved, the position of Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on WTO issues was introduced in the structure of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Methods and results of the study. The negotiation process of Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO can be divided into two stages:

- The first stage from 1994-2016, the negotiation process of accession during the first president of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- the second stage from 2017 to the present day, the accession process.

The Republic of Uzbekistan sent an application to the WTO in late 1994 with a desire to join the ranks of the member countries of the Trade Organization, and four years later, in 1998, a Working Negotiating Group was formed. The Working Group, representing the interests of the Uzbek side in the WTO negotiation process, took part in six meetings. The following is a brief overview of these meetings:

- the first session of the Working Group was organized on July 17, 2002, and during it the parties considered the memorandum "On the Foreign Trade Regime of the Republic of Uzbekistan", and discussed commitments on market access for goods and services. Three months later, in October 2002, an enlarged meeting of the WTO Interdepartmental Commission was held. The purpose of the meeting was to review the results of the July meeting, in which the Working Party participated. In addition, the participants of the enlarged meeting studied the plan of future activities related to the organization of the second meeting of the Working Party.

After consideration of the updated Memorandum, some countries (e.g. EU countries, USA, South Korea, Australia, etc.) submitted their questions to the Uzbek side regarding the provisions of the Memorandum. The answers to these questions were prepared by ministries and relevant agencies;

- the second session was held on June 29, 2004. The Memorandum on foreign trade regime was considered there. Legislative changes that took place in Uzbekistan were discussed during the meeting. At the same time, a separate meeting was organized to discuss subsidies for the agricultural sector. 14 WTO member states voted for Uzbekistan's accession to the organization. The US, EU and South Korea submitted written questions and comments on the memorandum;

- a third session was held in October 2005, during which tariff commitments and specific proposals for Uzbekistan's access to the global services market were made and multilateral meetings were held to address agricultural issues;

After Sh. Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016, the country followed the path of increasing the openness of foreign trade. In the Action Strategy planned for 2017-2021, Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO is reflected in the priority areas.

In the fall of 2017, Sh. Mirziyoyev announced that the Republic of Uzbekistan intends to resume the membership process, and in this regard, a number of measures were implemented by the Uzbek government in 2017-2019. The Uzbek government has developed the so-called "Road Map", which consists of 34 principles on adaptation to the WTO provisions. A Working Group on improving customs regulation issues was also organized. The Commission for Membership in the organization started its work again in May 2018, and in November, based on the relevant ministry, the activities of the Division for Coordination of Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the WTO were launched. By March 2019, a Memorandum on Foreign Trade Regime was prepared for the WTO.

- Fourth session: held on July 7, 2020 in Geneva in videoconference format. During the meeting Uzbekistan presented a report on its socio-economic condition and prospects for development within the framework of WTO membership. At the same time, Uzbekistan's regime in foreign trade and the memorandum presented on this issue were discussed. In the course of the discussion, the steps taken by the Uzbek side regarding the regulation of foreign trade and WTO-recognized standards were noted.

- fifth session: held on June 21, 2022 in Geneva. About 60 delegations of WTO member states participated in the event. In addition to them, experts and official representatives of various international communities took part in the meeting. The Working Group discussed in detail the

memorandum on the foreign trade regime of the Republic, as well as the summary, which included facts of interest to the parties, the questionnaire of countries in the WTO membership, the report on economic, customs-tariff, industrial and agricultural policy of Uzbekistan.

- The sixth session held on 14-15 March 2023 was chaired by the Ambassador-designate of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Yoon Seong-Dok and attended by 25 WTO member countries to study Uzbekistan's foreign trade regime and this meeting also served as a platform for bilateral negotiations with interested WTO members on market access for goods and services.¹

In order to become a full member of the WTO, Uzbekistan must complete the report of the Working Group and conclude bilateral agreements with all interested WTO members on access to the market for goods and services, to date, bilateral negotiations with 31 WTO members have been introduced and completed 3 as well as bring the country's legislation in line with WTO rules, which provide for a number of reforms in the liberalization of the economy.

It should be emphasized that the membership of the Republic in the Trade Organization will help it to fully join the world trade system, develop trade and economic ties with member countries, as well as globally expand international economic relations.

Conclusions.

Summarizing the conducted research, we can say that after the arrival of the current President of Uzbekistan, the country has seen fundamental changes and favorable impact on the process of accession to the WTO. These favorable conditions also have a number of prospects for the development of the national economy of the Republic. In particular, accession to the World Trade Organization allows the Uzbek side to achieve technological progress in many sectors of the economy. Thus, scientific and technological progress is associated with the importation of high quality imported equipment into the country. Moreover, after the final accession to the WTO, Uzbek exporters will have the opportunity to integrate into foreign markets. This integration process will be less problematic and easier. Also, another advantage of WTO membership may be the presence of free competition. However, despite these advantages, as our study has shown, the WTO accession procedure is a multi-stage process that can drag on for many years.

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¹ Further measures within the framework of Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO discussed

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