

Third China Round Table on WTO Accessions
Post-Accession
“Maximizing the Benefits of WTO Membership and Global Economic Integration”
2-5 June 2015, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Session 3: Participation in the Regular Work of WTO – Perspectives of Article XII Members

Topic: “Setting up the Internal Coordination Mechanism to participate in WTO regular work”

By Mr. Bountheung DOUANGSAVANH, Counselor, Permanent Mission of the Lao PDR in Geneva

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me the floor,
Honorable Ministers/Vice Ministers,
Distinguished participants,

On behalf of H. E. Mrs. Khemmani PHOLSENA, Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Lao PDR who has not been able to be here due to her prior commitments, I would like to express our appreciation for the invitation extended to the Lao PDR to participate in the Third China Round Table on WTO Accessions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to join previous speakers in extending my appreciation to the Government of Tajikistan, WTO Secretariat and the Government of China - for hosting, organizing and supporting this Round Table, respectively.

The Lao PDR has attached great importance to the China Round Tables on WTO Accessions because they serve as a platform where we can share our experience and at the same time to learn from experiences of others with regard to accession negotiations and post-accession efforts. You might recall that almost two years ago, Lao PDR was honored to have been entrusted to host the Second China Round Table on WTO Accessions, which successfully took place in Luang Prabang from 15 to 18 October 2013 – less than one year after Lao PDR became a full-fledged 158th member of the WTO on 2 February the same year.

My task in our Session 3 today, is to touch upon “*Post-Accession: Participation in the Regular Work of WTO – Perspectives of Article XII Members*” with a focus on “*Setting up the Internal Coordination Mechanism to participate in WTO regular work*”, the topic that, in the Session 2 yesterday afternoon, Maika and Nagib already discussed to large extent. Therefore, today I will focus on some experiences or efforts of the Lao PDR.

Lao PDR applied for WTO membership in 1997, however only 15 years afterward it was able to complete its accession negotiations and became a member of the WTO on 2 February 2013, exactly one month before Tajikistan. Since then, a lot of efforts have been put in place to improve internal coordination mechanism for effective participation of the Lao PDR in the multilateral trading system. However, most of the works had to be started from the scratch because before the accession most emphasis was given to accession negotiations and little was given to planning and preparation for post-accession.

Our efforts undertaken so far include adjusting domestic institutional structure, strengthening a representative office in Geneva, as well as divisions of responsibilities between Capital-based and Geneva-based officials.

With regards to adjusting domestic institutional structure, although no new mechanisms have been created, adjustments have been made to mandates of the existing committees and their secretariats responsible for WTO-related works. These include:

- The National Steering Committee for Economic Integration, with the Foreign Trade Policy Department (FTPD) under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce acting as its Secretariat. (This Committee is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs).
- The Trade Facilitation Committee, with the Department of Import and Export (DIMEX) under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce acting as its Secretariat. (This Committee is chaired by Minister of Industry and Commerce).

Furthermore, linkages with other forums and entities have been enhanced, including the Lao Business Forum (a Public - Private Dialogue) and the Round Table Meeting (a Government - Development Partners Dialogue).

Regarding the strengthening a representative office in Geneva, after the accession one additional delegate has been assigned to the Permanent Mission of the Lao PDR. This brings the total of delegates responsible for WTO-related works to two. In addition, this year Lao PDR has been fortunate to have one mission intern with support of the WTO Secretariat. This enables Lao PDR to follow more meetings and improve our coordination works with the Capital. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the ITTC for its kind consideration and support.

However, like most LDCs, Lao PDR has a small mission in Geneva. It is not possible to follow all the themes and meetings in Geneva. In this regard, we have made efforts to organize our work, set priorities and define responsibilities. At the same

time, we make use of Lao PDR's membership in different groups under WTO, such as ASEAN, LDC and LLDC through which we can provide inputs and share information.

After more than two years of membership in the WTO, my own assessment based on a presentation made by Maika yesterday, Lao PDR is still in a transition from "listening mode" to "active member". However, in a broader scene Lao PDR has made steady progresses and achievements in fulfilling its obligations and commitments:

- Lao PDR has made its utmost efforts to fulfill its accession commitments with regard to notification requirements. Since its accession in 2013, Lao PDR has submitted a total number of 15 notifications (11 in 2013, 3 in 2014 and 1 in 2015 so far).
- Lao PDR is well underway with ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, while it might take some time for the Lao PDR to finalize classification of its categories A, B and C trade facilitation measures, particularly categories B and C as there is a need to ensure firm commitments from ministries and agencies involved. I believe that Lao PDR will be able to submit the category A notification and deposit the instrument of acceptance for the Trade Facilitation Agreement well before the MC10.
- Lao PDR is also working on ratification of the protocol amending TRIPS Agreement.

Nevertheless, there are still challenges for us:

- Timely communications with and reporting to the capital needs to be improved in order to ensure smooth information flow between Capital and Geneva-based Mission. This is the task that we have not been able to perform well.
- Internal capacity constraints affect the possibilities of Lao PDR to participate in WTO works to the full extent.
- Limit budget makes it difficult or impossible to have Capital-based officials to participate in meetings in Geneva when needed, particularly for highly technical meetings.
- Dialogue with the private sector needs to be enhanced to get best benefit from WTO membership.

In conclusion, my advice to acceding members is to make good planning and preparation for post-accession internal coordination well in advance during accession negotiations.

Thank you.