



HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON THE CAREC REGION AND THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM: DEEPENING INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND BEYOND

22-23 October 2025 | WTO Room D, Geneva

PROGRAMME

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program, in partnership with the Secretariat of the World Trade Organization (WTO), will organize a high-level forum on 22-23 October 2025, focusing on Central Asia and its broader neighbourhood in the multilateral trading system.

The Forum will bring together Chief Negotiators and high-level government officials from the CAREC region who are responsible for WTO-related matters, representing countries that have joined the WTO through accession negotiations or are currently in the process of acceding, namely, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The objectives of this Forum are to:

- (i) Discuss how to navigate the challenges in the multilateral trading system amid increasing uncertainty in global trade and identify opportunities to enhance CAREC members' access to global markets, diversify their economies, and promote a more resilient global value chain;
- (ii) Exchange views on the role of the rules-based multilateral trading system for the CAREC region, including agenda and preparations for the 14th Ministerial Conference of the WTO (MC14);
- (iii) Facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned on WTO accessions and membership; and
- (iv) Strengthen collaboration between the CAREC Program and the WTO to support their common members on issues of mutual interest, including trade facilitation, trade in services, and digital trade.

The language of the Forum will be English.

TIME	SESSION
DAY 1, 22 October	
09:00-09:30	Registration
09:30-10:00	Opening Ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome Remarks by Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General, WTO Opening Remarks by Mr. Bruce Gosper, Vice-President for Administration and Corporate Management, ADB
10:00-10:30	Group photo and coffee break
SESSION 1: The role of the rules-based multilateral trading system for the CAREC Region: 30 years of WTO accessions in review: reflections, reforms, and the future <p>Over the past three decades, CAREC economies have become increasingly active in the multilateral trading system through WTO accession and membership. In Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan became WTO Members in 1998, 2013, and 2015, respectively. Pakistan is one of the WTO founding members. For the rest of CAREC members, Mongolia joined in 1997, Georgia in 2000, China in 2001, and Afghanistan in 2016.¹ Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are in various stages of accession.</p> <p>This session will take stock of key accession milestones and achievements, with particular attention to the accession anniversaries of Georgia and Kazakhstan. It will bring together representatives of WTO Members and acceding economies to reflect on the systemic importance of accession and membership, and to share country experiences from the CAREC region.</p> <p>Looking ahead, the discussion will also address the evolving challenges facing CAREC members in an era of global trade uncertainty and will explore how the region can engage with and contribute to the WTO reform agenda to ensure a stronger, more inclusive, and more effective rules-based multilateral trading system.</p>	

¹ ADB placed its regular assistance to Afghanistan on hold effective 15 August 2021.

TIME	SESSION
10:30-12:30	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director-General, WTO <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambassador Revaz Lominadze, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Georgia: <i>Reflections on 25 years of WTO membership</i> Ms. Zhanel Kushukova, Vice Minister of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan: <i>Reflections on 10 years of WTO membership</i> Ambassador Petter Ølberg, Permanent Representative of Norway to the WTO and EFTA <p>Discussants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambassador Yongjie Li, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO Ambassador Gerelmaa Davaasuren, Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Ali Sarfraz Hussain, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the WTO Ambassador Sharaf Sheralizoda, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva Mr. Nurbek Maksutov, Head of the Mission of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of the Kyrgyz Republic in Geneva <p>Open discussion</p>
12:30-14:00	Lunch break
<p>SESSION 2: Domestic preparation and coordination in accession negotiations: perspectives of negotiators</p> <p>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 parliament, business, and academia. Enhanced internal coordination has, therefore, the potential to provide a significant boost to domestic economic and institutional reform efforts. The session will provide an opportunity for acceding governments to exchange information and lessons learned from their preparations for accession.</p>	
14:00-15:30	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Maika Oshikawa, Director, Accessions Division, WTO <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Azizbek Urunov, Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on WTO - Chief Negotiator Mr. Babanyyaz Yalakov, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy, Turkmenistan Ms. Gulchin Alasgarova, Deputy Head of Trade and Foreign Investment Policy Department, Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan <p>Discussants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Zhanar Aitzhan, former Chief Negotiator for Kazakhstan's Accession to the WTO <p>Open discussion</p>
15:30-15:45	Coffee break

TIME	SESSION
<p>SESSION 3: Support for WTO accession and membership: partnership and regional cooperation</p> <p>Technical assistance plays a key role in ensuring that Members take full advantage of the multilateral trading system. While support is crucial during the accession process, it is equally important in the post-accession phase to fully leverage the benefits of WTO membership on a day-to-day basis, strengthen capacities for future negotiations, and fulfil obligations on notifications and reporting. Coordination of technical assistance efforts by development and bilateral partners (e.g., under South-South cooperation) remains critical to meet the evolving needs of acceding governments in a timely and tailor-made manner.</p> <p>This session will bring together the representatives of CAREC members and development partners to exchange views on accession and post-accession technical assistance, including under the CAREC Program. This session will also help ADB and other development partners identify areas of collaboration and create synergies to promote the global trade objectives, while responding to regional and national priorities.</p>	
15:45-17:15	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Bruce Gosper, Vice-President for Administration and Corporate Management, ADB <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Azizbek Urunov, Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on WTO - Chief Negotiator Mr. Babanyaz Yalakov, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy, Turkmenistan Ms. Gulchin Alasgarova, Deputy Head of Trade and Foreign Investment Policy Department, Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan <p>Discussants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN Economic Commission for Europe Ms. Dorothy Tembo, Deputy Executive Director, International Trade Centre Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Central and West Asia Department, ADB Mr. Sébastien Dessus, Manager, Global Trade and Regional Integration Unit, World Bank (<i>virtual</i>) Mr. Samer Seif El Yazal, Chief of Section, Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation, WTO Mr. Jinyong Wang, Director, Department of WTO Affairs, Ministry of Commerce of China (<i>virtual</i>) <p>Open discussion</p>
18:00	Reception (Atrium, WTO)

TIME	SESSION
DAY 2, 23 October	
<p>SESSION 4: Accession negotiations in the era of WTO joint statement initiatives</p> <p>This session will update participants on three areas which originated as WTO Joint Statement Initiatives - Services Domestic Regulation, E-Commerce, and Investment Facilitation for Development. While the future of some of these initiatives remains under discussion and the possible pathways for integrating their outcomes into the multilateral rulebook differ, they are already shaping some Members' expectations and may influence the dynamics of accession negotiations. In the run-up to MC14, the e-commerce work programme and moratorium have been identified as priority issues, while some Members are also pushing to incorporate both the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement and the e-commerce initiative into the WTO framework.</p>	
9:30-10:30	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Dimitar Bratanov, Counsellor, Accessions Division, WTO <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambassador James Baxter, Permanent Representative of Australia to the WTO: <i>E-commerce</i> Ambassador Sofia Boza Martinez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the WTO: <i>Investment Facilitation for Development</i> Ms. Elena Bertola, Legal Affairs Officer, Trade in Services and Investment Division, WTO: <i>Services Domestic Regulation</i> <p>Open discussion</p>
10:30-10:45	Coffee break

<p>SESSION 5: Structural reform and WTO accession</p> <p>This session will introduce ongoing WTO accession Working Party discussions on state-owned enterprises, subsidies, pricing policy, and competition policy and will consider the implications for CAREC members' accession negotiations. It will provide a forum to share lessons learned and peer experiences from recent and ongoing accessions. It will also discuss how international organizations help advance institutional reforms that facilitate WTO accession. Throughout, the session will highlight the role of WTO accession in advancing market-oriented reform by anchoring transparency, competition, and subsidy disciplines.</p>	
10:45-12:15	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Bruce Gosper, Vice-President for Administration and Corporate Management, ADB <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Adam Jakubik, Economist, International Monetary Fund (IMF) (<i>virtual</i>) <p>Discussants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Azizbek Urunov, Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on WTO - Chief Negotiator Ms. Zhanar Aitzhan, former Chief Negotiator for Kazakhstan's Accession to the WTO Mr. Sok Siphana, Senior Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia in charge of International and Multilateral Trade and Economic Affairs <p>Open discussion</p>
12:15-14:00	Lunch break

TIME	SESSION
<p align="center">SESSION 6: Topical issue – Trade facilitation and regional connectivity</p> <p>Comprising mostly landlocked countries, CAREC members rely heavily on regional connectivity and trade facilitation to integrate into global and regional markets. ADB, under the CAREC Program, has supported investments to promote regional connectivity along the six CAREC corridors. A combination of physical and soft infrastructure has reduced travel times, lowered trade costs, facilitated the safer movement of goods and people, and generated economic activity in the CAREC region.</p> <p>The session will share experiences and lessons learned on improving connectivity, facilitating trade, and reducing or eliminating non-tariff barriers. It will explore how international platforms can be leveraged to enhance regional connectivity.</p>	
14:00-15:30	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Dorothea Lazaro, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist, Central and West Asia Department, ADB <p>Presentation: <i>Developing CAREC Corridors and Enhancing Regional Connectivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova, Regional Head, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Central and West Asia Department, ADB <p>Panel 1: Country perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Babanyyaz Yalakov, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy, Turkmenistan Ms. Erdenetuya Darinchuluun, Director General, Trade and Economic Cooperation Policy Department, Ministry of Economy and Development Mr. Nurlan Kulbatyrov, Deputy General Director, QazTrade Center for Trade Policy Development, Kazakhstan Ms. Gulchin Alasgarova, Deputy Head of Trade and Foreign Investment Policy Department, Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan Mr. Nurbek Maksutov, Head of the Mission of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of the Kyrgyz Republic in Geneva <p>Panel 2: Partners' perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Birgit Viohl, Head of Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, WTO Mr. Poul Hansen, Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section, Trade Logistics Branch, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD Ms. Céleste Laporte Talamon, Policy Analyst, Eurasia Division, OECD (<i>virtual</i>) Ms. Dinara Dairabayeva, National Coordinator, Regional Project "Trade Facilitation in Central Asia", Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH <p>Open discussion</p>
15:30-15:45	Coffee break
<p align="center">SESSION 7: Topical issue – Fostering digital economy and cross-border digital trade</p> <p>CAREC members are accelerating their efforts to diversify their national economies by expanding the services sector and fostering the digital economy, including through cross-border e-commerce. The session will discuss opportunities, including global and regional initiatives such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a favourable business environment for the development of services sectors, including promotion of innovation and digitally enabled services; and Cross-border digital trade agreements and solutions. <p>Experiences with regulatory convergence and domestic regulatory reforms to promote services trade and digital trade will be explored.</p>	
15:45-17:00	<p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Stefania Gallo, Digital Trade Policy Officer, Digital Trade and Frontier Technologies Unit, WTO <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Dorothea Lazaro, Senior Regional Cooperation Specialist, Central and West Asia Department, ADB Mr. Luca Castellani, Legal Officer, Secretariat of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) (<i>virtual</i>)

TIME	SESSION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Iris Macculi, Economic Affairs Officer, E-Commerce and Digital Economy Branch, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD <p>Panel Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Erdenetuya Darinchuluun, Director General, Trade and Economic Cooperation Policy Department, Ministry of Economy and Development Ms. Gulchin Alasgarova, Deputy Head of Trade and Foreign Investment Policy Department, Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan Mr. Sirojiddin Juraev, Head of Department, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Uzbekistan <p>Open Discussion</p>
Closing Session	
17:00-17:15	<p>Closing comments by participants and organizers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director-General, WTO Mr. Bruce Gosper, Vice-President for Administration and Corporate Management, ADB

CONTACT POINTS

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