

Kasimov Inoyatullo
Counsellor on WTO issues
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tajikistan to the UNOG
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Dear colleagues,

First of all on behalf of the government of the Republic of Tajikistan I would like to express my gratitude to the UNECE for constant cooperation and support to my country.

The Executive Committee of the UNECE recommended at its thirty-fourth session in February 2010 that the Committee on Trade carry out three trades needs assessment studies in selected UNECE member countries with economies in transition.

These studies focus on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in goods, with an eye to on-going development efforts in the areas of trade facilitation, technical regulations and standardization policies. The findings of the studies will be used to: assist countries in their efforts to achieve greater regional and global economic integration; inform donors as to where assistance might be required; and strengthen policy discussions within the Committee on Trade and its subsidiary bodies on where additional work is required.

The study was conducted in 2013 pursuant to a request by the Government of Tajikistan, and is based on a review of trade facilitation and quality assurance development efforts as well as the results of a survey-based assessment of regulatory and procedural barriers to trade.

The assessment was implemented in close consultation with the Tajik National Working Group, which was established to act as the UNECE counterpart. The Working Group brought together representatives from relevant line ministries, State agencies and private sector support institutions under the leadership of the Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

With the support of the donor community and international development organizations, the Government implemented comprehensive infrastructure development projects to improve the transport sector and promote income diversification.

The last few years have seen the Government combine industrial development and regional integration efforts with a strive toward linking the economy with global value chains. This strive found its strongest expression in 2013, when Tajikistan

acceded the WTO. Preparations for accession have involved comprehensive reforms to improve trade facilitation conditions. Reform measures have been designed to (i) align trade-related legislation with the requirements of the WTO-administered multilateral trading system; (ii) simplify, standardize and automate customs clearance procedures; (iii) develop the transport system; and, (iv) modernize the system of standardization, quality assurance, accreditation and metrology (SQAM).

Tajikistan's landlocked status and remoteness from international maritime routes means that enterprises accrue additional costs, as they have to use the transport facilities of neighbouring countries to participate in international trade.

To address these barriers the government implemented comprehensive reform measures, which seek to: (i) align customs regulations with internationally recognized rules; (ii) modernize and automate customs administrative procedures, (iii) strengthen customs points with modern facilities and equipment; and, (iv) foster regional cooperation in the areas of customs and transport.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to articulate a national trade facilitation strategy; further improve public-private consultation mechanisms; strengthen measures for enforcing the rule of law; further develop the existing system of enterprise support services.

One of the main outcomes of the WTO's 9th MC has been an Agreement on Trade Facilitation. Trade facilitation is important because it can have a major impact on bringing down trade transaction costs. It essentially concerns the cost of clearing goods for import and export. Despite the huge attention given to the cost of border controls over the last 10-15 years, goods continue to be delayed at the border for days (or even weeks), slowing trade flows and adding costs to business that are often passed on to consumers. Trade transaction costs are highest in developing countries, which are the least able to carry this additional burden.

The trade facilitation agreement, which is binding on all WTO Member States at the level of all border agencies, and not just customs authorities, has been described as a classic 'win-win' outcome. But because there are implementation concerns among some developing countries, and especially LDCs, the agreement includes some flexibility, including provision for technical assistance for its implementation.

To ensure that business, particularly businesses in developing countries, can benefit, it is important that business understands what the agreement provides for and how the implementation process can be influenced.

The agreement has the potential to be of particular benefit to traders in developing countries, who continually face lengthy and costly border delays. It will be important for business in developing countries to monitor its implementation in the countries with which they trade.

As you are well aware our post WTO accession activities both in Dushanbe and in Geneva since the Republic of Tajikistan became a full-fledged member of the organization are on track. A current Government effort on TFA has been fulfilled by adopting Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “About Digital Signature” and Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “About electronic documents”. As a member of WTO Tajikistan has determined and notified to the WTO Category A provisions of the TFA and established Coordination Committee on Trade Facilitation. Financial and technical assistance needed for implementation of the Category C provisions.

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Trade facilitation agreement for Tajikistan is fundamental to the establishment of an improved and more efficient management process for international trade in goods on a global basis.

The UNECE managed several projects on trade facilitation in Central Asia, including a UN Development Account project for the SPECA countries on 5 five topics: integrated approach to trade facilitation, the Single Window, electronic trade and transport documents, simplification of border-crossing procedures, and public-private cooperation for trade facilitation, including the establishment of national trade facilitation bodies (UNECE’s trade facilitation Recommendation 4). The direct effects for Tajikistan were the launch of a project on the Single Window (using Recommendation 33 on the Single Window), which was then supported by a number of other organizations (GIZ, the EU, ADB). UNECE held capacity building on the simplification of border-crossing procedures, including visits and recommendations for the Tursunzade border crossing that were used by the World Bank and OSCE.

In collaboration with the OSCE UNECE is planning a capacity-building event on Trade Facilitation on 23-26 July 2018 at the OSCE Border management College (They have done these in the past several years). This year the event will focus on trade facilitation between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

On the SPECA Working Group on Trade we have become the Chair and we need to plan for the 2018 activities.

2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). On this occasion ESCAP and ECE prepared an Evaluation Report on SPECA with a view to reform and strengthen the Programme. In this sense, the WG on Trade is focusing on three specific areas:

- Finalizing and adopting the Regional SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy (Tajikistan already leads this work). Trade facilitation measures in a separate country without collaboration with neighbours, makes little sense. Countries in the SPECA region need to coordinate their efforts, and this is the idea of this strategy.
- Establishing a regional network of SPECA country trade negotiators, so that they can consult and coordinate, if necessary, their positions in the WTO and on other important trade issues in the region. This was the objective of the regional Trade Policy Forum, which UNECE co organized with the WTO secretariat in Ashgabat on 11-13 May 2016, and which was chaired by the First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan as the Chair of SPECA
- Developing principles of trade aligned to the needs of sustainable development in Central Asia. As the UN focuses now on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, it is agreed to work with the SPECA WG on establishing the link between trade and sustainable development in Central Asia. This was the subject of a High-Level SPECA Seminar organized on 10 July 2017, back-to-back with the WTO Aid-for-Trade biannual review at the WTO.

These are the practical matters identified with the SPECA WG on trade, on which UNECE suggests to focus the work programme of the SPECA WG on Trade in the near future.

Following up on the decisions of the Twelfth Session of the SPECA Governing Council, in Dushanbe in December 2017, the Government of Kazakhstan, UNESCAP and UNECE are organizing an Expert Meeting to discuss the SPECA Evaluation Report and prepare for the review and restructuring of the Program at its 20-anniversary session in September 2018 in Almaty. Two Government officials from Tajikistan will attend this event for which we are grateful to UNECE for its continued support and fruitful cooperation.

Thank you for your attention!