

UZBEKISTAN'S ACCESSION TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION: A STRATEGIC STEP TOWARDS RULES-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Jamila Kholmuradovna Bobanazarova

Member of the Senate Committee on International Relations, Foreign Economic Relations, Foreign Investments and Tourism, Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Abstract. This article examines Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) not merely as an instrument of foreign trade policy, but as a comprehensive institutional reform package encompassing public governance, the legal system, and market institutions. Drawing on comparative international experience with WTO accession, the article analyzes the stages, benefits, and risks of Uzbekistan's integration process, evaluates the national legislative harmonization measures undertaken to date, and assesses the sectoral and social implications of trade liberalization. The study finds that WTO membership does not automatically guarantee economic growth; positive outcomes depend on the extent to which accession is accompanied by institutional resilience, structural reform, and strategic planning. Based on this analysis, the article develops practical recommendations for ensuring that Uzbekistan's accession process strengthens export competitiveness while safeguarding social inclusiveness and the interests of domestic producers.

Keywords: World Trade Organization, WTO accession, trade liberalization, institutional reform, export competitiveness, investment climate, social protection, Uzbekistan.

O'ZBEKISTONNING JAHON SAVDO TASHKILOTIGA A'ZO BO'LISHI: QOIDALARGA ASOSLANGAN TARAQQIYOT SARI STRATEGIK QADAM

Jamila Xolmuradovna Bobanazarova

O'zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy Majlisi Senatining Xalqaro munosabatlar, tashqi iqtisodiy aloqalar, xorijiy investitsiyalar va turizm masalalari qo'mitasi a'zosi

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada O'zbekistonning Jahon savdo tashkilotiga (JST) a'zo bo'lishi nafaqat tashqi savdo siyosati vositasi sifatida, balki davlat boshqaruvi, huquqiy tizim va bozor institutlarini qamrab oluvchi kompleks institutsional islohotlar paketi sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi. JSTga a'zo bo'lish bo'yicha xalqaro qiyosiy tajribaga tayangan holda, maqolada O'zbekiston integratsiya jarayonining bosqichlari, afzalliklari va xavflari tahlil qilinadi, hozirgacha amalga oshirilgan milliy qonunchilikni uyg'unlashtirish choralari baholanadi hamda savdoni erkinlashtirishning tarmoq va ijtimoiy oqibatlari o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot natijasida JSTga a'zolik avtomatik ravishda iqtisodiy o'sishni kafolatlamasligi, ijobiy natijalar esa a'zolikning institutsional mustahkamlik, tarkibiy islohotlar va strategik rejalashtirish bilan qay darajada uyg'unlashganiga bog'liqligi aniqlangan. Ushbu tahlil asosida O'zbekistonning a'zolik jarayoni eksport raqobatbardoshligini kuchaytirish bilan bir qatorda ijtimoiy inklyuzivlik va milliy ishlab chiqaruvchilar manfaatlarini himoya qilishni ta'minlashi uchun amaliy takliflar ishlab chiqilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: Jahon savdo tashkiloti, JSTga a'zolik, savdoni erkinlashtirish, institutsional islohot, eksport raqobatbardoshligi, investitsiya muhiti, ijtimoiy himoya, O'zbekiston.

ВСТУПЛЕНИЕ УЗБЕКИСТАНА ВО ВСЕМИРНУЮ ТОРГОВУЮ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЮ: СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЙ ШАГ К РАЗВИТИЮ НА ОСНОВЕ ПРАВИЛ

Джамиля Холмурадовна Бобаназарова

Член Комитета Сената по международным отношениям, внешнеэкономическим связям, иностранным инвестициям и туризму Олий Мажлиса Республики Узбекистан

Аннотация. В данной статье вступление Узбекистана во Всемирную торговую организацию (ВТО) рассматривается не просто как инструмент внешнеторговой политики, а как комплексный пакет институциональных реформ, охватывающий государственное управление, правовую систему и рыночные институты. Опираясь на сравнительный международный опыт присоединения к ВТО, в статье анализируются этапы, преимущества и риски интеграционного процесса Узбекистана, оцениваются меры по гармонизации национального законодательства, предпринятые на сегодняшний день, а также рассматриваются отраслевые и социальные последствия либерализации торговли. Исследование показывает, что членство в ВТО автоматически не гарантирует экономический рост; положительные результаты зависят от того, в какой степени присоединение сопровождается институциональной устойчивостью, структурными реформами и стратегическим планированием. На основе данного анализа в статье разработаны практические рекомендации, направленные на обеспечение того, чтобы процесс присоединения Узбекистана укреплял экспортную конкурентоспособность при одновременном сохранении социальной инклюзивности и защите интересов отечественных производителей.

Ключевые слова: Всемирная торговая организация, вступление в ВТО, либерализация торговли, институциональная реформа, экспортная конкурентоспособность, инвестиционный климат, социальная защита, Узбекистан.

INTRODUCTION

As the global economy enters a phase of profound structural transformation, the sustainability of a national development model is increasingly determined by the degree to which it is institutionally integrated into the international trading system. From this perspective, Uzbekistan's accession process to the World Trade Organization should be assessed not simply as an element of external economic policy, but as a comprehensive reform package aimed at modernizing public administration, the legal framework, and market institutions.

The negotiation process, which has continued for more than thirty years, gained new momentum after 2023. By the end of 2025, the overwhelming majority of bilateral negotiations with member states had been concluded, and dozens of legal and regulatory acts aligning national legislation with WTO rules had been adopted. This progress is an

important indicator of the government's political will and institutional readiness for accession.

The purpose of this article is to analyze Uzbekistan's WTO accession process within the framework of comparative international experience, to evaluate the associated economic opportunities and risks, and to develop practical recommendations for ensuring that the accession process contributes to sustainable, inclusive, and competitiveness-driven economic development. To achieve this purpose, the following tasks were set: to examine the institutional role and functions of the WTO in the global trading system; to review comparative international experience regarding the effects of WTO accession; and to assess Uzbekistan's phased accession strategy and its sectoral and social implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Trade Organization, established in 1995, today unites more than 166 member states and serves as the single global platform regulating trade in goods, services, and intellectual property. Within the organization, mechanisms for dispute settlement, trade policy monitoring, and the assurance of transparency have been developed. The fact that approximately 99 percent of world trade is conducted among WTO members clearly demonstrates the strategic significance of this institution. In this sense, WTO membership is not a privilege but an obligation to create a predictable, transparent, and rules-based economic environment.

The comparative experience of countries that have acceded to the WTO shows that membership can expand export geography, enhance investment attractiveness, and strengthen transit potential. At the same time, accession experiences documented in the economic literature also reveal more complex outcomes: sectors that were insufficiently prepared for competition have, in a number of cases, faced intensified import pressure, and small businesses in vulnerable industries have in some instances contracted. This body of comparative evidence indicates that WTO integration does not automatically guarantee economic growth; positive effects materialize only when accession is combined with institutional resilience, structural reform, and strategic planning.

Existing studies on WTO accession — including analyses produced by the WTO Secretariat and international financial institutions on the experience of newly acceded economies — generally emphasize three recurring themes: the need for phased liberalization schedules tailored to domestic sectoral readiness, the importance of complementary social protection and retraining mechanisms during the transition period, and the role of export-oriented industrial policy in converting market access into tangible economic gains. However, the literature also notes that the specific design of a country's accession strategy — rather than accession itself — is the decisive factor shaping outcomes, which underscores the relevance of examining Uzbekistan's particular approach in detail.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative policy-analysis approach. Uzbekistan's WTO accession process is examined against a theoretical framework derived from the general functions of the WTO and against the comparative international experience of previously acceded economies, in order to identify recurring patterns of opportunity and risk associated with trade liberalization.

The analysis draws on a review of Uzbekistan's national legal and regulatory harmonization measures — including reforms to customs procedures, technical

regulations, and intellectual property protection — together with an examination of the government's stated strategic priorities, in particular the “New Uzbekistan — Land of Competitive Products” concept. The research proceeds in three stages: first, the institutional role of the WTO and the general lessons of comparative accession experience are established; second, Uzbekistan's phased accession strategy is assessed against this framework; third, the sectoral and social implications of the process are evaluated and translated into policy recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Uzbekistan is pursuing WTO accession through a phased approach that takes into account national interests and social stability, rather than through abrupt, across-the-board liberalization. Measures aimed at improving institutional quality include the harmonization of national legislation with international standards, the modernization of customs and technical regulations, and the strengthening of intellectual property protection. At the same time, the introduction of transition-period mechanisms is being considered for sectors whose competitiveness is not yet sufficiently developed. This approach reflects an evolutionary adaptation strategy rather than a “shock therapy” model of integration.

Within the framework of the “New Uzbekistan — Land of Competitive Products” concept, measures are being implemented to increase the share of high-value-added products, to promote national brands in international markets, and to provide financial and organizational support to small and medium-sized enterprises. These measures are designed to transform WTO membership from a purely import-liberalizing mechanism into an instrument of export expansion, allowing domestic producers to benefit from improved market access rather than merely facing intensified import competition.

The core rationale for WTO accession lies in improving population welfare through the creation of a rules-based economic environment. Greater transparency in trade procedures, an intensified competitive environment, and increased investment inflows are expected to contribute to job creation and income growth over the medium term. At the same time, liberalization inevitably represents a period of adjustment for certain sectors. Accordingly, strengthening social protection mechanisms, expanding retraining programs, and pursuing a balanced regional industrial policy remain priority tasks at the legislative and policy level.

Taken together, these findings confirm the pattern identified in the comparative literature: WTO membership itself does not guarantee positive outcomes, but functions as an institutional catalyst whose effects depend on the quality, sequencing, and social inclusiveness of accompanying domestic reforms. Uzbekistan's phased, sector-sensitive strategy — combined with an explicit export-promotion orientation — represents an attempt to maximize the benefits of accession while managing its transitional costs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accession to the World Trade Organization should be understood not as a matter of external political image, but as a means of institutionally reinforcing Uzbekistan's domestic reform agenda. The sooner this process is concluded, the sooner Uzbekistan's economy can complete a decisive transition — from discretionary decision-making to clear, predictable rules, and from a closed economic model to an open and competitive

system. Based on the analysis presented above, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Continue the phased harmonization of national legislation with WTO norms, while maintaining clearly defined transition periods for sectors that require additional time to reach competitive readiness.

2. Strengthen social protection mechanisms and expand retraining and requalification programs for workers in sectors most exposed to increased import competition.

3. Deepen implementation of the “New Uzbekistan — Land of Competitive Products” concept by expanding financial and organizational support to export-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises.

4. Pursue a balanced regional industrial policy that accounts for the differentiated readiness of regions and sectors for open competition.

5. Establish a systematic monitoring mechanism to track the sectoral and social effects of trade liberalization following accession, enabling evidence-based adjustment of support measures over time.

In supporting Uzbekistan’s integration into the WTO, it remains a core task to simultaneously protect the interests of domestic producers, improve institutional quality, and ensure the social inclusiveness of reform. Ultimately, success in the global economy is measured not merely by access to markets, but by the level of genuine readiness for competition — and in this respect, Uzbekistan is making a consistent and deliberate choice.

REFERENCES

1. World Trade Organization. Understanding the WTO: Basics — Principles of the Trading System. Geneva: WTO.

2. World Trade Organization. World Trade Statistical Review. Geneva: WTO.

3. World Bank. Trade and Development Report: Lessons from WTO Accession Experiences. Washington, DC: World Bank.

4. World Trade Organization Secretariat. Accessions to the WTO: A Handbook. Geneva: WTO.

5. Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Legislative acts on the harmonization of national legislation with WTO requirements, 2023–2025.

6. Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan. “New Uzbekistan — Land of Competitive Products” strategic concept documents.