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# **INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF UZBEKISTAN: PROCESSES OF ACCESSION TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION AND THE EAEU**

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## **Abstract**

This article describes the importance of economic integration, the economic integration of Central Asian countries, and the problems in the process of the Republic of Uzbekistan's accession to international financial organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union.

**Keywords:** Trade tariffs, integration, foreign trade balance, investment, GATT, Eurasian Economic Union, strategy, product cost, labor migration.

## **Introduction**

Today, the first thing that comes to mind when anyone hears the phrase 'international economic integration' is the European Union. Because the concept of economic integration became popular precisely after the formation of the European Union. Economic integration is the result of economic cooperation between countries, which leads to the convergence of economic mechanisms, and this convergence takes the form of interstate agreements and is regulated by relevant interstate bodies. International economic integration is the economic, socio-political and cultural unification of countries, which arose on the basis of the development of multilateral mutually stable relations between national



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economies (states) and the division of labor, and expresses the interconnectedness of production sectors at various levels and in various forms. Uzbekistan is also striving to achieve economic integration at the international level, first of all by joining the largest economic organization in the world - the World Trade Organization. The World Trade Organization (WTO), which has 166 member countries, was established in 1995 and accounts for 95% of global trade and world GDP. These countries together account for 97% of Uzbekistan's trade turnover [3].

The meetings of the Joint Working Group on Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization were resumed in 2020. In particular, the fifth meeting of the working group, held in Geneva on June 21 last year, was attended by more than 60 delegations of member states, as well as representatives of international organizations and foreign experts. All 25 member states that spoke, including the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and others, unanimously expressed their full support for Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO.

At a recent press conference, Deputy Head of the Department for Cooperation with the WTO of the Ministry of Investments, Industry and Trade, Amirbek Mukhamedov, said that joining this international organization is a long and complicated process. The process of joining this organization for each country takes an average of 8-10, and for some countries - 10-15 years [4]. For example, it took Kazakhstan 13 years to join the organization, and Russia 19 years. This is because accession is possible only after the consent of all member states is obtained. Although we are not negotiating with all 166 countries, a total of 47 countries are part of Uzbekistan's working group on WTO accession. All of them have expressed their desire to negotiate with Uzbekistan on access to the goods and services market.

Indeed, work in this area has been gaining momentum recently. In particular, earlier this month, at the next meeting of the Uzbekistan-Georgia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, a protocol was signed on the completion of bilateral negotiations between Georgia and Uzbekistan on access to the goods and services market within the framework of



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our country's accession to the World Trade Organization. A similar process is in the final stage with Mongolia and Turkey.

Uzbekistan's efforts to accelerate its accession to the WTO are supported and provided with technical assistance by international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIS) [3].

On May 25, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev participated in the thirtieth meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council via videoconference, the press service of the head of state reported. Since 2020, Uzbekistan has had observer status in the union, which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Joint work is underway to create favorable conditions for expanding trade relations, search for new growth points and opportunities. In 2022, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with the EAEU countries increased by 23%. Stable growth rates are also observed this year [5].

### **LITERATURE ANALYSIS**

“Membership in the WTO is a top priority for Uzbekistan, and we are grateful to the United States for its tremendous assistance in preparing for accession to this organization,” said Sodiq Safoyev. “Last week, Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Sardor Umurzakov and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross held very successful negotiations [via video conference]. We are confident that the United States will support us.”

The First Deputy Speaker of the Senate acknowledged that a number of the country's experts are concerned that WTO membership "will undermine the ability of enterprises to cope with global competition." "The majority of the population [supports accession], and there is an agreement in the government and parliament on WTO membership," he added.

Speaking about the Eurasian Economic Union, Sodiq Safoyev noted that there are many contradictions in society on this issue. “There are many questions about joining or not joining, but there are three main factors when considering membership in the Eurasian Economic Union,” he said. “First of all, millions of citizens of the republic work in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union.



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These are our citizens, it is very important for us to protect their rights and create good opportunities for them to earn money."

"Secondly, geography. We need new transport routes for our main markets. As part of this organization, we will enter a system of preferences, which will reduce transport costs for exports and imports. Thirdly, the main direction of Uzbekistan's exports is the member states of the Eurasian Union," said the First Deputy Chairman of the Senate.

According to him, a special group has been formed in Tashkent to assess the possibilities of joining the EAEU. "Let's consider whether this will reduce the independence of foreign trade policy, whether it will undermine the position of our small and medium-sized businesses in the face of experienced partners from other countries," said Sodiq Safoyev. "The government and parliament will make a decision on this. This issue still remains open" [6].

On April 14, 2023, during a presentation on the processes and prospects of joining the World Trade Organization, our President expressed the following thoughts: — "We plan to double the export of finished products in the next three years. The only way to achieve this is to join the World Trade Organization. This will allow us to establish a fair trade system with 166 countries and create stable markets" [3].

Tasks in this regard are set out in Goal 91 of the New Uzbekistan's 'Development Strategy' for 2022-2026. To this end, bilateral negotiations are being conducted with about fifty member countries of the World Trade Organization. Uzbekistan applied for WTO membership in 1994 and participated in three meetings of the working group, says Tolqin Pardayev, associate professor at the Customs Institute. "However, for some reasons, this process stalled. In 2017, efforts to join the WTO were resumed. By the beginning of 2019, the government had revived the activities of the working group [4].

— The five-year project "Supporting Uzbekistan's Accession to the WTO" is also supported by the European Union, — says Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor Jasurbek Otaniyozov. — This project was launched in February 2020, and the main focus is on supporting the country's development plans for the modernization of the national economy in the process of joining the WTO. The main goal of the project is to promote the economic development of Uzbekistan



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and strengthen its integration into the international trading system by creating a trading environment that complies with the rules established by the organization [3].

On May 14, 2025, Shavkat Mirziyoyev familiarized himself with a presentation on the process of Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and measures to accelerate it. The presentation noted that within the framework of bilateral negotiations, market access negotiations were held with 33 countries, and negotiations with 24 countries have been completed to date. Large-scale legal and institutional reforms were carried out as part of harmonizing national legislation with the requirements of the organization. In particular, 13 laws, 10 decrees and resolutions, 19 resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, and 10 interdepartmental regulatory legal acts were adopted. In particular, customs procedures, export-import rules, and mechanisms in the field of intellectual property were gradually brought into line with WTO standards, and exclusive rights were abolished in 6 enterprises with a state share. At the meeting, the Head of State gave relevant instructions on accelerating the process of accession to the WTO and organizing it in a qualitative and systematic manner. According to it, the tasks of completing bilateral negotiations with the remaining 9 countries this year, holding 2 meetings of the Working Group, and completing the draft report of the Working Group to fully formulate Uzbekistan's obligations within the WTO were clearly defined. It was also noted that it is necessary to accelerate the process of adopting about 15 regulatory legal acts as part of adapting legislation to the organization's requirements [1].

## **METHODOLOGY**

In researching the topic, economic, scientific abstraction, comparative analysis, dynamics, induction, deduction, and other methods were used. In the process of scientific analysis, these scientific research methods, in particular, synthetic and analytical methods of observation, generalization, grouping, comparison, and analysis, were widely used.



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### **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

First of all, membership in the Eurasian Economic Union gives us access to a market with a population of more than 182 million people and a value of 1 trillion 587 billion US dollars. Uzbekistan can significantly benefit by exporting its relatively inexpensive products to this market. The results of economic cooperation and trade relations within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2022 were analyzed. According to the Center for Economic Research and Reforms, Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover with the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union in January-October amounted to 12.6 billion dollars, or 24.6 percent. Of this, the volume of exports amounted to 4.5 billion dollars, and the volume of imports reached 8.1 billion dollars. The share of the EAEU countries in Uzbekistan's total foreign trade turnover was 31.4 percent, total exports - 29.1 percent, and total imports - 32.9 percent. In December 2020, Uzbekistan received observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union. It is with this association that the closest trade and economic relations have been established, and further integration with the EAEU will allow them to be further strengthened. The trade turnover of the Eurasian Economic Union countries with Uzbekistan in 2020 amounted to about \$ 10 billion. The share of the EAEU countries is 30-31% of Uzbekistan's total merchandise exports. In other words, even before our country became a member, the EAEU is already our largest foreign trade partner. Joining the EAEU will undoubtedly increase this figure. In addition, the entry of products from the EAEU member states into our market contributes to increased competition. Such competition is good for the consumer. In international trade relations, tariff (duty) barriers are considered as much a problem as non-tariff barriers. This problem arose during the GATT, the "ancestor" of the World Trade Organization - non-tariff barriers - barriers to mutual trade and distorting competition through various certificates, standards, decisions and decrees. There are scientific analyses that currently the burden of non-tariff barriers in the total export value of the EAEU territory is 15-30 percent. Imagine that you are exporting a product to Russia for 100 rubles, and 15-30 rubles of its cost are spent on overcoming various barriers. This is a huge amount. If the barriers within the EAEU are at this level, one can imagine what they will be for third countries. If Uzbekistan is admitted to the EAEU, it will



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be possible to avoid excessive border checks and the resulting waste of time by unifying standards with the five member states. Our exporters will be able to export their products to the EAEU much more freely. It is worth noting that among the scientific analyses, there are also analyses that the entry of Armenia and Kazakhstan into the EAEU has had a negative impact on their economies [2].

For Uzbekistan, the EAEU is an important structure in terms of labor migration processes. This is because the majority of Uzbek citizens work in the territory of the EAEU member states. In particular, according to the Agency for Labor Migration, in 2019, the number of Uzbek citizens working in the Russian Federation was almost 1.6 million, and in Kazakhstan - more than 300 thousand.

**Table 1. Information on the entry and exit of citizens of Uzbekistan on the territory of the Russian Federation for migration purposes.**

Year	By place of permanent registration	By place of temporary registration	Including:						Migration Outflow Cases	
			Initial Visit	Of which, by purpose of visit						
				Tourism	Education	Work	Personal reasons	Other		
2017	72 433	4 009 944	2 178 483	14 702	28 960	1 822 933	280 882	31 006	2 758 867	
2018	67 431	4 431 696	2 393 886	12 876	34 203	2 007 407	304 090	35 310	3 249 946	
2019	65 905	4 739 789	2 584 207	22 035	50 080	2 107 302	366 136	38 654	3 980 705	

**Source: Data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation**

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in 2017-2019, citizens of Uzbekistan visited the territory of the Russian Federation about 13 million times. The majority of them (99 percent) were registered as temporary residents, and about 1 percent were registered as permanent residents.



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**Table 2. International trade turnover of the Republic of Uzbekistan with the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (as of January 2025, in million US dollars) [8].**

The EAEU countries	International Trade Turnover	Export	Import
Russia	799.1	267.9	531.1
Kazakhstan	313.5	72.9	240.6
Belarus	50.7	11.3	39.4
Kyrgyzstan	48.9	24.8	24.2
Armenia	2.3	1.4	0.9

More than half of Uzbek citizens visiting the Russian Federation were first-time visitors, and more than 80 percent of them indicated that they came to work. Uzbek citizens also visited the Russian Federation for personal (13%), educational (2%), tourism (1%), and other purposes [7].

Now let's analyze the above a little. First of all, it should be said that Uzbekistan's future entry into the union and then exit from it could become a serious political risk. After all, exiting from the EAEU after joining it could lead to at least a trade war with the EAEU countries, and serious sanctions against us from Russia. Therefore, a deeply thought-out step should be taken in this matter.

Since Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, Uzbekistan's policy of self-isolation has almost come to an end, and our state is conducting constructive diplomacy with neighboring countries based on mutual trust. The first and most important step on this path is the informal consultative council of the heads of Central Asian states, which was put forward by Uzbekistan. In addition, in March 2019, the first forum for economic cooperation between the countries of Central Asia was held in Tashkent. The goal of the forum was to develop mutual trade and tourism. Official Tashkent is also actively supporting its own integration process in the Central Asian region, and this initiative is being positively received not only by the leaders of the region, but also by distant but important partners such as the European Union. Only three things are required for the successful implementation of such integration: avoiding conflict with Russian interests, opening up its market for the sake of common energy cooperation, and selfless diplomacy. To this end, new projects initiated by the Uzbek government - the



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second meeting of the Informal Consultative Council of Central Asian Leaders, which was supposed to be held in 2019, but has been postponed for unknown reasons - should show the countries of the region that this event is a serious one. This includes the Central Asian Economic Forum, which was held in Tashkent for the first time in 2019. Continuity is important here. On the way to WTO membership, for example, Kazakhstan managed to obtain permission to continue exceptional measures for a long time (phasing out). As a result, this country has the right to operate at the tariffs it promised to the WTO until 2025, and only after 2025 it will be possible to equalize (raise) its external duties with those of the EAEU. Therefore, I believe that Uzbekistan should first consider the issues of membership in the EAEU only after it completes the processes of full membership in the WTO. This will allow Uzbekistan to import even cheaper products from third countries that are members of the WTO, especially goods that are competitive with the technology produced by the EAEU countries, at a lower price from the WTO countries for a certain period of time. Therefore, I am in favor of not starting the EAEU negotiations before the issue of our WTO membership is resolved.

### **CONCLUSION**

First of all, Uzbekistan should intensify negotiations with the European Union and the WTO. I think it is necessary to study how WTO membership will affect our market and industry, and then, if necessary, raise the issue of EAEU membership. Some economists believe that after Uzbekistan joins the WTO, there will be no need to join the EAEU. After all, the tariffs that will be reduced for WTO accession will certainly be lower than the EAEU tariffs, which are measured by Russian tariffs. After the WTO, joining the EAEU means that tariffs will increase again. Therefore, strengthening bilateral relations with EAEU countries, especially with northern neighbors such as Russia and Kazakhstan, which play an important role in our foreign trade relations, seems to be the most optimal option for our country.

Given that Uzbekistan's accession to the EAEU will entail a major change in our foreign trade policy, affecting both domestic and foreign manufacturers, it is necessary for the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment to provide



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entrepreneurs and the general public with sufficient information about the positive and negative aspects of joining the EAEU, and to ensure that the topic is discussed among industry experts. At the same time, it is necessary to provide a clear answer as soon as possible to the question of the trajectory of Uzbekistan's foreign trade relations. There is no doubt that manufacturers and investors are waiting for such a clear signal from our government [2].

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