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Members of the World Trade Organization

By Megan J. Provost

As of July 29, 2016, there are 164 member-countries in the World Trade Organization (WTO). According to the WTO, any state or customs territory having “full autonomy in the conduct of its trade policies” is eligible to join (or, more accurately, “accede to”) the WTO. However, before countries are granted full membership, WTO members must agree on their accession terms.

**Becoming a Member**
The WTO generally breaks the accession process down into four states. The applicant countries must:

1. **Tell us about yourself.** The government applying for membership into the WTO is asked to describe all aspects of its “trade and economic policies” that might have a bearing on WTO agreements. This information is submitted to the WTO in a memorandum, which is then examined by the “working party” dealing with the country’s membership application. 

   *Note:* These “working parties” oversee the accession process and are open to all WTO member-countries.

2. **Work with individual members on trade commitments.** When the working party has made sufficient progress on principles and policies, parallel bilateral talks begin between the prospective new member and individual WTO member-countries. Because different member-countries have different trading interests, bilateral negotiations work best. These talks cover tariff rates, specific market access commitments, and other trade policies in goods and services. The new member’s commitments that are negotiated through these bilateral discussions must apply equally to all WTO member-countries, under normal nondiscrimination rules. These negotiations and commitments can be highly complicated.

3. **Draft membership terms.** Once the working party has completed its examination of the applicant’s trade regime, and the parallel bilateral market access negotiations are complete, the working party finalizes the terms of accession. These appear in a report, a draft membership treaty (called a “protocol of accession”), and schedules of the soon-to-be-member’s commitments.

4. **Make a decision.** The final package, consisting of the report, protocol, and schedules, is presented to the WTO General Council or the Ministerial Conference. Two-thirds of WTO member-countries must vote in favor of the application. Once approved, the applicant is free to sign the protocol and to accede to the WTO, however, many
countries’ own parliament or legislature must also ratify the agreement before membership is complete.

**Alliances and Groups of Countries**

While WTO membership is open to state and custom territories, there are some membership groups, as well as coalitions of nations that regularly work together. This is especially true in the agricultural negotiations, where we have seen well over 20 coalitions and alliances submit proposals or negotiate with a common position. In addition, developing countries are utilizing alliances more frequently, likely due to the improved bargaining power of a larger group.

The best known, as well as largest and most comprehensive, group at the WTO is the European Union (EU). The EU is a customs union with a single external trade policy and tariff system. The EU is a WTO member in its own right, as are each of its 28 member-states, making at total of 29 WTO members. While the member states coordinate their position in Brussels and Geneva, the European Commission alone speaks for the EU at almost all WTO meetings. However, sometimes references are made to specific member states, particularly where their national laws differ. This is the case in some disputes when an EU member’s law or measure is cited, or in notifications of EU member countries’ laws, such as in intellectual property (TRIPS).

A number of other nations have accomplished a lesser degree of economic integration, but still have important trade alliances. For example, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN, which includes WTO members Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Viet Nam) have many common trade interests and are frequently able to coordinate positions and to speak with a single voice. MERCOSUR, the Southern Common Market (which includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela, with Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as associate members), has a similar set-up. Other groups that occasionally present unified statements at the WTO are the African Group; the least-developed countries (LDCs); the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP); and the Latin American Economic System (SELA).

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**The Quad, the Quint, the Six and ‘not’**

Some of the most difficult negotiations in the WTO have resulted from “breakthrough” talks from four to six of the major WTO members-countries. Originally, the “Quad” consisted of Canada, the European Union, Japan, and the United States.

However, since the launch of the Doha Development Round, developing countries’ voices have increased considerably, bringing in Brazil and India. And, Australia was added as a representative of the Cairns Group. So, since 2005, four, five or six of the following have got together to try to break deadlocks, particularly in agriculture: Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India, Japan, and the United States.

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Appendix A: The Member Countries

The following is a list of WTO member countries (and their date of accession), as of July 29, 2016.

Afghanistan – July 29, 2016
Albania – September 8, 2000
Angola – November 23, 1996
Antigua and Barbuda – January 1, 1995
Argentina – January 1, 1995
Armenia – February 5, 2003
Australia – January 1, 1995
Austria – January 1, 1995
Bahrain – January 1, 1995
Bangladesh – January 1, 1995
Barbados – January 1, 1995
Belgium – January 1, 1995
Belize – January 1, 1995
Benin – February 22, 1996
Bolivia – September 12, 1995
Botswana – May 31, 1995
Brazil – January 1, 1995
Brunei – January 1, 1995
Bulgaria – December 1, 1996
Burkina Faso – June 3, 1995
Burundi – July 23, 1995
Cambodia – October 13, 2004
Cameroon – December 13, 1995
Canada – January 1, 1995
Cape Verde – July 23, 2008
Central African Republic – May 31, 1995
 Chad – October 19, 1996
Chile – January 1, 1995
China – December 11, 2001
Colombia – April 30, 1995
Congo – March 27, 1997
Costa Rica – January 1, 1995
Côte d’Ivoire – January 1, 1995
Croatia – November 30, 2000
Cuba – April 20, 1995
Cyprus – July 30, 1995
Czech Republic – January 1, 1995
Democratic Republic of Congo – January 1, 1997
Denmark – January 1, 1995
Djibouti – May 31, 1995
Dominica – January 1, 1995
Dominican Republic – March 9, 1995
Ecuador – January 21, 1996
Egypt – June 30, 1995
El Salvador – May 7, 1995
Estonia – November 13, 1999
European Union – January 1, 1995
Fiji – January 14, 1996
Finland – January 1, 1995
France – January 1, 1995
Gabon – January 1, 1995
Gambia – October 23, 1996
Georgia – June 14, 2000
Germany – January 1, 1995
Ghana – January 1, 1995
Greece – January 1, 1995
Grenada – February 22, 1996
Guatemala – July 21, 1995
Guinea – October 25, 1995
Guinea-Bissau – May 31, 1995
Guyana – January 1, 1995
Haiti – January 30, 1996
Honduras – January 1, 1995
Hong Kong, China – January 1, 1995
Hungary – January 1, 1995
Iceland – January 1, 1995
India – January 1, 1995
Indonesia – January 1, 1995
Ireland – January 1, 1995
Israel – April 21, 1995
Italy – January 1, 1995
Jamaica – March 9, 1995
Japan – January 1, 1995
Jordan – April 11, 2000
Kazakhstan – November 30, 2015
Kenya – January 1, 1995
Korea, Republic of – January 1, 1995
Kuwait – January 1, 1995
Kyrgyz Republic – December 20, 1998
Laos – February 2, 2013
Latvia – February 10, 1999
Lesotho – May 31, 1995
Liberia – July 14, 2016
Liechtenstein – September 1, 1995
Lithuania – May 31, 2001
Luxembourg – January 1, 1995
Macao, China – January 1, 1995
Macedonia, FYR – April 4, 2003
Madagascar – November 17, 1995
Malawi – May 31, 1995
Malaysia – January 1, 1995
Maldives – May 31, 1995
Mali – May 31, 1995
Malta – January 1, 1995
Mauritania – 31 May 1995
Mauritius – 1 January 1995
Mexico – 1 January 1995
Moldova – July 26, 2001
Mongolia – February 21, 1996
Montenegro – April 4, 2003
Morocco – January 1, 1995
Mozambique – August 26, 1995
Myanmar – January 1, 1995
Namibia – January 1, 1995
Nepal – April 23, 2004
Netherlands – January 1, 1995
New Zealand – January 1, 1995
Nicaragua – September 3, 1995
Niger – December 13, 1996
Nigeria – January 1, 1995
Norway – January 1, 1995
Oman – November 9, 2000
Pakistan – January 1, 1995
Panama – September 6, 1997
Papua New Guinea – June 9, 1996
Paraguay – January 1, 1995
Peru – January 1, 1995
Philippines – January 1, 1995
Poland – July 1, 1995
Portugal – January 1, 1995
Qatar – January 13, 1996
Romania – January 1, 1995
Russia – August 22, 2012
Rwanda – May 22, 1996
Saint Kitts and Nevis – February 21, 1996
Saint Lucia – January 1, 1995
Saint Vincent & Grenadines – January 1, 1995
Samoa – May 10, 2012
Saudi Arabia – December 11, 2005
Senegal – January 1, 1995
Seychelles – April 26, 2015
Sierra Leone – July 23, 1995
Singapore – January 1, 1995
Slovak Republic – January 1, 1995
Slovenia – July 30, 1995
Solomon Islands – July 26, 1996
South Africa – January 1, 1995
Spain – January 1, 1995
Sri Lanka – January 1, 1995
Suriname – January 1, 1995
Swaziland – January 1, 1995
Sweden – January 1, 1995
Switzerland – July 1, 1995
Taiwan – January 1, 2002
Tajikistan – March 2, 2013
Tanzania – January 1, 1995
Thailand – January 1, 1995
Togo – May 31, 1995
Trinidad and Tobago – March 1, 1995
Tunisia – March 29, 1995
Turkey – March 26, 1995
Uganda – January 1, 1995
Ukraine – May 16, 2008
United Arab Emirates – April 10, 1996
United Kingdom – January 1, 1995
United States – January 1, 1995
Uruguay – January 1, 1995
Vanuatu – August 24, 2012
Venezuela – January 1, 1995
Viet Nam – January 11, 2007
Yemen – June 26, 2014
Zambia – January 1, 1995
Zimbabwe – March 5, 1995
Appendix B: Memberships in Progress

The following countries’ accessions are in progress:
Algeria
Andorra
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Belarus
Bhutan
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Comoros
Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia
Iran
Iraq
Lebanon
Libya
Sao Tomé and Principe
Serbia
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Syria
Timor-Leste
Uzbekistan