Uzbekistan’s World Trade Organization (WTO) Membership: Interests, Risks, and Expected Outcomes

(Translated)

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According to official data, Uzbekistan’s plan to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) by 2026 aims to boost exports, attract investment, and enhance economic competitiveness. However, such statements merely present an idealized picture to the public; significant economic integration brings not only opportunities but also serious risks. Undoubtedly, Uzbekistan’s agricultural sector will be the first to feel the impact of these shifts.

For years, Russia has been a primary market for Uzbek agricultural exports. Yet, in recent times, it has leveraged migration and foreign trade as tools for political pressure, resulting in border delays for Uzbek products, a decline in quality, and significant financial losses— or even bankruptcy— for some businesspeople. Consequently, Tashkent’s pursuit of alternative export markets stems from both economic necessity and geopolitical pressures.

Uzbekistan views increasing its GDP as a top priority to cover the budget deficit, boost exports, and attract investment. With external debt exceeding $48 billion, the country regards improved economic indicators as the key to maintaining access to further external financing; without such improvements, covering the budget deficit would become increasingly difficult.

The farmers' protests witnessed across Europe in recent years could serve as a valuable lesson for both the state and society in Uzbekistan. In France, Germany, Poland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and other nations, farmers have staged widespread protests against soaring fuel and fertilizer prices, tax burdens, bureaucratic red tape, and mounting competition from imports. They have argued that certain European Union environmental policies have driven up production costs and disadvantaged local farmers in the marketplace. In response to these protests, some governments have been compelled to offer tax relief, postpone specific environmental mandates, and adjust import policies.

Another issue under discussion is urbanization. While urbanization is often portrayed as a natural component of economic development, it can negatively impact national food security if it leads to a depletion of human resources in rural areas, reduced efficiency in land use, and a decline in food production. Aligning with European standards is frequently cited as a primary justification for accelerating this process.

Meanwhile, mandatory animal registration and identification procedures, along with stricter veterinary oversight, have been implemented since August. Official statements claim the system aims to improve regulation and monitoring; however, it could also be leveraged to track private assets and wealth, boost tax revenues, and enforce absolute control—all while Western capitalist interests seek to amass further wealth.

If the state persists on this path, there is a risk that major foreign corporations operating in Uzbekistan’s agricultural sector will outcompete local farmers, effectively reducing them to a state of dependency on these corporate giants. Signs of this trend have already emerged with the entry of Chinese companies into the Uzbek market. Such a trajectory could drive farmers and agricultural workers to abandon the sector—a scenario that aligns with the West's primary objective.

Who, then, is behind these decisions and requirements?

Western capitalist circles leverage specific initiatives and international experts to advance their political and economic interests. Examples include the activities of Jeffrey Sachs and the projects of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network in Uzbekistan and Central Asia—activities viewed as part of this broader trend. Uzbekistan is also actively participating in the implementation of these reforms.

According to statements by Bill Gates, his investment team has been purchasing vast tracts of agricultural land in the United States. This is not merely an isolated initiative. Major investment funds and pension funds have been actively acquiring farmland over the past fifteen to twenty years, treating it as a strategic asset. Key players in this arena include CalPERS, Bill Gates’s investment firm, TIAA, the Harvard University endowment, and Farmland LP. These funds and companies have invested in agricultural assets across the United States, Brazil, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and Central Asia is now also being viewed as a strategic region for future investment.

Uzbekistan’s accession to the World Trade Organization must not come at the expense of local businesspeople, farmers, or the country’s natural resources. Instead, the state must foster an economic environment that enables local producers to compete and establish effective legal safeguards to prevent strategic assets from passing into foreign hands without oversight. Safeguarding the Ummah's interests is not demonstrated through slogans, but rather through such practical decisions.

The most crucial task for Uzbekistan is to deeply consider the long-term political and economic consequences before integrating into the international economic order; for merely exchanging one form of economic dependence on foreign powers for another does not guarantee the people's well-being. Relying first on the Soviet Union, then being influenced by Russia, and today becoming beholden to the West, will never lead the country onto the path of independent development.

For Muslim peoples, the ultimate standard is not found in man-made economic systems, but in the Shariah rulings of Allah (swt). Islamic economics does not aim to concentrate wealth in the hands of a select few; instead, it seeks to distribute wealth equitably and serve the interests of society. As Allah (swt) stated, ﴿كَيْ لَا يَكُونَ دُولَةً بَيْنَ الْأَغْنِيَاءِ مِنْكُمْ﴾ **“So that it may not circulate solely among the wealthy from among you”** [TMQ Surah Al-Hashr: 7].