



## CONCEPT NOTE

### Background and rationale

The transformation of agricultural markets as a result of political and economic transition in the post-Soviet countries was accompanied by the process of globalization and deepening trade integration both within the region and with external trade partners. The countries are often engaged in multiple trade negotiation processes at the same time, each with their own challenges and benefits. Many in the European and Central Asian countries joined the WTO which helped enhance their participation in global agricultural trade, and the region plays an increasingly important role as a supplier of agricultural commodities to international markets.

However, in general, the capacities of in Europe and Central Asia to engage effectively in trade negotiation processes and to implement trade agreements are constrained. The region's governments have limited capacity to address the concerns that arise during the implementation of trade agreements, determine the implications of national trade policy reforms for agricultural support programs, establish an effective inter-governmental coordination mechanism for the implementation and engage the private sector in the process of trade policy reform. Poor understanding of international trade rules and of the relationship between trade policy and agricultural development issues prevents the countries from maximizing the gains from expanding trade. The countries often lack the resources and institutional capacities to undertake the reforms needed to fulfil their trade obligations and implement measures that would allow the agricultural sector taking greater advantage of trade opportunities.

Continuous training of officials and other stakeholders in international rules and procedures for agricultural trade and assistance in improving regulatory frameworks in areas that affect trade (sanitary and phytosanitary standards; trade facilitation; market information etc.) are needed, together with follow-up support, in order for the countries to comply with their international commitments and to allow them to use effectively the available mechanisms to defend their countries' trade interests. This requires strengthening capacities of national experts and

institutions, in particular for training and advisory services on trade-related issues to agricultural sector stakeholders.

The Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia is intended to bring together experts who conduct research, carry out training programs and advise governments and private sector on issues related to agricultural trade and trade policy, including regional and multilateral trade agreements. The core business of the network will be to facilitate generation and exchange of knowledge and to ensure that appropriate capacity development solutions on issues related to agricultural trade in the CIS region are identified and applied.

### **Objectives**

- Provide a neutral and independent platform for knowledge and experience exchange on agricultural trade issues affecting European and Central Asian countries;
- Enhance the quality and relevance of agricultural trade research and strengthen collaboration among experts for analysis, capacity development and other initiatives in the European and Central Asian region;
- Strengthen the capacities to provide technical advice and policy recommendations to governments and the private sector.
- Improve communication and information sharing on trade policy issues with the wider community

### **Activities**

- Organization of the online and on-site workshops, training seminars and discussions on agricultural trade policies
- Preparation and dissemination of relevant publications and data
- Technical assistance to trainers in preparing curriculums, adapting or developing training programmes including Training of Trainers guidelines for them to engage in adapting/delivering training
- Facilitation of exchanges and study tours among researchers and analysts from different European and Central Asian countries
- Organization of annual meetings/conferences of the network
- Facilitation of public-private dialogue on agricultural trade policy issues in European and Central Asian countries

### **Participants and main functions**

Main participants:

- *Academia and independent experts*: Research centers, universities and other research and teaching institutions and independent experts

Activities: Research, knowledge dissemination and advisory services

#### Other participants:

- *Government*: Ministries of agriculture, economy, trade, among others and regional bodies

Activities: Validate demand for knowledge/training/advisory services, policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and financial support to the network

- *Private sector*: Agri-food companies, producer associations, trading companies, investment companies, banks, law and consulting firms

Activities: Validate demand for knowledge/training/ advisory services, knowledge sharing and financial support to the network

- *Civil society*: NGOs involved in agricultural development and trade

Activities: Dialogue, technical assistance, knowledge dissemination

#### Potential partners

- WTO Secretariat
- International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)
- International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium (**IATRC**)
- FAO-supported networks such as Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) and EastAgri
- Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO)
- Other UN agencies such as UNCTAD and UNDP

#### Outcomes

- A consolidated expert community actively involved in addressing the challenges associated with promotion of agricultural trade in the European and Central Asian countries.
- Improved quality of agricultural trade policy research and advisory services to governments on trade agreements and agricultural trade policy
- Private sector and civil society more informed about the implications of trade policy changes on agriculture and engaged more effectively in dialogue with governments on agricultural trade issues

## **The approach to network creation**

As part of its Regional Initiative on Agri-Food Trade and Regional Integration, FAO will establish a neutral platform for the dialogue among network participants, acting as a facilitator and providing organizational support to carrying out the core activities of the network. FAO's Trade and Markets Division, jointly with the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, will act as a catalyst for the creation and promotion of the network, serving as a Secretariat for the network in the initial stages of its development. It will also provide targeted technical assistance needed for the delivery of the network's work program and assist with resource mobilization. This initiative will build upon the ongoing FAO work in the area of capacity development for trade in the region.

As the first step, FAO will conduct a selection process for the Network members using criteria such as:

- job profile and experience
- existing program of work related to capacity development or providing expert advice in the area of agricultural trade and
- availability and readiness to develop, apply and transfer new knowledge and skills.

The process will involve identification of the target audience, collecting information about the candidates from the target audience using a Participant Application Form and interviewing the short-listed candidates via Skype or phone. This procedure will also serve to nominate the board of ATnet trustees.

At the expert network's first meeting, economists and legal experts from Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia discussed their activities and drafted a collective work plan for 2015-2016. Discussions focused on identifying the existing difficulties in development and dissemination of relevant analytical materials on such key topics as WTO accession commitments and their implications for agriculture, as well as possible solutions and ideas for collaboration at the regional level. In addition, during the event was established the Coordinating Committee of the Expert Network.

## **FAO's role in trade**

The primary goal of the Regional Initiative "Improving Agrifood Trade and Market Integration 2016-2017" is to support member countries in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment for small and medium-sized enterprises. A better trade policy environment for modern agrifood markets requires the development of capacity for both trade agreements and domestic food safety and quality standards. The Initiative consists of three main components to support the sharing of ideas, experiences and solutions across interventions.

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## **Online resources:**

FAO Trade:

<http://www.fao.org/trade/en>

FAO Trade and Markets Division:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est>

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia:

<http://www.fao.org/europe/en>

FAO-UNITAR online training course “WTO Accession and Implications for Agriculture in CIS Countries”

<http://www.unitar.org/unfao/>

Workshop: Agricultural export promotion in Kyrgyzstan, 18-19 of October 2016, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est/international-trade/europe-and-central-asia/agri-food/en/>

Regional workshop on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement impact on agri-food trade, 30 of May – 01 of June, Odessa, Ukraine:

<http://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail-news/en/c/901824/>

Regional Workshop: Resolving agricultural trade issues through the WTO, 07 June 2017, Kiev, Ukraine: <http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-events-new/wtokiev/en/>

Brink, L. 2014. Countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States – Agricultural Policy Issues in the Context of the World Trade Organization. FAO, Rome: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3883e.pdf>

Annual Review of Agricultural Trade Policies in post-Soviet countries (produced in Russian with synthesis in English): <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7327r.pdf>

Monthly Newsletter “Overview of trade policy Europe and Central Asia” produced in Russian since May 2015: <http://www.fao.org/economic/est/international-trade/europe-and-central-asia/cispubs/en/>