

## **Euro-Asia Call for Action**

### **Outcome Document of the High-Level Euro-Asia Regional Review Meeting of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014 2024 held on 22-23 August 2023, Bangkok, Thailand**

#### **Introduction**

1. We, the Ministers and representatives from Landlocked Developing countries (LLDCs), gathered in Bangkok, Thailand on 22-23 August 2023 for the High-level Euro-Asia Regional Review Meeting in preparation of the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs to be held in 2024, to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (VPOA) in the Euro-Asia Region, including identification of achievements, gaps, constraints, new and emerging challenges and opportunities, sharing of best practices, experiences and innovative approaches for accelerated post-pandemic climate resilient recovery as well as appropriate policy measures and concrete recommendations at the national, regional and global levels necessary for making the successor programme of action for LLDCs a truly transformative one, especially in contributing to rapid economic growth, inclusive development and successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Euro-Asian LLDCs.

2. We are meeting against the backdrop of a fragile and highly uncertain global economic outlook, amid the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the adverse impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and other environmental degradation aspects, mounting risk of debt distress, cost of living crisis, and rising geopolitical tensions with widespread and disproportionate effects on the poorest and the most vulnerable.

3. We are seriously concerned that the achievement of the SDGs is in great peril. At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, we are alarmed that the progress on most of the SDGs is either moving much too slowly or has regressed below the 2015 baseline. Years of sustainable development gains are being reversed. Millions of people have fallen into poverty, hunger and malnutrition are becoming more prevalent, and humanitarian needs are rising. LLDCs, with their existing geographical constraints and high vulnerability to shocks are being affected severely.

mobilize

15. We note that during the implementation period of the VPoA, 2 LLDCs became full members of the WTO, and four LLDCs have a WTO observer status and are at different stages of negotiation towards accessing to the WTO.

16. We acknowledge that LLDCs in the region have

previous decade (2000-2014) to an average of 3.4% between 2015 and 2023. It tumbled to -1.2% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It increased to 4.6% in 2021 and was estimated to be 3.6% in 2022.

25. We also recognize that over the review period, Euro-Caucasus' share of exports of services remained extremely marginal (at less than 0.5 per cent of global trade in services), with almost no visible change.

26. We note that a significant portion of the services sector, which accounts for over 50 percent of most LLDCs' economies, is not internationally tradable, such as wholesale and retail trade. This lack of tradability further limits productivity growth.

27. We further note that the tourism sector which is one of the main contributors to several Euro-Caucasus' economies was hardest hit by COVID-19 (a decline in the region's median of tourism receipts (% of total exports) from 14 % in 2019 to 5 % in 2020) and the recovery has been slow and its potential remains largely untapped.

28. We acknowledge that Euro-Asian LLDCs have put significant emphasis on infrastructure development in their national development plans, many of which have introduced and/or updated national infrastructure plans and allocated significant resources to develop their road,

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48. We encourage LLDCs, transit countries and their development and trading partners to further enhance the implementation of their obligations under all relevant international, regional and sub-regional agreements on transit trade and transport facilitation, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), ESCAP Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, as well as other more tailored regional agreements to enhance trade capacity, supply chain and trade resilience. We call on development partners, the private sector and relevant international, regional, and sub-regional organizations including ESCAP, WTO, UNCTAD, UNECE and ADB to increase their support to LLDCs and transit countries on a sustainable basis, to accelerate implementation of these agreements.

49. We encourage LLDCs to be proactive in indicating their capacity needs for Trade Facilitation Agreement measures notified under Category C to facilitate the acquisition of the necessary technical and capacity assistance. We call upon the donor countries to provide assistance and support for capacity building of the LLDCs to implement the relevant provisions of the Agreement.

50. We encourage non-WTO member Asian LLDCs to become members as soon as possible and call on international community to provide technical support and capacity-building assistance to expedite their accession efforts.

51. We call upon the members of the World Trade Organization to make a strong commitment to enhancing effective, non-discriminatory and equitable participation of the LLDCs in the multilateral trading system. We further call on enhanced market access including through reducing or eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade, particularly SPS and TBTs, in key markets for LLDCs, addressing tariff escalations, and the elimination of trade barriers that are inconsistent with WTO Agreements.

52. We emphasize the need for enhancing cross-border collaboration between the landlocked developing countries and transit countries in order to promote sustainable, inclusive, affordable, and resilient regional and global transport systems and value chains.

53. We recognize that COVID-19 has led to a surge in e-commerce and that the growth in e-commerce provides international trade opportunities including new market opportunities for LLDCs. However, LLDCs, due to their limited trade capacity and infrastructural bottlenecks could not reap the benefits offered by e-commerce. We call on the development and trading partners and relevant international organizations to provide financial and technical assistance to promote e-commerce in LLDCs including through capacity building and developing the necessary framework and improving digital infrastructure, as well as digital skills.

54. We recognize that the Fourth Industrial Revolution associated with rapid technological change and digitalization has a profound impact on the way we produce, transport and trade. Digitalization has transformed the way services are supplied, which is having a transformative impact upon how services trade is framed within the multilateral trading system. Digital trade in services is also among the most dynamic sectors in the global economy. This can facilitate LLDCs participation in international trade, especially by helping to overcome traditional trade barriers and to move more commerce online. However, despite the tech development, barriers to digital trade continue to exist, especially in LLDCs. International community should ensure the roll out of affordable ICT infrastructure and digital eco-systems and adapt the education







the establishment of subsidiary bodies to guide the implementation.

76. We encourage the region's LLDCs to continue formulating policies and strategies aimed diversifying their export structure, reducing their reliance on commodity exports, and adding value to their products, particularly in the manufacturing, agriculture, ICT and tourism.

77. We encourage Euro-Asian LLDCs to adopt effective tourism development strategies including undertaking additional marketing efforts, reducing costs, improving the quality of services, developing and maintaining tourism infrastructure, simplifying visa processes, ensuring quality services, safety, and security, and enhancing human resources through vocational education, training, and capacity building, and facilitating local supply sourcing and to promote linkages between the tourism sector and local suppliers.

78. We encourage Euro-Asian LLDCs to take

83. We encourage the LLDCs to strengthen their efforts in raising domestic savings, including through carrying out reforms in tax administration, digitalization of tax collection system, broadening the tax base and strengthening domestic capital markets. We also encourage LLDCs to explore new and innovative financing mechanisms to raise capital for development including accessing the global climate funds and mobilizing resources through issuance of green bonds and other instrument.

84. We reiterate our call on donor countries to fulfill their ODA commitments, and further urge them to systematically take into account the special needs and challenges of LLDCs that fall into the category of middle-income countries, where appropriate. We also call upon the development partners to provide enhanced financial and technical support to the LLDCs that will graduate from their LDC status in the near term and lose preferential trade schemes and other special and differential treatments.

85. We underline the urgent need for revitalizing infrastructure investment in LLDCs in an inclusive, accessible and affordable way to meet the financing gap in developing modern and

