



7th Meeting of the CAREC Regional Trade Group
13 June 2025 | Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

1. The Regional Trade Group (RTG) under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program held its 7th meeting to discuss the midterm review of the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030 and priority activities and initiatives for reporting to the Senior Officials' Meeting on 17-20 June 2025.¹ Mr. Sanzharbek Bolotov, Deputy Minister of Economy and Commerce and CAREC National Focal Point for the Kyrgyz Republic, stressed the importance of cross-border trade and connectivity. He also discussed how the proposed CAREC Trade and Investment Framework (CARTIF) can strengthen the regional work towards sustained trade and investment, and supported the proposal to issue a Statement of Intent at the CAREC Ministerial Conference in November 2025. ADB's Country Director for the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Zheng Wu underscored the need to operationalize the recommendations of the CAREC 2030 Midterm Review and how the CITA 2030 Midterm Review helps ensure responsiveness to members' needs during rapid changes in the global economy. CITA 2030 has achieved much, underscoring that collective effort is crucial for creating a more open, efficient and resilient trade system.

2. The RTG meeting discussed the: (i) midterm review of CITA 2030; (ii) updates and lessons from specific CAREC Trade initiatives; (iii) country proposals for regional trade projects; (iv) development partners' perspectives; and (v) suggestions for the Phase 2 TA to implement CITA and its Rolling Strategic Action Plan 2025-2027.

3. **Midterm Review of CITA 2030.** CAREC members welcomed ADB's [CAREC Trade Sector Report](#) (2025-2026) and the overall CITA 2030's substantive progress and benefits to their countries and reaffirmed the trade strategy's relevance to their national priorities and significance to deepening economic cooperation. The meeting suggested to focus on smart, green and inclusive trade, digitalization, and leveraging CARTIF to expand and diversify economies and deepen regional integration. Private sector engagement, stronger ties among trade agencies, and integration of services were also highlighted. The [preliminary findings](#) of the CITA 2030 MTR will be updated with the inputs received from country consultations and RTG meeting.

4. **Azerbaijan** considers participation in CITA of strategic importance, given national priorities of export diversification, digital and green economy. Amid the evolving global context, the provision of technical and analytic support, feedback mechanism for evaluating activities, knowledge sharing, and focus on sustainable development, digital trade, and deepening regional integration was emphasized. The **People's Republic of China** (PRC) is encouraged with the achievements of CITA especially in digital trade transformation, leveraging emerging technology, and developing the CARTIF concept, which lay a solid foundation for CAREC's future. Prioritizing CARTIF to expand, diversify, promote sustainable trade, and deepen regional integration, is encouraged. **Georgia** finds CITA strongly aligned with its priority objectives to become a regional trade hub connecting Europe to Asia, diversify exports and strengthen digital and green economy. Progress is seen in key areas and the Georgian Government is ready to engage in active

¹ The RTG meeting agenda, list of participants, meeting documents, and photos are available at the [CAREC event page](#).

discussion on CARTIF. Georgia further suggested that CITA must address emerging priorities for smart, green, and inclusive trade, i.e. elevate focus on export diversification, modernize SPS policy and infrastructure, empower SMEs, startups and innovators for trade, deepen connectivity through digital and regulatory alignment, scale up digital innovations regionally, while actively promoting green supply chains, carbon standards and environmental trade.

5. **Kazakhstan** highlighted CITA pillars' relevance to its national trade policy as well as the WTO accession efforts of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, for which CAREC TA can continue to support. Among the proposed activities include providing a model for setting up and operating transport hubs and opportunities for the PRC to share its rich experience in setting up marketplaces. To update CITA, recommendations include: (i) incorporate export-oriented critical minerals, given resource-rich members and interest from EU and PRC investors; and (ii) adapting to CBAM carbon tax by hard-to-abate sectors. For CARTIF, trade and investments should be regarded as one, and a declaration of intention to be adopted at the highest level is required to provide grounds for negotiations. The **Kyrgyz Republic** considers CITA to be a key instrument for deepening economic cooperation and sustainability of regional markets. It has intensified efforts to raise export competitiveness through the "Made in Kyrgyz 2025" export program to promote, facilitate, and improve quality, and a Kyrgyz Export Trade center, and proposes the deepening of institutional ties with trade promotion organizations of other countries. Transport infrastructure is a priority, for which the country is seeking to strengthen multimodal corridors by creating trade and logistics hubs that use digital technologies.

6. **Mongolia** considers CITA to be relevant and forward-looking, as it aligns with national trade and economic diversification objectives. CITA's emphasis on soft infrastructure and support enabled Mongolia's notable progress in aligning with SPS standards, and use of blockchain for e-certificate of origin. CITA's multi-pillar approach benefited the country with projects that modernize border facilities and economic zones. **Pakistan** is well-positioned as a transit hub and prioritizes the use of trade facilities and integration of transit trade in CAREC corridors. It looks forward to expansion of TIR and AEO through capacity building of both public and private sector. Its export processing zone facilities can be used by CAREC through investment and bilateral agreements. For continued relevance of CITA, private sector must be involved, including in business innovation, and in CITA implementation of AI, e-commerce, supply chain, warehousing, services, banking and finance projects. Linkages of Customs clearance systems and risk management, integration of services sector are also important. With global trade uncertainty, regional trade has become more relevant, and members should take advantage of opportunities created under CAREC. **Tajikistan** prioritizes cross-border trade and investment, and is benefiting from CITA. It has several strategies to better integrate into regional and global markets, covering infrastructure, regulatory reforms, institutional development, private sector engagement; also TF and customs, investment climate, diversification of trade, digital trade. CARTIF is a platform for regional integration. CITA is aligned with its strategic goals and Tajikistan is committed to continue working to further economic integration.

7. **Turkmenistan** in pursuing trade facilitation, digitalization, integration into trade links, has established a working group for developing paperless trade and is forming the national border coordination group to deepen interagency through national single window. **Turkmenistan** proposes (i) clearer wording for CITA pillars, with targeted measurable indicators; (ii) developing strategies and pilot projects to facilitate e-commerce; and (iii) support modernizing customs, develop single window systems, and build capacity of trade bodies. **Uzbekistan** has been undertaking trade facilitation projects including the Toguz automated system of the plant protection agency that covers the whole value chain from production to export and is integrated

with ePhyto Solution, the e-Queue project with UN and ADB support to be installed in more than 10 BCPs, and single window that covers more than 10 agencies issuing more than 60 certificates.

8. **Updates and Lessons from Specific CAREC Trade Initiatives.** ADB shared [updates](#) on specific CAREC trade initiatives, such as: Regional Improvement of Border Services (RIBS) projects and key initiatives, namely: CAREC Advanced Transit System and Information Common Exchange; CARTIF, Roadmap for Sustainable Investment Policy Reforms in Uzbekistan; CAREC Partnership for Trade, Climate, and Innovation signed in Baku at the sideline of COP29; WTO accession of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, and numerous digital trade initiatives. ADB presented the scope of [phase 2 TA](#) to support CITA implementation. CAREC members expressed general support to the TA scope and subprojects. **Kazakhstan** welcomed the inclusion of trade in services and recommended participation in the OECD Services Trade Restrictiveness Index (STRI) exercise. The **PRC** agreed that trade in services is important but clarified that its participation in STRI is not certified by the government.

9. **Proposals for Regional Trade Projects and Interventions.** The RTG members identified potential regional trade projects including: (i) establish regional innovative hub (Kyrgyz Republic), digital trade platform and electronic data exchange (Azerbaijan, Georgia), and support diversification, by leveraging digital technologies (Kyrgyz Republic) or tourism (Tajikistan); (ii) develop cross-border agro-logistics hubs (Azerbaijan and Kyrgyz Republic) and transport logistics center in the Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor (Kyrgyz Republic); (iii) upgrade BCP infrastructure (e.g., in Tamak and Bekabat BCPs, Kenan side of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek BCP, and Kazu-Bel and Karagach BCPs) and Issyk-Kul Airports; (iv) joint BCP (Georgia and Azerbaijan); (v) develop green border facilities or sustainable trade corridor (Azerbaijan); (vi) use emerging technologies in customs, assess seaport border procedures (Kazakhstan); and (vii) mutual recognition of certificates of origin and conformance (Uzbekistan); and standards or green certificates (Tajikistan). RTG members expressed interest in continuing training and knowledge exchange (Kyrgyz Republic), trade analysis and negotiating capacity (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), business outreach, and information sharing mechanism with National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and regular public-private dialogue (Georgia, Turkmenistan), or regional platform of training centers and unified standards, also for green trade, support subsidies and programs for sustainable products (Tajikistan). These inputs will be reflected in the CITA 2030's Rolling Strategic Action Plan (RSAP) 2025-2028.

10. Georgia proposes sharing its experiences on the AEO concept and mutual recognition program as well as its adoption of robotic process automation for customs procedures and. The **PRC** invited CAREC members to a seminar on digital trade organized by the Academy for International Business Officials under the Ministry of Commerce in September 2025.

11. **Development Partners' Perspectives.** Several development partners presented their initiatives: CAREC Institute shared its knowledge products and capacity-building in trade. [World Bank](#) shared plans in expanding trade integration in Central Asia. [GIZ](#) has a Trade Facilitation in Central Asia project and organized the regional network of NTFCs and a donor coordination group. [WTO](#) Standards and Trade Development Facility shared lessons from the ePhyto initiative and is now developing e-veterinary certificates pilot in other regions. The [International Trade Center](#) has electronic queue management system (eQMS) and supports trade information portals and e-certificate of origin. [UNCTAD](#) supports the use of trade in addressing climate change and low-carbon diversification, UNESCAP shared its Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Adviser ([TINA](#)) online tool. [UNCITRAL](#) has model laws for trade digitalization, [UNECE](#) has a package of standards for multimodal data exchange, and Korea Trade Network ([KTNet](#)) proposes to digitalize conformity certificates.