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It is a great honor to address you today at the 25th CAREC Ministerial Conference. On behalf of the Government of Georgia, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Mongolia for hosting us so warmly here in capital Ulaanbaatar and for their gracious hospitality and excellent arrangements. I would also like to express our sincere appreciation and commendation to Mongolia for its chairmanship of the CAREC Program this year, as well as for its tireless efforts and valuable work in advancing the objectives of the Program. I also wish to extend our deep appreciation to the CAREC Secretariat and to the Asian Development Bank for their continued leadership and tireless efforts in bringing us together.

It is also a great pleasure and honor to congratulate CAREC on its 25th Anniversary. Over the past 25 years, CAREC has played an important role in strengthening regional cooperation, connectivity, trade and sustainable development among its member countries. This anniversary is not only a celebration of the achievements of the past, but also an opportunity to look forward to a future of even stronger partnerships and shared progress. On this special occasion, I extend my sincere congratulations to CAREC and everyone who has contributed to its success.

We are pleased to support the CAREC Ministerial Declaration, which addresses a number of important matters relevant to the continued development and prosperity of the CAREC region, including regional connectivity, trade and investment, sustainable and inclusive growth, economic cooperation and the resilience of our economies in the face of emerging challenges. We believe that the Declaration provides a useful framework for reinforcing our collective commitment to deeper regional cooperation and for translating our shared priorities into concrete actions.

We gather today at a time when CAREC region faces both new challenges and new opportunities. It is through dialogue, partnership and collective action that we can continue to advance the vision of a more connected, resilient and sustainable CAREC region.

Since the last Ministerial, Georgia has made steady progress in improving its transport and logistics infrastructure, deepening customs and border modernization and advancing digital solutions to streamline trade. We believe these efforts contribute not only to Georgia's economic growth but also to the resilience and competitiveness of the broader CAREC region.

Let me briefly illustrate Georgia's recent macroeconomic indicators reflecting the progress we have achieved so far. Georgia recorded one of the highest rates of economic growth globally. In 2025, the Georgian economy continued to expand strongly, with real GDP growth of 7.5% for the full year. This positive momentum has continued in 2026, with real GDP growth reaching 7.9% during the first seven months of the year.

Transport connectivity remains a key pillar of regional cooperation for Georgia within

CAREC. We highly value the opportunity to work together with CAREC partners towards a more integrated and competitive transport corridor, advancing the objectives of the CAREC Transport Strategy 2030.

The growing importance of the Middle Corridor creates new opportunities to move from connectivity towards broader regional economic development. Georgia, through its strategic location and multimodal transport network, is committed to further strengthening its role as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

The importance of this sector to our economy is also reflected in its strong growth: between 2019 and 2025, transport and storage accounted for more than 6% of GDP and grew by an average of 15.9% annually. Building on this momentum, by 2032, the Government plans to mobilize approximately USD 7 billion for major transport projects such as the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, the renewal of railway rolling stock, the upgrade of road network and the development of a new international airport in Tbilisi. The significance of these investments extends well beyond Georgia, enhancing the overall capabilities of the Middle Corridor.

Unlocking the full potential of the CAREC region requires moving beyond traditional transport routes toward next-generation economic corridors supported by regulatory harmonization, modern infrastructure, digitalization and stronger regional cooperation. Initiatives such as the CAREC Advanced Transit System and Information Common Exchange (CATS/ICE) can play an important role by harmonizing and digitalizing transit procedures, reducing administrative burdens, improving transparency and strengthening the competitiveness of the Middle Corridor. Following the signing of the CATS/ICE testing-phase MoU by Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan and Uzbekistan in November 2025, work is continuing on the Multi-Country Framework Agreement, software development and preparations for the pilot phase.

At the same time, physical border infrastructure and joint border management remain critical. With ADB support, Georgia is advancing joint border crossing initiatives with Azerbaijan, aimed at eliminating duplication of controls and facilitating smoother trade flows. The Georgia–Azerbaijan “Silk Road” Joint Border Crossing Point is progressing toward the preparation of bankable investment documentation and is identified as the first priority project under the proposed CAREC BUILD financing facility.

Furthermore, Georgia strongly supports the CAREC CARTIF and attaches great importance to its successful conclusion and effective implementation. We hope that the ongoing negotiations will be accelerated and brought to a successful completion, enabling CARTIF to deliver tangible benefits for regional trade, investment, connectivity and economic cooperation. Georgia also welcomes and encourages the increased participation of high-level representatives in this process, which can provide further political momentum and help advance our shared regional objectives.

By combining these initiatives and strengthening cooperation among CAREC members, the region can reduce trade and logistics costs, improve supply-chain resilience, facilitate investment and ensure that the benefits of the modern-day Silk Road translate into broader and more sustainable economic growth.

CAREC cooperation has provided valuable opportunities for Georgia also in the areas of energy connectivity, policy development, and institutional capacity-building. We see significant potential to further expand regional energy connectivity, particularly through renewable energy generation, transmission, and trade.

Projects such as the Black Sea Submarine Cable and the Green Energy Corridor demonstrate the growing potential to link physical, energy, and digital connectivity and create new opportunities for regional cooperation.

Georgia views digital connectivity as a key driver of regional integration, resilience and competitiveness, with the ambition to strengthen its role as a Digital Hub connecting Europe and Asia. The country has established a strong connectivity foundation, with near-universal mobile coverage, widespread 5G and high fixed-broadband penetration, while initiatives such as Log-In Georgia are expanding fiber-optic connectivity to rural and underserved areas and supporting digital skills.

Georgia is also strengthening the regulatory environment for more cost-efficient network deployment and developing resilient cloud and data infrastructure. At the regional level, Georgia supports a diversified CAREC Digital Corridor based on high-capacity terrestrial and submarine fiber links, data centers, cloud infrastructure and multiple gateways to global digital networks. Greater regulatory coherence, infrastructure sharing and exchange of best practices among CAREC countries can further reduce costs, attract investment and strengthen the resilience of regional digital connectivity.

Georgia also sees artificial intelligence as an increasingly important driver of innovation, productivity and economic competitiveness. As Georgia develops its national approach to AI, priorities include building the necessary foundations—reliable connectivity, data and cloud infrastructure, computing capacity, quality data, digital and AI skills, and an appropriate governance framework.

At the regional level, CAREC can add significant value by connecting national AI and innovation ecosystems, facilitating knowledge exchange and responsible AI governance, and strengthening cooperation among governments, universities, research institutions, technology companies and startups. Practical regional AI applications could focus on shared priorities such as smart trade and transport, digital public services, agriculture, energy and water management, climate resilience and business support. By combining infrastructure investment with skills development and regional cooperation, CAREC can move from policy dialogue toward practical and scalable initiatives that build a more connected, innovative, resilient and future-ready digital economy.

In summing up, Georgia’s commitment to CAREC reflects our belief that regional cooperation is the foundation of shared success. By investing in links between East and West, we are investing in a more stable, prosperous, and connected future for Georgia, CAREC and for the entire region.

Thank you.