



CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership (CARTIF)

Key Takeaways and Next Steps — Inaugural Meeting for the Negotiations of the CARTIF Agreement, 11 March 2026

1. Overview

The inaugural CARTIF meeting marked an important step in implementing the Bishkek Declaration. Participating countries demonstrated strong engagement and commitment to advancing negotiations in a timely, practical, and inclusive manner. This note summarizes key takeaways and proposed next steps.

2. Overall Assessment

The meeting sent a strong political and technical signal that participating countries are ready to launch CARTIF negotiations. Nine CAREC countries are actively participating; Azerbaijan may join as an observer at a later stage. Countries affirmed the need for a well-structured, adequately supported, and operationally realistic negotiation process.

3. Negotiation Approach and Working Group Structure

Countries expressed broad support for a hybrid, flexible approach combining:

- Written exchanges for provisions with limited divergence;
- Online working group sessions for technical discussions; and
- In-person Chief Negotiator meetings for key decisions.

A differentiated approach to working groups was endorsed — protocols with limited divergence will be handled through written procedures, while more substantive issues will be addressed in dedicated working group discussions.

4. Key Issues for Follow-Up

- Clarity on institutional roles: responsibilities of Chief Negotiators and National Focal Points.
- Targeted technical support: including a WTO compatibility analysis (requested by the Kyrgyz Republic) and broader capacity-building.
- Well-defined negotiation modalities: clear documentation, communication, and process transparency.
- Negotiation trajectory: identification of potential "early harvest" outcomes and an indicative timeline for conclusion.

5. Next Steps and Timeline

Immediate Actions (March–April 2026)

- Countries to formally nominate Chief Negotiators and National Focal Points.
- ADB/CAREC Secretariat to circulate meeting materials and an updated negotiation text.
- Proposed working group structures and operational modalities to be developed.
- Demand-driven technical assistance to be mobilized; dedicated SharePoint platform activated for secure document sharing.

Preparatory Phase (March–May 2026)

- Finalize and circulate working group terms of reference and a bracketed Zero Draft.
- Virtual Chief Negotiators meeting tentatively planned for early May 2026 to align on structure and ensure readiness.

Launch of Negotiations (June 2026 onward)

- Zero Round to be held in early June 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, alongside relevant CAREC meetings.
- Chief Negotiators to participate in person; technical working groups to operate in hybrid format.
- ADB and CAREC Secretariat to provide ongoing technical, organizational, and capacity-building support.