



Joint Meeting of the CAREC Regional Trade Group (RTG) and Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC)

4 June 2026 | Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

HIGHLIGHT OF DISCUSSIONS

1. The Regional Trade Group (RTG) and Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC) under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program held a [Joint Meeting](#) to discuss progress in implementing the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030 against its Midterm Review (MTR) recommendations and related initiatives, for reporting to the Senior Officials' Meeting on 11–12 June 2026.¹ Mr. Batkhoo Idesh, State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Development of Mongolia, emphasized the need for greater customs cooperation, adoption of international best practice, and private sector participation in strengthening linkages between the trade and customs sectors. Mr. Asad Aleem, Regional Head for Regional Cooperation and Integration, Central and West Asia Department of ADB, underscored the contribution of the MTR recommendations to revitalizing regional cooperation and integration (RCI), the subject of ADB's new RCI Operational Approach. Ms. Erdenetuya Darinchuluun, Director General of the Trade and Economic Cooperation Policy Department and CAREC National Focal Point for Mongolia, and Mr. Enkhtaivan Gelegjamts, Deputy Director General of the Mongolian Customs General Administration, co-chaired the meeting and reiterated Mongolia's commitment to practical regional initiatives that improve connectivity, facilitate trade, and support sustainable growth.

2. **Setting the stage.** The Meeting recognized the tangible progress of [trade initiatives](#) recommended by the CITA MTR, particularly the action plans of six memoranda of agreement signed during the 24th CAREC Ministerial Conference in 2025.² The 2026 Asian Economic Integration Report prepared by ADB elaborated on the challenges and potential for CAREC value chain integration, trade agreements, investments, and services trade.

3. **Trade policy reforms and agreements.** The zero round of negotiations for the Chief Negotiators of the CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation (CARTIF) Partnership Agreement were held on 3 June 2026 which approved the negotiation modalities and terms of reference and discussed the draft text of the CARTIF Framework Agreement. Participating countries were requested to submit written comments by 3 July 2026, with a Chief Negotiators' Meeting planned in September 2026. Members looked forward to the World Trade Organization (WTO) accession of the remaining countries, supported by ADB/CAREC technical advice and capacity building—including for Turkmenistan to finalize its Memorandum of Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR), alignment of Uzbekistan's legislation in with WTO agreements, and advisory support to Azerbaijan. A High-Level Forum on CAREC and the Multilateral Trading System (October 2025), a Workshop on Navigating Trade Issues and WTO Transparency Requirements (April 2026), and the ADB–World Bank Trade Forum (May 2026) advanced dialogue on a rules-based trading system and value chain integration.

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

² Bishkek Ministerial Declaration on the Launch of Negotiations for the CARTIF Partnership Agreement; MOU on Implementing the Testing Phase of the Expanded CATS/ICE; MOU on the Pilot Project on Electronic Exchange and Mutual Recognition of Conformity Certificates; MOU on CAREC Regional Tourism Development; MOU on the Kyrgyz Republic–Uzbekistan Cross-Border Sustainable Tourism Cluster Development; and the Loan Agreement for the Almaty–Bishkek Economic Corridor Regional Improvement of Border Services Project.

4. **Trade facilitation and modernizing border-crossing points.** The pilot-testing of the CAREC Advanced Transit System and Information Common Exchange (CATS/ICE) is being expanded to other member countries, while preparations are underway for the Multicountry Framework Agreement and the full live operations of CATS/ICE targeted for 2030. At the RTG meeting, Mongolia formally acceded to CATS/ICE through signing of the MOU. The concept for the Border Upgrades for Integration, Logistics and Development (BUILD) Facility (expected to be approved by ADB in Q3 2026), was presented and drew interest from several countries, prioritizing the Azerbaijan–Georgia joint BCP with further candidate projects in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. A Workshop on advancing digital and green trade facilitation (November 2025) highlighted technological innovations and an e-commerce goods clearance integration strategy for small-parcel trade.

5. **Accelerating digital trade.** The CAREC pilot project on the electronic exchange and mutual recognition of conformity certificates—undertaken with Korea Trade Network and UNESCAP under the CAREC Partnership for Trade, Climate and Innovation—was launched in a workshop on 1–2 June 2026. CAREC joined the Global Digital Trade Expo hosted by the PRC for the third time, through a seminar to advance cross-border trade through digital payments in September 2025, and ADB supported a rapid assessment of Kazakhstan’s e-commerce legal and regulatory framework. The Mongolia–PRC experience in joint customs control, particularly the unified cargo manifest, was cited as a replicable model that drew participant interest.

6. **Expanding investments and trade in services.** CAREC regional tourism development was featured at the CAREC and the Global Silk Road session at the ADB 2026 Annual Meeting in Samarkand with ADB and UN Tourism signing a Letter of Intent to cooperate. The Roadmap for Sustainable Investment Policy Reforms in Uzbekistan—supported jointly by OECD, EU, and ADB—was published in 2025. Kazakhstan prioritized trade in services and called for CAREC support through a survey of the current situation, gaps, and instruments, noting the usefulness of the Services Trade Restrictiveness Index. The RTG Chair noted CARTIF could serve as a vehicle for deepening services cooperation and stressed that mutual recognition is crucial for cross-border trade.

7. **Country Interventions.** Azerbaijan, whose National Committee on Trade Facilitation was designated in 2023, operates a Trade Information Portal and has signed trade agreements with 13 countries; its BCP modernization combines electronic data exchange with nine countries, AI-based risk analysis, and a Single Window established by 2025 Presidential Decree, with the joint Ipek Yolu–Abreshumis BCP protocol with Georgia fully agreed and participation in CATS/ICE underway. The PRC encouraged active participation in CARTIF, proposing a focus on low-divergence protocols to secure an Early Harvest before the 2026 CAREC Ministerial Conference and inviting CAREC members to a two-week digital trade seminar in late October. PRC Customs shared information on its International Trade Single Window and agreements on authorized economic operators (AEO) with 58 countries and regions. Georgia, aspiring to become a regional trade and logistics hub, welcomed the CARTIF zero round as a constructive start, prioritized BCP improvement, and is already exchanging electronic information under ICE.

8. Kazakhstan adopted a National Concept of Trade Policy to 2030 to become a primary trade and logistics hub and boost non-resource exports, supports CARTIF within its EAEU obligations, replaced Astana-1 with its Keden national information system, automated rail transit control (reducing clearance from three hours to 30 minutes), and initiated a draft Multilateral “Seamless Transit” Agreement. The Kyrgyz Republic emphasized open, predictable, rules-based trade consistent with WTO principles, called for reforms on dispute settlement, transparency, and special and differential treatment, and continues modernizing BCPs while introducing Smart Customs and an AI-enabled Single Window. Mongolia is increasing value-added production,

advancing digitalization, concluded an Interim Trade Agreement with the EAEU entering into force in July 2026, and welcomed CARTIF progress alongside its CATS/ICE accession.

9. In addition to expanding trade ties to 130 countries, deploying digital signatures in the Single Window system, and accelerating regional trade documents recognition, according to OECD, Tajikistan has entered the top 3 countries in Europe and Central Asia for business reform and trade facilitation, now focusing through new investment and export support legislation on implementing protocols for trade facilitation, SPS, TBT, and digital commerce, with a priority on SME growth. Turkmenistan, committed to aligning with international standards, advanced its WTO accession through its MFTR, established its National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) in early 2026, and is modernizing border infrastructure (with the Farap–Avtoyollary BCP as a model achieving 37-minute average clearance), integrating ASYCUDA World with its single window, and is technically ready to pilot CATS/ICE. Uzbekistan, in the final stage of WTO accession, is modernizing customs through e-declaration, single window, and risk management, and proposed joint procedure simplification, mutual recognition of conformity assessment certificates, and unified digital platforms for transport documents.

10. **CITA Rolling Strategic Action Plan (RSAP).** Between 2001 to 2025, trade-related investment projects (together with economic corridor development and tourism) amount to \$2.3 billion. The draft RSAP for 2026–2029 attached to the CITA MTR was presented to CAREC members, with a request for the RTG and CCC to prioritize and streamline activities and focus on projects with trade impact from policy reforms, tourism, transport, food safety, and agriculture value chains. The revised RSAP for CAREC members consideration is in **Attachment 1**.

11. **Development partners' perspectives.** Development partners reported on initiatives aligned with CITA 2030 and expressed interest in joining the 25th CAREC Ministerial Conference. The UN Awaza Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries (2024–2034) places trade, trade facilitation, and regional integration among its core priorities and aligns with CAREC initiatives. GIZ is strengthening NCTFs and cross-border cooperation and offered to coordinate on one-stop border crossing points. OECD is supporting transit permit digitalization, the TRACECA Single Permit arrangement, and critical raw materials connectivity. UNCTAD presented its Empowerment Programme for Trade Facilitation while UNDP highlighted trade competitiveness, diversification, and digital and AI trade. The WTO Standards and Trade Development Facility emphasized scaling up SPS innovation and new financing approaches. Appreciating the development partners support, RTG and CCC members were encouraged to closely coordinate with other agencies on trade-related investment projects (Agriculture, Food Safety agency, Transport, Digital) and submit proposals on projects, policy reforms, technical support and policy dialogues.