



# Session 1

## Key takeaways of the CARTIF Inaugural meeting and introduction to meeting's agenda

*Zulfia Karimova*

Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist  
Regional Cooperation and Integration Unit, CWRD, ADB

# Short background

## CARTIF - Advancing Economic Integration, Trade, and Investment Cooperation in CAREC

### Key Features and Objectives of the CARTIF Partnership:

- **Voluntary and Inclusive:** Open to all CAREC countries, participation is voluntary and interest-based, with differentiated responsibilities.
- **Soft Agreement:** CARTIF is not a traditional trade agreement, it sets up a framework without creating market access commitments.
- **Modular Design:** Divided into Initial Protocols (mandatory for joining) and Additional Protocols (negotiated later by interested parties), allowing for gradual integration, including market access.
- **Strategic Goals:** Facilitate trade in goods and services across borders, Promote regulatory transparency and cooperation, Encourage investment through improved policies and procedure, Support digital trade, e-commerce, and inclusive participation (e.g. SMEs, women), Create a structured but flexible path toward deeper regional trade integration.

# Key milestones 2024-2025

**April 2024** - Draft CARTIF concept presented at CAREC Regional Trade Group in Astana.

**March – June 2025** - Series of the consultations with CAREC countries at the online and hybrid regional workshops on the CARTIF Zero-draft.

**June 2024** - CARTIF concept discussed and endorsed at regional workshop in Istanbul.

**August 2025** – Final discussion and endorsement by the CAREC trade focals of the CARTIF Zero-draft in Bishkek.

**January - June 2025** - CARTIF Zero-Draft prepared and supported by CAREC trade experts.

**September 2025** - Draft CARTIF Ministerial Declaration finalized and prepared for adoption at the CAREC Ministerial Conference.



*Chief Negotiators' Meeting on  
the CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership Agreement  
8 May 2026*

# Bishkek Ministerial Declaration on CARTIF Negotiations

**Bishkek Ministerial Declaration on CARTIF Negotiations** was adopted at the CAREC Ministerial Conference held in Bishkek city on 20 November, 2025.

**Eight CAREC countries (PRC, GEO, KAZ, KGZ, MON, PAK, TKM, and UZB)** signed the Declaration during the MC. **TAJ** signed the Bishkek Declaration in March 2026. **AZE** is in the process of internal procedures to sign.

**CAREC countries ministers** welcomed the CARTIF Zero-draft as the basis for launching formal negotiations among interested CAREC countries, and supported the official launch of negotiations on CARTIF with a view to concluding a modern, development-oriented partnership.



# Key takeaways of the CARTIF Inaugural meeting

CARTIF Inaugural meeting was held on **11 March 2026** in the virtual format.

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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 at a later stage. Countries affirmed the need for a well-structured, adequately supported, and operationally realistic negotiation process.



# Key takeaways of the CARTIF Inaugural meeting

## 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
  - 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.

# Key takeaways of the CARTIF Inaugural meeting

## Key Issues discussed

- 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

# Agreed next steps and timeline

## **Preparatory Phase (May 2026):**

- CARTIF Chief Negotiators' Preparatory Meeting on 8 May 2026
- Finalize and circulate working group terms of reference and a bracketed Zero Draft

## **Launch of Negotiations (June 2026 onward):**

- Zero Round to be held on 3 June 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, alongside relevant Regional Trade Group meeting
- 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

# Introduction to the agenda

- **Session 2: Presentation on the CARTIF negotiation structure and modalities (by Mikheil Janelidze, CARTIF Team Leader)**

The Session will provide an opportunity to review the CARTIF negotiation structure and modalities, and the updated negotiation text.

- **Session 3: CARTIF Chief Negotiators Statements.**

Each CARTIF Chief Negotiator is requested to review and provide feedback on the proposed CARTIF negotiation structure and modalities. Additionally, each member state should ensure readiness for the launch of negotiations and move to fully operational negotiation framework.

- **Session 4: Next Steps**

This session will outline the next steps for CARTIF negotiation process in 2026.

**THANK YOU !**