



CAREC Institute Chai Talk on

The Legal Foundation of Digital Trade: Practical Barriers to Cross-Border E-Commerce

Webinar

13th October 2026, 15:00-16:30 (Beijing time)

Background and Rationale:

The CAREC region stands at a critical juncture where digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities for economic integration and growth. However, the promise of a digitally connected CAREC corridor remains constrained by fragmented legal and regulatory frameworks that hinder cross-border digital trade. Despite significant progress in digital infrastructure and trade facilitation, the region faces a stark disparity: intra-CAREC trade (excluding the People's Republic of China) accounts for only 7% of total trade, compared to ASEAN's 24% in 2023. This gap is largely attributed to regulatory misalignment, limited digitalization, and weak coordination across member countries.¹

Digital trade holds transformative potential for the CAREC region. The 2023 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation revealed that CAREC countries collectively achieved an impressive average implementation rate of 69% for general and digital trade facilitation measures.² Full implementation of digital trade facilitation measures could lower international trade costs by up to 15% for CAREC countries. However, significant legal and regulatory hurdles remain.³

The legal foundation for digital trade encompasses multiple interconnected domains: electronic transactions and digital signatures, data protection and privacy, cybersecurity, consumer protection, electronic transferable records, and cross-border data flows. Most CAREC countries have established legislation in these areas, but implementation, functionality, and scope vary significantly. The absence of a unified regional legal framework remains a major barrier.

Recognizing this complexity, the CAREC Digital Strategy 2030 aims to reduce barriers to cross-border trade through e-payments and digital platforms, while adopting common standards and principles of interoperability, scalability, and security. The CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda 2030 emphasizes alignment with international instruments, cross-border connectivity, and knowledge-sharing on best practices for e-commerce.

¹ Asian Development Bank. (2025). Digitally Connected CAREC: Digital Trade, Emerging Regulatory Challenges, and Solutions

² CAREC Institute. (2024, August 30). New Report Unveiled: Transforming Trade in Central Asia through Digital and Sustainable Facilitation

³ ESCAP & CAREC Institute. (2024). Digital and sustainable trade facilitation in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)

However, despite these strategic commitments, the day-to-day obstacles facing businesses engaged in cross-border e-commerce in the region remain insufficiently addressed. Differences in legislation and administrative procedures rather than the absence of laws as such are among the most immediate and tangible barriers. These include divergent requirements for electronic transactions and digital signatures, incompatible approaches to data protection and cross-border data flows, uneven consumer protection regimes, and non-harmonized customs and payment procedures.

Consequently, this Chai Talk recommends redirecting the discussion from the general principles of regional cooperation towards a more pragmatic examination. The core question should be: Which particular disparities in legislation and administrative procedures currently impede cross-border e-commerce within the CAREC region, and in what areas can nations already progress towards greater regulatory compatibility, avoiding the necessity for full legislative unification?

The objective is to facilitate a comparison of regulatory frameworks, identify shared obstacles for businesses, and determine sectors suitable for incremental rule alignment or mutual compatibility. This dialogue could serve as a foundational step towards systematic CAREC efforts concerning digital trade regulation compatibility, potentially paving the way for pilot initiatives to jointly tackle specific cross-border challenges.

Modality of the event:

The CAREC Institute Chai Talk event provides a platform for experts from the region and partner organizations to gather and openly discuss trending topics while enjoying a cup of tea or coffee. Consistent with this focus, the CAREC Institute will host a Chai Talk event on 13th October 2026, beginning at 15:00 Beijing time. The discussion will center on the legal foundation of digital trade and opportunities for regulatory alignment within the CAREC region.

The online event will feature experts who will share their views, insights, knowledge, and practical experiences on the challenges and opportunities in harmonizing laws, promoting interoperability, and fostering regional cooperation in digital trade, with a particular focus on identifying specific barriers that countries could jointly study and seek to address in a pilot format. The dialogue will thereby contribute to advancing the legal infrastructure necessary for a digitally connected CAREC corridor, while helping to move the regional discussion from general principles of cooperation toward concrete mechanisms that make small national markets more connected and accessible to one another.

Please, register here

https://carecinstitute-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_GCxvZ9bJSlaSnferocGz1A

Agenda

13th October 2026 (Beijing time)

14:50-15:00 Virtual Connection to the Webinar and Speakers' Group Photo

15:00-15:10 Opening Remark

Dr. Kuat Akizhanov, Deputy Director 2, The CAREC Institute

15:10-15:15 Introduction of the Speakers by the Moderator

Sukhdelger Sosorbaram, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, CAREC Institute

15:15-16:15 Discussion by Speakers

- Muzaffar Azamov, Chairman of the E-Commerce Association of Uzbekistan
elcom.uzb@gmail.com
- TBC Nasim Bakhramov, Chairman of the E-Commerce Association of Tajikistan
bnasima@mavsim.com
- TBC Aibek Kurenkeev, Chairman of the E-Commerce Association of Kyrgyzstan
kurenkeev@gmail.com
- TBC Lado Kandelaki, Chairman of the E-Commerce Association of Georgia
kandelakil@gmail.com
- TBC MED Mongolia
zolzaya.t@med.gov.mn Chief of Trade Division, MED, Mongolia

16:15-16:25 Q&A and Discussion: Moderator will pick up questions from the audience and engage in discussion with panelists

16:25-16:30 Concluding Remarks

Dr. Kuat Akizhanov, Deputy Director 2, The CAREC Institute

Notes:

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