



Balkan Cities Network

**CITY DIPLOMACY
STRATEGY
DOCUMENT**

January
2024



**Better
Cooperation,
Better
Future**

B40

Balkan Cities Network

Declaration

This declaration was finalized by the participating mayors and municipality representatives after the first B40 - Balkan Cities Network kickoff meeting hosted by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on 29-30 November 2021.

We, as the leaders of the local governments of the participating Balkan cities and the founders of the B40 - Balkan Cities Network;

- Being aware of the potential that sustainable development and peace present for the cities in our region,
- With a shared vision for a European future,
- Aspiring to establish a fruitful cooperation in areas of common interest,
- Knowing that climate change and other global challenges we face requires working together towards common solutions at local, regional and global level,
- Recognizing that good governance requires a resilient, democratic, transparent, and inclusive local governance, based on data, science and shared wisdom for future cities,
- Emphasizing the critical importance of the localization of the New Urban Agenda and other international agreements and plans, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals,

Under the framework of the B40 - Balkan Cities Network, established at the Istanbul Summit, in line with the abovementioned common values, we declare to;

- Work together through this Network to strengthen the dialogue among our cities,
- Cooperate in the fields of economy, culture, innovation, sustainability, and solidarity,
- Develop new areas of cooperation focusing on reversing the effects of the climate change, and strengthening local democracy and good neighborly relations in our region,
- Evaluate the difficulties encountered at the local and regional levels within the framework of reciprocity and dialogue in common platforms by sharing solutions and good practices with the parties,
- Contribute to the recommendation development processes for decision makers at all levels,
- Assist in the planning of the Network meetings and the specification of the meeting agendas in line with the annual priorities to be determined by the Network members and participating in the meetings with Mayors and technical personnel,
- Host and participate in the Network meetings,
- Encourage participation of local communities through participatory activities,
- Provide support to the Network Secretariat.

Istanbul,
30 November 2021

Article I. Background and Goals

1. City Diplomacy and B40 Balkan Cities Network

One of the most important features of the 21st century is the increase in interaction between different regions, driven by advancements in communication and transportation technologies as well as the globalisation of economic relations. While increased interaction and speed provide new opportunities for enhanced cooperation among nations at the global level, it has also made it necessary for cities to build new relationships and renew established ones.

Home to more than half of the world's population, cities are vital centres for population and resource mobility, as well as for developments in information and technology. Cities have been recognized as primary areas where global challenges must be addressed, creating the need to establish relations beyond national borders. In order to accomplish the long-standing goals of local governments, such as the fight against poverty, climate change, and inequality of all kinds, many cities are making city diplomacy into a central pillar of their work.

The core challenges of today require the effective mobilisation of cities and local governments by complementing and enriching national strategies. It has become extremely important for cities in different regions to collaborate to achieve effective results. City diplomacy has been recognised as an important tool that supports cities' responsibilities in local affairs by expanding their global relationships to acquire expertise and resources. Mayors have emerged as influential figures in a new kind of diplomacy that helps produce local solutions for global problems.

The proper conduct of city diplomacy is only possible if communication, sharing, and cooperation between cities are improved. In this direction, the number of international platforms, mechanisms, and networks established by cities to promote cooperation and emphasize common welfare-oriented solutions is rapidly increasing. The role of cities that follow these strategies is strengthened in the international system, while cities that fail to enter cooperation networks risk exclusion from the benefits of the multi-level solutions and cooperation opportunities offered by city diplomacy channels.

The B40 Balkan Cities Network - hereinafter referred to as the B40 Network - was established with the common interest of the cities participating in the "B40 Balkan Cities Network Istanbul Summit" hosted by Istanbul in November 2021. Realizing strong potential at the regional level, where there is already a common heritage, challenges and opportunities, the B40 Network is a new cooperation and solidarity platform that aims to develop regional solutions through local governments and the channels of city diplomacy to contribute to regional peace and address the global challenges faced by cities.

While focusing on future projections for the region, the B40 Network aims to expand the participation of cities in the region and improve the accessibility and quality of participation. The B40 Network seeks solutions to areas in need and challenges that cities face both locally and globally, presenting a comprehensive strategy document. The B40 Network city diplomacy strategy is built on six key challenge areas:

- Governance and Democracy
- Economy and Development
- Ecology and Environment
- Urban Built Environment, Transportation, and Infrastructure
- Social Welfare and Justice
- Effective Cooperation during Crises

Recognising that the members of the B40 Network share experiences, challenges, and connections in each of these areas, and appreciating the value of the urban heritage and diversity of the Balkan Region, the members of the B40 Network are committed to promoting common commitments and developing joint projects in each of these areas.

2. B40 Balkan Cities Network City Diplomacy Strategy

The B40 Network;

- considers cooperation and solidarity, which it defines as essential elements, and the principle of zero compromises against discrimination as its core values, both in its internal functioning and in its relations with other actors,
- empowers cities in the Balkan Region – its members – to make city diplomacy a pillar of their administrative work through engagement with international networks and platforms to create new opportunities for their residents and contribute to regional peace,
- adopts the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and places them at the core of its work.

In addition to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the B40 Network and its members take as their main references the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the European Union Green Agenda, envisioning cities as active creators under the motto "better cooperation, better future."

Article II. Basic Principles

In order to implement the city diplomacy approach as a basic principle, the B40 Network aims to do the following:

1. Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity must be respected and followed as often as possible, when issues can be dealt with at the most immediate or local level consistent with their resolution, increasing the opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs.

2. Proactive Approach

The B40 Network supports the capacity of cities to respond to local and global challenges by developing joint projects and pursuing new opportunities for city governments in the Balkan Region.

The B40 Network;

- encourages the prevention of possible crises before they occur while taking precautionary measures,
 - allows for a swift and coordinated response to sudden-onset crises,
 - supports the joint designation of working areas and contributes to common welfare through collective action towards these opportunity areas.
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3. Participation and Local Democracy

Challenges for local democracy may vary according to geographical location and the historical characteristics of the cities of the Balkans. The aim is to share common goals as the decision-making structure of the B40 Network aims to implement the best practices of local democracy. Each member has the right to seek appointment or participate as a member of a working group or the Executive Committee, to request an item for the agenda, or present an opinion.

4. Multilateralism and Diversity

City diplomacy is a strategy that supports relations between the members of the B40 Network, and fosters cooperation between Balkan cities and other regions, international networks, foundations, and institutions. The B40 Network aims to improve multilateral and diverse participation in the policymaking process in the Balkans and promote the ability of cities in the Balkans to access institutions and resources outside the region. In this context, the B40 Network prioritises the following objectives in order to achieve its goals:

- to pursue collaborations between cities that will contribute to regional welfare and development,
- to partner with civil society and private sector organizations in the region, forming partnerships on a regional level,
- to develop new approaches and implement practical solutions on topics of interest to the members (for example, climate, environment, transportation, migration, local democracy, smart cities),
- to ensure that cities have an active role in policy development at their own national level, and collaboratively at the regional level.

Article III. Tools and Resource Development

The B40 Network prioritises co-existence and prosperity through peace and cooperation among the members. In this context, the members aim to develop joint projects and share innovative knowledge and experience. Its goal is to contribute to the common welfare and accumulation of city-based development. In alignment with these defined objectives, the B40 Network aims to diversify the field of resource development and expresses its intention to contribute to regional development and welfare through the members.

Article IV. Target Fields and Vision

The B40 Network has a holistic view of the well-being of the region and advocates for the support of local development. Carrying out its activities in line with its principles and objectives, the B40 Network is aware of the region's potential, and is supporting working groups composed of member cities to generate proposals and projects within the framework of its vision for the future.

The future vision of the B40 Network is based on the following urban principles:

1. Ensuring the development of cities as the fundamental building block of representation and development
2. Contributing to inter-communal communication and interaction through inter-city relations
3. Being an active player in addressing of global problems
4. Creating regional attraction areas
5. Supporting regional development and welfare

The following goals are currently under development by the working groups:

1. Local Climate Action:

1.1. In coordination with the competent central authorities ensuring the compatibility of B40 Network cities climate policies with the relevant national policies and plans as well as the countries' international obligations, including those under the Paris Agreement and promoting new collaborations with international initiatives working on this subject,

1.2. Promoting climate adaptation actions of member cities through the sharing of best practices, expertise and experience, particularly by developing common projects,

1.3. Developing evidence, data, and citizen science applications open to all participating cities.

2. Local Democracy:

2.1. Encouraging inclusive and democratic policies in member cities, and taking into consideration the opinions of young citizens as part of decision-making processes,

2.2. Enhancing the participation of cities in the decision-making processes at national and regional levels,

2.3. Supporting the inclusion of vulnerable populations to ensure equality within the framework of inclusive cities,

2.4. Facilitating the creation of youth and personnel exchange programs between members.

3. Local Economic and Cultural Cooperation:

3.1. Creating new opportunities for institutions, organizations, groups, festivals, and cultural activities in the Balkans to cooperate, reach new audiences through promotional opportunities, and expand their creative networks,

3.2. Preserving and promoting Balkan cultural heritage as a shared resource by embracing common elements, in coordination with competent central authorities in line with national legislation in force such as natural, built and archeological sites, landscapes, museums, monuments, artworks, historic cities, literary, musical and audiovisual works, as well as the knowledge, practices, and traditions of its people, recognizing culture as a transformative force for community regeneration and a factor that directly nurtures peaceful relations,

3.3. Promoting culture and tourism that serves to support inter-Balkan cooperation and economic activity, contributing to economic growth, employment, and social cohesion,

3.4. Establishing professional connections between cities investing in culture, sharing knowledge, and promoting cultural events that revitalise urban areas.

4. Smart Cities and Digital Transformation:

4.1. Promoting digital cooperation between cities and their residents, as well as tech solutions that can be jointly adopted by all member cities,

4.2. Serving as a platform for members to share ideas that enable all residents to participate in the policy making process of their cities and support the investments of companies, startups, educational institutions, and services that benefit both residents and cities,

4.3. Creating tools that support open access study and exploration of the problems faced by member cities, enabling resident participation in the development of solutions,

4.4. Supporting the connection between innovative economic sectors and inter-Balkan creativity to develop new regional advantages.

5. Effective Cooperation During Crises:

5.1. Developing cooperation mechanisms among the members that can be implemented during natural disasters and humanitarian crises,

5.2. Developing joint projects for training and sharing best practices among members,

5.3. Ensuring that B40 Network cities share their knowledge, experience, and best practices on issues that require technical expertise such as firefighting, civil defense, search and rescue and fighting forest fires.



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