

Joint Letter: Standing in Solidarity for Local Democracies and Ending the Pretrial Detention of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mayor Erion Veliaj

We, the undersigned mayors of the B40 Balkan Cities Network, the leading initiative in the Balkan region, established under the leadership of Mr. Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of Istanbul, hereby express our grave concern regarding the emergence of a dangerous **trend which threatens local democracy** in the Balkans and the world.

Despite our diverse political affiliations, we are united in our alarm over the **indefinite pretrial detentions of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Founding President of the B40 Network, Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj, the Third President of the B40 Network, and other mayors.** Removing democratically elected officials from office prior to any final convictions is not justice. It undermines the will of the voters and pose direct threats to local democracies.

The **October 2025 Venice Commission Report of the Council of Europe** explicitly warns that the use of pretrial detention against sitting mayors constitutes a serious risk to democratic governance. When applied indefinitely, such detention effectively disenfranchises citizens by sidelining their chosen representatives without due process.

Under the **European Convention on Human Rights**, detention must remain a measure of last resort, not a tool of political incapacitation. When an elected mayor is detained without bail or verdict, citizens are left without representation, eroding public trust and institutional legitimacy.

It is evident that the detention and judicial proceedings concerning Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mayor Erion Veliaj are inconsistent with the principles and standards enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and articulated in the October 2025 Report of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

We emphasize what we are not seeking. We do not demand immunity, nor do we comment on the merits of the charges or on guilt or innocence. Our appeal is **narrow, principled, and fully aligned with European standards.**

It is our clear call to end the indefinite pretrial detention of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mayor Erion Veliaj, and other detained mayors, and to allow them to await legal proceedings in freedom while exercising the duties entrusted to them by the citizens they represent.

Justice must be transparent, proportionate, and respectful of democratic choice. We therefore urge all relevant authorities to uphold these principles and to safeguard local democracy.

We, the undersigned Mayors of the B40 Balkan Cities Network, call upon all relevant authorities to ensure the restoration of democratic mandates and the consistent application of European norms in all cases concerning elected local officials.

Signed,

[The Undersigned Mayors of the B40 Balkan Cities Network]

 MAYOR OF ZAGREB
 ACTING MAYOR OF ISTANBUL
 MAYOR OF SOFIA
 MAYOR OF THESSALONIKI
 MAYOR OF NOVI SAD
 MAYOR OF BELGRADE
 MAYOR OF BANJA LUKA
 MAYOR OF LJUBLJANA
 MAYOR OF PELLA
 MAYOR OF DENİZ
 MAYOR OF LEZHE
 MAYOR OF DIMITROVGRAD
 MAYOR OF TUZLA
 MAYOR OF LARISSA
 MAYOR OF MUELA
 MAYOR OF ORESTIADA
 MAYOR OF SLIVEN
 MAYOR OF KERKIR
 MAYOR OF PRILEP
 MAYOR OF KOROVO
 MAYOR OF MYTILENE
 MAYOR OF BURSA
 MAYOR OF TIMIȘOARA