

Balkan Cities Network

SOFIA MEETING



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Founding President of B40 Balkan Cities Network, Mayor Ekrem IMAMOGLU, was in Sofia for a B40 Network meeting that was held on June 28, 2022 with the participation of 10 Bulgarian cities.

The Cities of Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Dimitrovgrad, Troyan, Karlovo, Karnobat, Sliven and Belitsa as well as the City of Kardzhali, one of the founding members of B40 Network, participated in the meeting.



B40 Balkan Cities Network: 40 member cities

Mayor Imamoglu, reiterated in person the invitation to join B40 Network for the participating cities. Those cities became members of B40 Network by signing its declaration. Besides, City of Burgas and Rakovski, although not present in the meeting, also became a member of B40 Network by signing the declaration in advance which increased the number of B40 member cities to 40.

On the other hand, cities of Isperih, Vırbitsa ve Sırnitsa committed to become a member of B40 Network although they could not participate in the meeting. National Association of the Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) also played a role in the organization of B40 Network Sofia Meeting.



Mayor IMAMOGLU, Founding President of B40 Balkan Cities Network, started his speech by thanking for the invitation extended by the Mayor of Sofia, Ms. Yordanka Fandakova. He also expressed his gratitude to Mayor of Veliko Tarnovo and Chairman of NAMRB, Mr. Daniel Panov, for his contribution to the organization of the meeting and showed his appreciation for the participation of all esteemed Mayors. Mayor IMAMOGLU said 'I believe that with the participation of your cities, B40 Balkan Cities Network will become stronger and that regional cooperation opportunities will improve the well-being, peace and security of our citizens.' He also mentioned that it is very important to bring the esteemed Mayors around the same table for the common future of our cities. Mayor IMAMOGLU said that B40 Network was founded on the principles of equal representation of Balkan cities and working towards the common goals with common sense.



In this regard, Mayor IMAMOGLU continued, four working groups were created and he gave information about the activities of these groups. He stated that B40 Network working groups have gathered three times so far and 40 high level representatives of member cities conducted a 5-day workshop in Istanbul last week.



He said that B40 Network local climate action working group aims at strengthening the environment and climate power of the member cities as well as increasing the regional solidarity in the field of environment. In this way, Mayor IMAMOGLU explained, it is intended to improve the adaptation capabilities of the member cities to climate change and sustainable development policies at global scale, which prioritized the preparation of a B40 Regional Climate Action Master Plan in the medium and long term. He also emphasized that a series of trainings, workshops and activities are included in the action plan to raise awareness of climate change. On the other hand, Mayor IMAMOGLU said that a B40 Air Quality Monitoring System is planned to be implemented to improve the air quality of the member cities, which will create a data base that is open to public.

Mayor IMAMOGLU informed the participants of the meeting that by taking account of the requests of member cities, cooperation in the fields of coastal cleaning, prevention and audit of industry and marine pollution was included in the action plan. As waste management is regarded as a priority cooperation area, if requested by the member cities, analyses of waste management practices and needs analysis can be carried out by teams of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality by visiting the member cities to help them draw a road map, Mayor IMAMOGLU said.

He underlined that in the scope of B40, regional transformations can be achieved, particularly in the areas of environment transformation, waste management and green energy. This should be a green transformation that is in line with European Green Deal which was announced by European Union in 2019.



On the other hand, he stated that the B40 Network local democracy and migration working group focuses on projects that support the local economy through cooperatives and entrepreneurship, as well as providing gender equality support to women and immigrant entrepreneurs. In this context, he emphasized that they want to build a B40 Urban Entrepreneurship Ecosystem that will help disadvantaged communities in particular. He announced that they included the development of innovative models for our members who want to expand the city council and participatory budget practices and to improve local democratic participation in their plans in order to strengthen civil decision-making mechanisms in member cities.

Mayor IMAMOGLU stated that the B40 Network smart cities and digital transformation working group has prepared projects that will benefit more from technology and innovation for member cities. He said that extremely exciting projects such as establishing an Open Data Platform among B40 cities and establishing a B40 Disaster Information System are also on the agenda. He also stated that they support member cities and share technical information to cooperate in preparing a Smart City Master Plan. On the other hand, he added that B40 Network local economic cooperation working group want to engage in joint cultural and artistic activities that will strengthen the member cities' economic and cultural ties.

Mayor IMAMOGLU emphasized his belief that the many projects they will carry out in the B40 Network will increase economic cooperation in the Balkans and create a more people-oriented, efficient, and effective local government model. He also stated that meeting in the B40 Balkan Cities Network and under the European perspective would pave the way for the member cities to have a brighter future. He emphasized that the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is prepared to provide all types of assistance for the implementation of these projects. He stated that Istanbul will share its experience and know-how on these issues with member cities, and that they will work with any member city that wishes to participate in these projects. "I am confident that you also believe in the constructive and transformative power of cooperation, because we do as well," he said at the end of his speech.



Ms. Yordanka FANDAKOVA, Mayor of Sofia,

Began her speech by expressing her delight that the B40 Balkan Cities
Network meeting was held in Sofia.
"Today, all cities, large and small, face the same problems," she said in her speech.
"Cities' problems and crises are similar; not only are their problems and difficulties similar, but so are their priorities. In this sense, local governments are not only responsible for their own cities; they must also find regionally applicable solutions. We recognize that we bear responsibility for the development and dissemination of new technologies, as well as citizen participation through common green policies.

The B40 Balkan Cities Network will provide a better vision for the entire region as well as for each individual member city." Mayor Fandakova stated that the B40 initiative launched by Mayor IMAMOGLU is very important and that cities should be places that "guarantee dialogue." She stated that the B40 Network will help to strengthen city-to-city relations. "I thank him for creating the grounds for working together," Mayor Fandakova said of Mayor IMAMOGLU's role in the creation of the B40 Network.



"Today, we bear greater responsibility than ever before; we bear responsibility for our region," Mayor Fandakova added. "Our strategic priority should be environmental protection. As Sofia Municipality, we began our work in this direction by developing the metro, an environmentally friendly mode of transportation. We will be delighted to help them grow by collaborating with the B40 Network." Mayor Fandakova stated that she believes that with each new municipality's participation, the B40 Network will become more efficient, and thus she supports the inclusion of new municipalities.

Furthermore, Mayor Fandakova stated her intention to make Sofia the term president of the B40 Network following Athens.





Mr. Daniel PANOV,Mayor of Veliko Tarnova and Chairman of NAMRB,

Started his speech by saying "today is a very important day for Bulgarian municipalities". He stated that he believes the membership of the cities present at this meeting to the B40 Network is an important step towards a deeper partnership and cooperation. For this reason, he said that the Municipality of Veliko Tarnova supports the participation of other municipalities in the B40 Network. Mayor Panov continued his words: "In an environment with problems such as inflation, increase in energy prices and Covid-19, the cooperation of cities has become much more important. As Municipalities of Bulgaria, we express our desire to work together for a better future by joining the B40 Network. Each municipality that became a member today wishes to use its expertise in the path of "better cooperation, better future".

Mayor Panov stated that one of the topics of the B40 Network Summit to be held in November should be the development of cooperation in the field of tourism in the Balkans. He expressed that the Balkans has a great tourism potential and that this issue, which every municipality can contribute to. should be included in the agenda of the B40 Network, Mayor PANOV stated that he is very pleased to be a member of the B40 Network as the Municipality of Veliko Tarnova, and that this network will work to create a good future for both Bulgarian cities and all Balkan cities.





Mr. Hasan AZIZ, Mayor of Kardzhali and a founding member of the B40 Network,

Started his speech by saying welcome to Mayor IMAMOGLU. He stated that this meeting is a very important step for the B40 Network. Indicating that he was the only representative of Municipalities of Bulgaria at the Istanbul Summit in November 2021, he expressed his satisfaction that the number has increased today. Mayor Aziz expressed his belief about the B40 Network: "Our problems and people's dreams unite us. People living in Plovdiv and people living in Kardzhali have the right to have the same standard of living. The B40 Network opens a door for us to achieve this; in this respect, it provides us with a great opportunity. The B40 Network, will provide a good answer to the question "How do local aovernments work collaboratively?"



Mayor Aziz stated that as the Municipality of Kardzhali, they started to work together with 4 working groups within the B40 Network. He said that they are exchanging know-how especially on waste management and smart city, and they are working on projects by having discussions with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on these issues. He explained that they believe they will present these issues as concrete results during the next meeting in Athens. He also added that they support the increase of youth activities in the cities of the B40 Network. He said that the B40 Network will implement important projects that will increase the bond between Balkan cities, especially regarding tourism.

Mayor Aziz stated that the Municipality of Sofia had previously conveyed a request to be the third term president of the B40 Network, and said that the Municipalities of Isperih, Varbitsa and Sarnitsa have also committed to being a member of the B40 Network.



Mr. Zdravko DIMITROV, Mayor of Plovdiv,

Started his speech by thanking Mayor IMAMOGLU for his kind invitation. He said that the importance of tourism in terms of the B40 Network was emphasized, and that the fields of sports and culture should not be forgotten. He stated that culture and sports are important fields that will connect future generations, and that cooperating on these fields will also contribute to the sustainable future of cities. He said. "Let's aive a good example of success in the Balkans by cooperating on these and many other fields." Stating that municipalities are the closest administrations to people, he said that they can contribute to central governments with the cooperation to be developed between municipalities. He concluded, "Let's be successful and achieve valuable works for future generations."





Mr. Ivo DIMOV, Mayor of Dimitrovgrad,

Stated that today's meeting is the first major B40 Network expansion meeting, but also an important meeting for the B40 Network to be strengthened. Stating that they attended the local governments meeting in Norway last week, Mayor Dimov said that they observed all cities talkina about similar issues. He explained that all cities, big or small, work for similar purposes. Therefore, he expressed that it is very important for the B40 initiative to provide the opportunity to share good practices and exchange experiences.





Ms. Donka MIHAYLOVA, Mayor of Troyan,

Began her words by stating that Troyan is defined as the heart of the Balkans. She said the elements that define the city of Troyan are the love of nature and the spirit of entrepreneurship. Mayor Mihaylova, who said that people are people everywhere, indicated that Troyan Municipality would be pleased to share its experiences with other member cities. For example, she mentioned that their work on ecological child nutrition and that they would be happy to share their experiences on this subject among the cities of the B40 Network. Mayor Mihaylova also mentioned that the National Association of the Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) has united the cities of Bulgaria for 25 years. She underlined that thanks to this, 265 municipalities gained experience of working together and expressed that she would be happy to see this spirit in the B40 Network.





Mr. Emil KABAIVANOV, Mayor of Karlovo,

Started his speech by expressing his pleasure to be among the participants of the meeting. He stated that the Balkans is the region of people who prioritize their feelings. "After such a troubled past, we must now find solutions to the problems ahead," he said. He also indicated that they became a member of the B40 Network to be a partner of this solution. Sharing the good wishes expressed by other Mayors in their speeches, he said that he believed it would be exciting to write the story of the future together. He emphasized that the Balkans deserve good stories.





Mr. Georgi DIMITROV, *Mayor of Karnobat,*

Mentioned that he knows Turkey well and that he met Şafak Başa, General Manager of Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (ISKI). He said that the issues that Mayor IMAMOGLU put on the agenda of the B40 Network are of great importance. He emphasized the importance of working on these issues together and developing common solutions to the common problems. Underlining the value of coming together on the occasion of the B40 Network, he expressed his sincere wish that this cooperation would lead to long-term cooperation.



Mr. Stefan RADEV, Mayor of Sliven,

Started his speech by congratulating Mayor IMAMOGLU for the establishment of the B40 Network. He stated that he was pleased to be at this meeting and to join the B40 Network. Mayor Radev mentioned that the Balkans is a complex region in many ways, and that it has struggled with many problems in the past. He emphasized that the B40 Network will open a new paragraph in this region.







Mr. Radoslav REVANSKI, Mayor of Belitsa,

Pointed out that in the B40 Network, small municipalities talk to national and international metropolitan municipalities, work side by side with them and that is a great opportunity. He emphasized that what a great chance it is for all municipalities, small or large, to carry out this process together.



At the end of the meeting, Mayor IMAMOGLU thanked the participating mayors for their speeches. He said, "Esteemed Mayors of Bulgaria join the B40 Network and add strength to our strength". Expressing that he was impressed by NAMRB's very special work, Mayor IMAMOGLU stated, "If the Balkan cities succeed in cooperating in this special and beautiful geography, the B40 Network will be referred to as a very special structure in the future."









Addressing Mayor IMAMOGLU, NAMRB Executive Director Silvia Georgieva said, "It is every mayor's responsibility to feel the city and its people. This is what you shared at our meeting in Istanbul in December." Georgieva underlined that NAMRB, together with the Permanent Secretariat of the B40 Network, is ready to continue working to expand this network and ensure the active participation of Bulgarian municipalities.

Mayor IMAMOGLU visited the Mayor of Sofia, Ms. Yordanka Fandakova in her office during his visit to Sofia. Georgi Georgiev, the Chairman of Sofia Municipal Council, Deputy Mayor Desislava Bileva and Deputy Mayor Doncho Barbalov have attended the meeting.





Mayor IMAMOGLU, during his visit to Sofia, also visited the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Sofia, H.E. Aylin SEKİZKÖK, at the Residence of the Turkish Embassy. Mayor IMAMOGLU expressed that Istanbul and Sofia are two ancient cities that share the same aeographical and cultural values, and that they have hosted two important cultures that have intertwined and influenced each other throughout history. The residence, which is used as the Residence of the Embassy today and known as "Sırmacıyevi", is the residence where the founder of the Turkish Republic. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, lived while he was serving as a military attaché in Sofia.



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