

B40 SOFIA SUMMIT DECLARATION

We, the Mayors and representatives of the B40 Balkan Cities Network, gathered at the B40 Sofia Summit on February 24, 2025, reaffirm our steadfast commitment to the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the rule of law, fundamental human rights, and the right to vote and be elected as a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. Recognizing both the unprecedented challenges and boundless opportunities our urban centers face, we declare our collective vision and resolve to foster better cooperation, ensure sustainable development, and promote justice and dignity for all our citizens.

Anchored in a shared vision of Europe and guided by the motto “Better Cooperation, Better Future,” we emphasize the importance of democratic governance as an indispensable foundation for the sustainable development of our cities. We reaffirm that freedom of expression and participatory governance are essential pillars of free, just societies. We acknowledge that democratic governance enables not only the prosperity of our local communities but also the strength of regional cooperation, contributing to stability and progress in the Balkans and beyond.

In recent years, we have witnessed the alarming erosion of democratic rights on a global scale. The undermining of the rule of law and the suppression of fundamental freedoms threaten the integrity of democratic institutions and processes. In particular, we highlight the worrying trend of politically motivated legal actions that serve as tools of political coercion. Such actions not only undermine the will of the people but also cloud the outcomes of free and fair elections—fundamental elements of democratic legitimacy. We categorically oppose any attempt to weaken these principles and consider any such actions a direct challenge to universal democratic values.

We strongly reaffirm our belief in the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Misuse of judicial power for political purposes is unacceptable and must be resisted. The independence of the judiciary is essential to maintaining trust in governance and ensuring that democracy can thrive. We stress that local governments, as fundamental building blocks of democracy, must be empowered to govern freely, inclusively, and transparently. Accountability, respect for human rights, and the active participation of all citizens are essential to fostering good governance and sustainable urban development.

Recognizing the critical need for environmental sustainability, we also pledge to accelerate our shift toward green energy and adopt sustainable practices. By embracing emerging technologies and pioneering creative solutions, we aim to optimize municipal services and elevate the quality of life for our citizens. In doing so, we reaffirm our commitment to building resilient urban environments that will ensure a healthier future for generations to come.

In conclusion, as members of the B40 Balkan Cities Network, we stand united in our commitment to protect democratic values, uphold the rule of law, and defend fundamental human rights. We call on all national and international stakeholders to respect these principles, address the global erosion of democracy, and support the resilience and legitimacy of local governments. Together, we pledge to advance democracy, justice, and human dignity while working toward a sustainable and cooperative future.