



2025 SOFIA SUMMIT



Theme: *"The Future of the Balkans: Innovation, Green Transition, Cooperation and Growth"*

(24.02)– Main Summit

General Assembly Meeting

Opening Ceremony:

09:00 – 10:00

- o Family photo (head of delegations)
- o Welcome speech by city of Sofia
- o Speech from the Founding President, Mr. Ekrem İmamoğlu- Mayor of Istanbul
- o Speech from B40 President (Tirana)
- o Announcement of new members & signing ceremony including introduction and short speech by the new members
- o Transfer of B40 Presidency
- o Speech by Mr. Vassil Terziev – New President of B40 Network
- o Presentation on the updates to the Organisational Structure and Working Principles of the B40, Mr. Barbaros Büyüksağnak, B40 Permanent Secretary

Mayor Discussion Panels – Learning from Real-World City Examples

10:00 – 10:40

1. Local Climate Action: Strategies for Sustainable Urban Planning and Green Energy Initiatives

- **Listening to Success Stories:** Mayors share concrete examples of sustainable urban development and green energy projects from their cities.
- **Identifying Challenges:** Participants discuss common obstacles such as funding, regulatory hurdles, and technology integration as illustrated by their experiences.
- **Informed Discussion:** Through real-world examples, the session explores actionable ideas for enhancing regional climate resilience.

Coffee Break & Networking

10:40– 11:00



Continuation of the Mayors Discussions

11:00 – 12:45

2. Local Democracy and Migration: Addressing Challenges of Inclusion and Integration

- **Learning from Experience:** Mayors present practical cases of promoting inclusive governance and managing integration challenges in their communities.
- **Highlighting Lessons Learned:** Participants focus on what has worked well and what obstacles have arisen, providing insights into effective practices.
- **Focused Dialogue:** The session facilitates an informed discussion based on these examples, aiming to identify practical solutions that cities can adapt.

3. Smart Cities and Digital Transformation: Exploring Technological Solutions for Smarter Governance

- **City Case Studies:** Mayors describe their digital initiatives and smart governance tools, offering firsthand accounts of successes and challenges.
- **Understanding the Balance:** Participants listen to examples on how cities manage the balance between technological innovation and ensuring data privacy and cybersecurity.
- **Evidence-Based Exchange:** The discussion is driven by real-world cases, helping cities consider scalable solutions and best practices.

4. Local Economic and Cultural Cooperation: Enhancing Regional Trade, Tourism, and Cultural Ties

- **Showcasing Local Success:** Mayors share experiences from initiatives that have effectively stimulated local economies and boosted cultural tourism.
- **Learning from Practice:** The session highlights concrete examples of how cities have leveraged cultural assets and economic strategies to enhance regional cooperation.
- **Interactive Reflection:** Through listening to these examples, the discussion focuses on drawing practical insights that can be adapted by other cities in the region.

12:45 – 13:00

Sofia's vision and priorities as the new B40 President.
Vassil Terziev – Mayor of Sofia

13:00 – 15:00

Networking Lunch



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Meeting of the Executive Committee of B40

Afternoon Session

15:00 – 16:30 – Bilateral Meetings & Informal Networking

Dedicated spaces provided for one-on-one discussions between city representatives.

17:00 – 18:45 – Site Visit (Delegates Only (Limited Capacity – Please register):

Historical Sofia Tour:

Embark on a guided walking tour through Sofia's historic core, where you'll learn about the city's rich heritage and the stories behind its enduring landmarks.

Modern Sofia Tour:

Discover the dynamic side of Sofia on a guided tour highlighting its innovation hubs and entrepreneurial spirit. Explore the city's modern landmarks and hear inspiring stories about breakthrough companies and cutting-edge technologies emerging from this vibrant urban landscape.

Evening Session:

Gala Dinner (**official delegates only**)

Informal Networking (**head of delegations**)



(25.02)– Panel Sessions and Practical: Driving Regional Collaboration and Innovation

Objective: Summarize outcomes, align on regional initiatives for growth, and foster partnerships through actionable strategies and discussions.

Program:

09:30 – 10:10

Panel 1: "Preparing Cities for European Integration: The Enlargement Agenda"

Topics:

- **City–EU Relations:**
 - How cities can act as bridges between national governments and EU institutions.
- **Local Governance Capacity:**
 - Building local governance capacity to meet EU standards.
- **Optimizing EU Funds Utilization:**
 - How cities could prepare and build capacity to optimize the use of EU funds through dedicated training, strategic planning, and specialized administrative structures.
- **City–Led EU Accession:**
 - Successful examples of city–led contributions to the EU accession process.

Participants and Keynote Speakers:

- **Mr. André Sobczak** – Secretary General of Eurocities
 - **Mr. Solomon Passy** – Former Minister of Foreign Affairs (2001–2005)
 - **Ms. Tanya Hristova** – Mayor of Gabrovo
 - **Moderator – Ms. Vessela Cherneva** – Deputy Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations
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10:10 – 11:00

Panel 2: "Sustainable Tourism: Protecting Heritage and Communities in Open Cities"

Topics:

- **Tourism Management:**
 - Strategies to attract visitors while protecting cultural heritage.
 - Addressing challenges of overtourism.
- **Community Engagement:**
 - Balancing tourism growth with local residents' needs.
- **Collaborative Practices:**
 - Opportunities for inter-city collaboration and sharing best practices.



Participants and Keynote Speakers:

- **Mr. Ricardo Rio** – Mayor of Braga
 - **Mr. Borislav Petrov** – Founder FlatAway
 - **Mr. Ivica Puljak** – Mayor Split
 - **Moderator – Ms. Milena Nikolova** – Chief Behavior Officer
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11:00–11:20

Coffee Break & Networking

11:20 – 12:00:

Panel 3: " Smart Governance in the Balkans: Cities as Catalysts for AI and Tech Innovation"

Topics:

- **Tech Ecosystems & Talent Attraction:**
 - Creating vibrant tech ecosystems within Balkan cities.
 - Strategies to attract and retain top IT talent.
- **AI in Urban Development:**
 - Enhancing urban planning, mobility solutions, and public services with AI.
 - Case studies of successful AI implementations.
- **Ethical AI & Data Privacy:**
 - Addressing ethical concerns and ensuring data privacy.
 - Promoting transparent AI practices in city administrations.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:**
 - Collaborative projects for smart city infrastructures.
- **Digital Leadership:**
 - Preparing administrations for AI adoption through training and policy development.

Participants and Keynote Speakers:

- **Ms. Dessislava Petrova-Antonova** – Research Lead – GATE Institute
 - **Mr. Momchil Vassilev** – Endeavour Balkans
 - **Dr. Plamen Russev** – Executive Chairman of Webit Foundation
 - **Moderator – Mr. Ognyan Vassilev** – Founder Startup Bulgaria
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12:00 – 12:40

Panel 4 "Financing Resilient Futures: Investments and Innovations for Sustainable Balkan Cities"

Topics:

- **Funding Urban & Climate Resilience:**



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- o Accessing funds from institutions like EBRD and EIB for urban and environmental projects.
- o Funding opportunities for climate resilience initiatives.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:**
 - o Successful models in infrastructure, green projects, and digital ecosystems.
 - o Aligning projects with EU Green Deal goals.
- **Innovative Climate Solutions:**
 - o Urban cooling systems and green infrastructure to combat heatwaves.
 - o Strategies for addressing climate change impacts.
- **Intercity Collaboration:**
 - o Leveraging shared resources and knowledge to build climate resilience.
 - o Collaborative strategies for sustainable urban development.

Participants and Keynote Speakers:

- **Mr. Donald Mishaxhiu** – Head of EBRD – Infrastructure for Bulgaria, Romania, and Western Balkans
- **Mr. Thomas Osdoba** – Head of Net Zero Cities
- **Ms. Meropi-Spyridoula YDRAIOU** – Spokesperson on Environment and Climate (Council of Europe)
- **Moderator – Ms. Angelina Boneva** – Deputy Minister of Regional Development (2023-2024)

12:40 – 13:00:
Closing Session:

- Key takeaways from the three-day summit.