

4th INTERNATIONAL BALKAN FORUM

EDİRNE DECLARATION

1 – “The Fourth International Balkan Forum” was held in Edirne on 28-30 April 2011 in a constructive and friendly atmosphere.

The Forum was organized by TASAM in cooperation with Governorship of Edirne, Thrace Development Agency and Yunus Emre Institute. During the Forum, “Cultural Diplomacy” was focused as the main theme. The meeting was held with the participation of politicians, scholars, diplomatic mission representatives and media members from Balkan countries, United States, European countries and European Commission. Throughout the meeting Cultural Diplomacy was examined thoroughly with its all aspects.

2- During the two-day Forum, presentations and discussions were conducted in seven separate sessions under the titles of “The Culture of Co-existence in Balkans: From Identity Conflicts to Cultural Integration”, “Protection of Cultural Heritage in Balkans during the Process of European Integration and Cultural Rights”, “Towards a New Civil Society in Balkans 1: Development of Civil Society and Cooperation between Balkan Development Agencies”, “Identity Politics in Balkans: Identity as a Determinant in Creating a Pluralistic Society”, “Religion and Belief in Balkans: Cooperation for Mutual Tolerance and Understanding”, “Pursuit of Democracy in Balkans and Media” and “Towards a New Civil Society in Balkans 2: Dialogue between CSOs and Common Projects” and various opinions concerning the cooperation between countries and institutions have been exchanged.

3- It’s emphasized during the Forum that there is a growing need for cultural diplomacy in today’s world and it’s depicted that knowledge of the processes and interactions between cultures have become vital as global society is getting increasingly multicultural. While it’s mentioned that it is not possible to learn about each of infinite number of different cultures in the world, it’s unanimously confirmed that it is possible to learn the techniques that allow and foster inter-cultural negotiation, co-operation and understanding.

4- It’s been met on the common ground that the use of these techniques shall be researched, thought and promoted. It’s reached the conclusion that by studying the history, methods, theory and practice of cultural diplomacy, one can become better prepared for the cross-cultural challenges that present themselves at local, regional and international levels. In this context, 4th International Balkan Forum has been a rewarding experience both for the participants and for today’s global society that so urgently needs a better understanding of the importance of cultural diplomacy.

5- Cultural diplomacy is a two-way process: on the one hand, diplomatic network facilitates a faster transference and presentation of facts, contents, ideas and cultural architects of one country, and on the other, culture itself allows for a promotion of diplomatic interests of that country on political, strategic, economic and other levels. Within this regard, one of the tasks of cultural diplomacy is also to avoid the conflicts between different cultures, particularly between the culture of the majority and that of the minority in South–East Europe where for so long the embers of such conflicts have been smoldering and suddenly bursting into flames.

6- In this regard, there is a need for developing the regional cooperation and common aims on the framework of cultural diplomacy between the Balkan Countries. In this point, common values of cultural heritage stand out as constructive component to reach the regional cooperation. Cultural heritage is a bridge between the different cultures; it is a source of past, today and future and also it is a component to strengthen the intercultural dialogue.

7- Language and religion as a part of the cultural heritage also have important role in the Balkans in order to establish the culture of co-existence. Language and religion were critical catalyst components in the creation of different cultures. Also, these played important role in starting the conflicts in Balkans. But today, stand out as an important factor in starting the dialogue and in creation of democratic, pluralist society. Cultural diversity which contains different languages and religions, enrich the Balkans, and provide facility to live together in harmony along with keeping general and valid values and rules of the society.

8- Cultural Diplomacy is critical factor to ease the security issues related to radicalism, extremism and the crime with playing role in living the societies together who are from different cultural environment. In this way possible difficulties of providing the security structure of values and valid norms of common life will be eased.

9- Cultural diplomacy has a really important role in constructing the European cultural identity and in protecting the unique properties of this identity in the process of the integration of Balkans to EU. This kind of defense processes ease to protect the shared basics as different cultural identities and their diversities and respect to others' values. In this respect, it is really significant for the civil society organizations to make common projects and in this direction to create awareness in the stage of protecting the diversity in European Union integration process and encouraging culture of coexistence.

10- Globalization processes are affecting culture in many ways. In an era where hierarchies are being eroded and giving way to networks, it's possible for peoples to maintain their existence by safeguarding the distinctiveness of their cultures, traditions, languages and heritage, but at the same time international arena is being transformed by the possibility of learning and promoting different

cultures with the new opportunities that emerge through the new technologies. Therefore, both in Balkan region and on global scale, the hopes for establishing more peaceful order are increasing.

11- In parallel with the strategic concept summarized in the first 10 items above and with the changing of the concept of power in the world, there has been a consensus on the urgent need to the significant initiatives in Balkan countries. In this framework, it is also agreed upon the idea that 4th International Balkan Forum and its results are a strategic call for all formal and civil decision makers in Balkan countries to make active and proactive initiatives.

30 April 2011 Edirne