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Balkan Universities Association E-Bulletin





Balkan Universities Association

**8th MEETING OF BALKAN UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION (BUA)
JUNE 3rd - 4th 2024, TIRANA, ALBANIA**

The 8th Meeting of the Balkan Universities Association (BUA) was hosted by the University of Tirana on June 3rd and 4th, 2024. The meeting started with a grand opening ceremony with over 100 participants including representatives of 37 universities from 9 Balkan countries, rectors, ambassadors, prominent figures of politics, diplomacy, bureaucracy, and academia of the region. The topics of this year's conference were "Integration of the Balkans into Europe" and "Promotion of Tourism in the Balkans". After the opening ceremony, the panel on the European Integration Process of the Balkans started.



In the first panel discussion of the 8th BUA Meeting, experts discussed the "European Integration Process of the Balkans". Federica Mogherini, former Italian Foreign Minister, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Rector of the College of Europe, participated in the panel discussion.



In the first panel moderated by Prof. Dr. Gentian Elezi, member of the Institute of European Studies at the University of Tirana, Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, Rector of the University of Bucharest, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sorin Costreie, Vice-Rector of the University of Bucharest and President of UNICA (European Capital Universities Association), Prof. Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, Rector of University of Business and Technology, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Enes Turbic, faculty member of the Balkan Research Institute at Trakya University, took part as speakers.



In his speech, Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, Rector of the University of Bucharest, presented the importance of progress and the ways to improve the European integration of the Balkan countries and stated that the path to the EU can be very successful if the Balkan countries, which are moving towards the EU and want to be part of the EU family, work well and hard.

Prof. Dr. Sorin Costreie, Vice-Rector of the University of Bucharest and President of UNICA pointed out that the future of a university lies in deep cooperation and joint work, and that cooperation is important therefore it is necessary to conduct joint research, make progress, and involve communities in various projects.



Prof. Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, Rector of the Kosovo University of Business and Technology, expressed his gratitude for BUA's ability to connect almost all universities in the Balkans, which is very difficult and complex in the current era and said: "We have to take responsibility for ourselves, this is a great moment because we are living a kind of information revolution." Assist. Prof. Dr. Enes Turbic pointed out in his speech that the Western Balkans have been on the European path since 1999 and emphasized that Serbia, one of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which is not yet a member of the EU, has been a candidate since 2009, Montenegro since 2012 and Bosnia and Herzegovina since March 1, 2024. In terms of interaction, one of the main paths is regional cooperation, Turbic said, adding that the similarities in the Balkan countries are a great way to achieve better collaboration.

"Promotion of Tourism in the Balkans" was discussed in the second panel held within the scope of the General Assembly. Making the opening speech of the panel, Albanian Minister of Tourism and Environment Mirela Kumbaro emphasized the significance of such events for the Balkan countries and expressed her honor in participating in this valuable event.



In the panel moderated by Prof. Dr. Eden Mahmut, Secretary General of the Black Sea Universities Network, Vilma Bello, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania, Prof. Dr. Lorenc Bejko from Tirana University, Prof. Dr. Emel Gönenç Güler, Faculty Member of Tourism Management Department of Trakya University School of Applied Sciences, and Enrico Ceko from Canadian University of Technology made presentations.



Vilma Bello, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania stated that they are very pleased to have hosted such an important event in terms of promoting the tourism potential in the region and mentioned that Albania has made significant investments in the field of tourism in recent years.



In his presentation, Prof. Dr. Lorenc Bejko, Lecturer at the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management at the University of Tirana, emphasized that in developed countries, the tourism sector is not just a seasonal business for three months of the year but a sector that operates year-round and makes significant contributions to the economy. Bejko stated that Albania is very rich in terms of both history and archaeology and that cultural tourism holds an important place.

Prof. Dr. Emel Gönenç Güler, Lecturer at the Department of Tourism, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Trakya University, stated that Balkan countries can attract a wide range of international tourists by effectively promoting their various tourism opportunities. Albania should do more in this respect and the political and economic ties between Balkan countries should be strengthened through cooperative tourism efforts. She said that by adopting the multi-tourist destination concept, regions can increase their attractiveness to a wider audience, promote sustainable tourism, and maximize the economic benefits of their tourism industries.





Prof. Dr. Enrico Ceko from the Canadian Institute of Technology presented a comparative analysis of the tourism sector in the Western Balkans. Emphasizing that Balkan countries have recently joined the international community of ISO standards and are involved in the World Bank's Doing Business and Quality of Life Index, Ceko said that Balkan countries have faced numerous issues over the years related to quality institutions, infrastructure, business environment, and quality of life. When Albania is considered from the perspective of the tourism sector, significant infrastructure investments have been made in recent years, marking an important achievement. He also stressed the substantial contribution of the tourism sector to the economy.



On June 4th, on the occasion of The BUA General Assembly meeting discussed the activities of the Balkan Universities (BUA) convened in Tirana, Albania. BUA General Assembly meeting started with the opening speech of Prof. Dr. Artan Hoxha, Rector of Tirana University. In his speech, Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, Rector of Trakya University and Secretary General of BUA, talked about the activities of the Balkan Universities Association from the past to the present and touched upon its plans for the future.



Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu stated that Balkan University Museums Association was opened on May 8th, 2024, after the BUA Tuzla meeting and that this museum will serve as an important instrument to emphasize the importance of cooperation and cultural heritage among Balkan universities. Rector Tabakoğlu also stated that the BUA Forest, where each member university of the Balkan Universities Association has a tree, has been established. Rector Tabakoğlu said that Trakya University's work on the Balkans continues and the Balkan Libraries Association event was hosted by Trakya University on May 9-11, 2024. He announced that it was unanimously decided that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kalina Ivanova, President of the Bulgarian Libraries Association, would be the President of the Balkan Libraries Association for the year 2025. Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, who proposed that the presidential system followed within the framework of BUA should also be adopted by the Balkan Libraries Union, lastly proposed the establishment of the Balkan Universities Museums Union in order to bring together the museums in the Balkan Universities Association within the framework of the union. In addition, he emphasized that the interaction between Balkan Universities will become stronger with the establishment of associations such as Balkan Music Association, Balkan Search, and Rescue Association and Balkan Cinema Association.



Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu stated that that 9 universities applied for membership for membership after his presentation, and presentations were made by the representatives of the related universities. During the meeting, new candidate universities were introduced and agreements were signed for the participation of the members admitted to the association at last year's General Assembly. In the second session of the BUA General Assembly, the representatives of Istanbul Gedik University, Istanbul Kültür University, Polis University, Agricultural University of Tirana, Kırıkkale University, Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Karadeniz Technical University, Bulgaria Tsenov Academy of Economics were introduced to the BUA General Assembly. After the voting process, it was unanimously decided that 9 universities would become BUA members, increasing the total number of BUA members to 101.

“The BUA Statute signing ceremony was held for Prof. Dr. İsmail Kocayusufoğlu, Rector of the Canadian Institute of Technology (Albania) and Prof. Dr. Ali Argun Karacabey, Vice Rector of Altınbaş University (Türkiye), who became BUA members at the BUA 2023 Tuzla meeting.



After the signing ceremony of the new members, the voting for the election of the BUA presidency for 2025 started. Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, Rector of Trakya University and Secretary General of BUA, mentioned the contacts made with the University of Montenegro for the presidency of BUA 2025 and proposed the University of Montenegro as the President of BUA 2025, which was unanimously accepted by the BUA General Assembly. In addition, the University of Prizren proposed the candidacy of the University of Prizren for the presidency of BUA 2026, which was unanimously accepted by the General Assembly.



BUA Secretary General and Rector of Trakya University, Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu presented BUA 2024 President and Rector of Tirana University, Prof. Dr. Artan Hoxha with the BUA Presidential Certificate and expressed his gratitude for his contributions to BUA. BUA 2024 President Prof. Dr. Artan Hoxha handed over the symbol of the Association to the new President, Prof. Dr. Sanja Pekovic, Vice-Rector of the University of Montenegro



The General Assembly Meeting concluded with a photograph taken by BUA members as a memento.



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