



## THE SIXTH MEETING OF BALKAN UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION

The 6<sup>th</sup> meeting Balkan Universities Association (BUA) was held on 12-15 October 2022 in the form of a joint congress with the Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN) under the title "Dialogue and Cooperation in the Black Sea and Balkan Regions" hosted by the University of Bucharest. The meeting got together 7 Balkan countries with 17 BUA members, 2 candidate Universities, a total of 30 Universities and 116 participants. The historic meeting also got together the organizing committee members listed as BUA Secretary General Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, BUA Term President Prof. Dr. Mircea Dimitru, Rector of the University of Bucharest Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, Vice-Rector Prof. Dr. Sorin Costreie, BSUN Term President Prof. Dr. Karin Markides, BSUN Secretary General Prof. Dr. Eden Mamut; It started with a grand opening ceremony featuring important figures of the region's politics, diplomacy, bureaucracy and academia.



On the first day of the BUA 2022/ BSUN 2022 Congress on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the session was chaired by Prof. Dr. Sorin Costreie, Vice-Rector of the University of

Bucharest. The congress continued with the opening speech of the Rector of the University of Bucharest, Prof. Dr. Marian Preda expressed that they hosted an important meeting in order to develop cooperation to find solutions to problems and to draw a vision for the future.



Participating in the opening of the meeting with a video message, Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca stated that the problems in the region can only be solved through dialogue and this can only be possible with cooperation in the academy, and stated that universities have a great responsibility at this point.



European Parliament Commissioner Mariya Gabriel drew attention to the importance of the Erasmus Student and Academician Exchange Mobility Program and stated that this program led European societies to get to know each other closely and to open cooperation channels. NATO Deputy General Secretary Mircea Geoana, who attended the opening with a video message from Brussels, emphasized that Europe cannot be the same as before and stated that the Black Sea and Balkan regions have gained strategic importance at this point. Emphasizing that the meeting jointly organized by BUA and BSUN created an environment of dialogue and cooperation in the field of higher education and that the environment will have positive results in the region, Romanian Education Minister Liga Deca said that universities have great responsibilities for peace and stated that this meeting is a milestone in the region's common future in education. Romanian Minister of Research, Innovation and Digitization, Sebastian Burduja, who said that the cooperation of universities in the field of security and new technologies will increase regional prosperity, emphasized that the pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia War have deeply affected the region, and that this effect can be minimized with a permanent peace environment to be achieved through dialogue and cooperation. Expressing that the meeting where the important universities of the Balkans and the Black Sea come together in these difficult days is a hope for the future of humanity and the world, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu expressed his thought that if peace cannot be achieved today, the future will be darker for the world. Romanian Defense Minister Vasile Dincu, who attended

the opening with a video message, drew attention to the strategic effects of the Ukraine-Russia War and said that these effects can be overcome with cooperation between countries and universities.







President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey Prof.Dr. Erol Özvar said, "Instead of coming together for dialogue and cooperation against the challenges we all face, societies started to build high walls among themselves. Our task is to create pathways that show how it is possible to live together. In this respect, scientific and cultural collaborations to be developed between our universities are one of the most promising of these paths. As HeC, we are committed to actively supporting Turkish universities in order to cooperate with international unions and institutions. As international interactions spread, the quality of higher education and research will improve all over the world. I believe that we should raise all our students with a globalized mindset on the way to internationalization. Prof. Özvar stated that Turkish higher education is growing day by day with 208 universities and more than 7 million students, and said, "Turkey, which is the largest country in terms of the number of students in European higher education and offers quality higher education, has a great potential to contribute to the sustainable development of the Balkans and the Black Sea."



Emphasizing that BUA and BSUN play important roles in the region, President of Greek Higher Education Institution, Prof. Pericles Mitkas stated that the unions will continue to work for sustainable development and a free world. Prof. Mitkas thanked Trakya University Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakođlu and his delegation for leading the two unions, of which he held the presidency in the past, to come together. Stating that such meetings are very important in such difficult times, Romanian Prime Minister Adviser Iulian Chifu said that universities should undertake important tasks on the environment, which is one of the main agenda items of the meeting. Saying that the world is on the verge of a major change in technology and robotics, and that no one knows what kind of world awaits children, Romanian House of Representatives Member George Tuta drew attention to the need for the whole world to focus on this and called for cooperation from all countries. Saying that 30 years ago, he attended a big meeting hosted by Bođaziđi University, where European and Balkan universities came together, Romanian Former President Emil Constantinusce stated that the gathering of important universities from the Balkans and the Black Sea was much more valuable than the meeting 30 years ago. Stating that today's meeting would shed light on the way to end conflicts on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, Constantinusce expressed his belief that important cooperation and projects will be implemented in the near future.



BSUN Term President Prof. Karin Markides stated that there is democracy and freedom in the character of universities and emphasized the necessity of voicing these concepts more loudly than ever as two unions as the pioneer of sustainable development and lasting peace., Trakya University Retired Lecturer Prof. Dr. Hilmi İbar mentioned about the establishment and activities of BUA said, “BUA should have much more members, just like the European Universities Association. At this point, the joint work of the two university unions will create new opportunities and facilities. Why would the youth of this region study in Western Europe? We must fulfill our duties.”







In the second session of the Congress, the Ambassadors of France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Turkey called for dialogue and cooperation to achieve lasting peace. After the speeches of BUA and BSUN member university representatives and important names of diplomacy and bureaucracy in Europe and host Romania, the ambassadors of the union member states took the floor. The common message of the ambassadors was that the vision for the future can be drawn through cooperation and dialogue. French Ambassador to Bucharest, Laurence Auer, said that the Russian-Ukrainian War does not only contain conflicts, but also has multi-component problems, and said that it was their duty as Europe to keep communication and dialogue channels open. Expressing his views on equal opportunities in education, energy and economy, Auer stated that the EU member states acting together would serve peace.

Ambassador Alfredo Maria Durante Mangoni expressed that the issues related to the Black Sea and the Balkans were of direct concern to Italy and emphasized the importance of cooperation for sustainable development and economy and thanked those who contributed to the realization of the meeting. He said that Russia's aggressive attitude threatened the region and humanity and was a major obstacle to development, Polish Ambassador Maciej Lang emphasized the need to continue to come together and work to produce new ideas and strategies to overcome this current situation and the obstacles it had created. Ambassador of Ukraine Teofil Bauer expressed that they were very pleased to attend such a comprehensive meeting when the country and the region needed dialogue and cooperation the most and drew attention to the fact that education and science should not be limited to serving the present of humanity, but should also have an important place in the construction of the future.

Karakossatis from the Greek Embassy in Bucharest stated that the developments in the world now concerned all societies and expressed the importance of coming together and acting together in order to find appropriate solutions. The Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Bucharest, Füsün Aramaz said “Turkey is a Balkan and a Black Sea Country across the board. It has deep ties with the region.” Noting that Turkey was a Balkan country and one of the countries with the longest border to the Black Sea, and that there were deep ties with these two regions, Ambassador Aramaz added, “I find it very important that these two unions come together at this point. I think we can build a beautiful future for the region together. We must develop cooperation for economic development. Pandemic and war negatively affected the region. We must work even harder together for prosperity and peace. These studies and projects will serve for peace and tranquility. Turkey will continue to be a country that continues its efforts based on dialogue and cooperation with all its might to ensure long lasting peace”. Stating that 15 universities from Turkey were members of BSUN and 12 universities from BUA, Ambassador Aramaz ended her speech by expressing her thanks to all universities and participants, especially to Trakya University Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, BUA Term President Prof. Dr. Mircea Dimitru, Rector of University of Bucharest Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Sorin Costreie, BSUN Term President Karin Markides and Secretary General Prof. Dr. Eden Mamut.





The third session of the congress titled "Dialogue and Economic Cooperation in the Black Sea and Balkan Region" continued with the speech of world-renowned economist and scientist Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, who is a faculty member of Columbia University, under the moderation of BSUN Secretary General Prof. Dr. Eden Mamut.



The fourth session of the congress titled "The Role of Universities in the New Regional and Global Context" was moderated by Prof. Dragos Aligica, KPMG Professor of Business Administration and co-director of the Black Sea Field Studies Program at the University of Bucharest. Dr. Sonia Sachs, Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, Prof. Dr. The panel, which included presentations by Phoebe Koundouri, Prof. Dr. Karin Markides, Dr. Catalina Ancuta, Prof. Mykhailo Zghurovskyi, emphasized the role of universities and educational, research and intellectual exchange networks in supporting a peaceful, prosperous and better integrated post-conflict region, focusing on the potential for de-escalation, reconstruction and cooperation in the region.



In the last session of the congress titled "The Role of Higher Education in Turbulent Times", HeC President Prof. Dr. Erol Özvar and Greek Higher Education Institution President Prof. Pericles Mitkas looked at the future projection of the region from the perspective of universities. In the panel titled "The Role of Higher Education in Turbulent Times" where the

President of the Council of Higher Education Prof. Dr. Erol Özvar and the President of the Greek Higher Education Institution Prof. Pericles Mitkas came together, it was emphasized that the exit from the crisis environment brought about by the pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia War could be possible through cooperation, and that universities have important duties in this cooperation.

Prof. Dr. Erol Özvar, President of the Council of Higher Education in Türkiye, who made his speech on four themes, explained these four themes as "higher education in turbulent times with a comparative and global perspective, with a particular focus on COVID-19 and forcibly displaced people" "Turkish higher education's responses to recent challenges" "why we should provide quality higher education to people suffering from emergencies" and "our responsibilities as leaders and managers of higher education and the measures to be taken" respectively. Stating that many universities in the world switched to distance education in March 2020 and that digitalization in education accelerated in this way, HeC President Prof. Dr. Erol Özvar said, "In addition to the pandemic, there is forced migration around the world for various reasons such as war, political instability, military conflicts, natural disasters, hunger and economic conditions. According to the latest data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the total number of people forced to leave their homes is 89.3 million by the end of 2021. While 1 out of 167 people in the world was a migrant/refugee in 2012, today this figure has increased to 1 out of 88 people. According to the latest estimate by UNHCR, this number exceeds 100 million people worldwide." Stating that problems such as drought and famine due to climate change force people to migrate to other countries, Prof. Özvar said, "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), climate change is the biggest health threat facing humanity. Health professionals around the world are already unable to respond to the damage caused by this emerging crisis. According to the WHO's estimate, climate change will cause the death of about 250,000 people a year between 2030 and 2050 due to malnutrition and the diseases it brings." Stating that the origin of the word dialogue comes from the Greek word "diálogos", the President of the Higher Education Council of Turkey Prof. Dr. Erol Özvar drew attention to the importance of dialogue and stated that this method should never be abandoned.



The President of the Greek Higher Education Institution, Prof. Pericles Mitkas, who started his speech by talking about the historical developments of BUA and BSUN, the two university associations of which he is the chairman, stated that the meetings and studies of both associations have made a regional contribution to the United Nations' 2030-Sustainable Development Vision. Noting that similar problems are experienced all over the world despite the differences in geographies, Prof. Pericles Mitkas said that the role of universities is to produce permanent solutions to these common problems. Stating that the pandemic process experienced in 2020 affected education as in all sectors, Mitkas stated that the problems became a spiral with the successive financial crisis, war and energy crisis. Prof. Mitkas said that universities are the solution centers of this spiral of problems; scientific studies, public-industry-university collaborations, cultural interaction, innovation, contributing to economic development, creating solutions to social problems, academic freedom, digitalization, Erasmus and other international collaborations and mobility, all problems can be solved by expanding the networks of universities in accordance with national and regional objectives.

Prof. Pericles Mitkas, who drew attention to the importance of lifelong learning programs and multidisciplinary studies in higher education; He concluded his speech by emphasizing the necessity for universities to show their leadership and response in the pandemic, digitalization in wars and crises. The first day of the Congress on Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and the Black Sea Region, which is of historical importance for the region, came to an end with the panel chaired by Prof. Romița Iucu from the University of Bucharest.



The first session of the second day of the BUA 2022/ BSUN 2022 Congress on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 started with Prof. Rick Fawn from the University of St Andrews as an invited speaker of the panel titled "Resumption of Dialogue and Cooperation in the Black Sea and Balkan Region". In the first session of the second day, Prof. Rick Fawn from St. Andrews University made evaluations at the "The Conference of Restarting Dialogue and Cooperation in the Black Sea and the Balkan Region". In the session chaired by Prof. Dragoş Aligică from the University of Bucharest, Prof. Rick Fawn said that long-term projects were needed to solve the problems. He said that these projects should be based on diplomacy with mutual respect and understanding. Prof. Fawn, claiming that there was a great change in the world with the collapse of the Soviet Union, stated that concrete steps should be taken in order not to keep peace in discourse, and also expressed the need for think-tanks and universities to undertake important missions at this point.





In the second session of the day, “The Conference of Sustainable Development in the Black Sea and the Balkan Region” was held under the chairmanship of Prof. Pericles Mitkas, the President of the Greek Higher Education Institution. The first speaker of the session, Nicolaos Theodossiou, the President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, emphasized the importance of coordinated and solution-oriented work for the solution of regional problems. Secretary General of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization Lazăr Comănescu, expressing that the energy crisis stands as the biggest problem in front of sustainable development, stated that the Climate Change Agreement signed in Paris in 2017 failed with a pandemic in 2020 and a war in 2022 and therefore he expressed the need for re-evaluation of this agreement with new arguments. Romanian Prime Minister Advisor and a famous economist László Borbély, stating that the solution of any problem today is only possible with the action of the political authorities, drew attention to the necessity of separating the issues such as social interaction and public-industry cooperation, which should be guided by universities, from the centralized structure. The session, chaired by Prof. Pericles Mitkas, ended with a question and answer session.



The afternoon sessions of the second day continued simultaneously. Cosmin Ghiță, the General Manager of NuclearElectrica, one of the leading companies in Romania in the field of energy, gave a speech in the parallel session on “Energy and Sustainable Development in the Black Sea Region” chaired by Prof. Radu Dudău from the University of Bucharest. In his speech, by expressing that nuclear energy and energy security have become an important issue today, he drew attention to the importance of clean energy and nuclear energy. Prof. Silviu Nate from Lucian Blaga-Sibiu University, giving a speech in the same session, said that it is being worked on the solutions that will bring the East and the West together on the basis of energy, in the environment created by the pandemic and the war.





The Congress of Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and the Black Sea Region, which brings together the important universities of the countries bordering the Balkans and the Black Sea, hosted a world-famous name in the field of clean energy and hydrogen. President of the Hydrogen Technologies Association and Ontario Technology University Faculty Member Prof. Dr. İbrahim Dinçer, participating in the meeting with the initiatives of Trakya University, drew attention to the future of hydrogen energy. Prof. Dr. İbrahim Dinçer, recognized as an authority all over the world with his studies in the field of clean energy and hydrogen energy, participated in the “The Congress of Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and the Black Sea Region”, which was held in cooperation with the Balkan Universities Association (BUA) and the Black Sea Universities Association (BSUN). Prof. Dr. İbrahim Dinçer, giving a speech in the session titled Energy and Sustainable Development in the Black Sea region, said, “For sustainable development; energy, education, environment and economy have come into prominence. Clean energy and clean hydrogen will create clean food and clean water. The road to hydrogen energy will be through the transition from fossil fuels that pollute our world to clean fuels.’’. Prof. Dinçer, conveying the difference between the use of fossil fuels and hydrogen comparatively, said that hydrogen was cheaper and more efficient. Dinçer, emphasizing that the need for clean energy in the world was increasing day by day, said, “Turkey continues its research for clean energy with its own resources in the Black Sea Region as well. The use of clean energy will reduce carbon emissions over time. Clean energy and clean hydrogen are the road to sustainability, and without these two, it will be very difficult to achieve sustainability.”



Vice-Chancellor of Boğaziçi University Prof. Gürkan Kumbaroğlu, giving a speech in the parallel session on “Fake News, Propaganda and Other Social Challenges” chaired by Bogdan Nicolae, said that especially the Black Sea and its surroundings have gained great importance in terms of cheap energy. Prof. Kumbaroğlu stated that the studies to make the natural gas available in the Black Sea Region in Turkey for use are being continued, and that they also have carried out hydrogen studies at Boğaziçi University. The parallel sessions ended with question and answer sections



In the Round Table Meeting titled the Role of Networks and Unions in Academic Collaboration, the importance of exchange programs was highlighted. CIVIS Representative Romita Iucu, giving a speech in the meeting chaired by Prof. Luciano Saso, the President of European Capital Universities Network, talked about their fields of activity by saying that they are operating in 6 countries as of now. President of the CIVIS Student Council Angela Petre,

talking about the role of students in European universities, stated that the active participation of students in decision-making mechanisms, projects and activities enables them to grow up as well-equipped individuals. Mihai Paunescu, expressing that online scientific meetings, research projects and post-doctoral mobility are their focal points as the European Social Sciences University, stated that they are not only limited to Europe, but also carry out studies oriented capacity building with the whole world.

UNITA Representative Irina Macsinga, telling that they carry out projects with different regions in the world in the fields of language education and educational research, stated that the most important thing they have learned from their experiences is that students, academic staff and administrative staff can work efficiently and in harmony for success.

EPICUR Representative Nicolaos Theodossiou, expressing that they have been working with 8 universities in 6 countries of Europe with 307 thousand students, 40 thousand staff, 118 faculties and 156 research groups since 2019, stated that they have made attempts for R&D programs, networking between European universities, innovative methods in education and training and carrying out joint studies with the cooperation of civil society and researchers.

Last sessions of the second day of the congress were held simultaneously. The second day ended after the “Internationalization of Universities” session, which was held simultaneously with the “Human Security Education” session chaired by SNSPA University Rector Prof. Remus Pricopie. Former Minister of Education of Lithuania Gintaras, giving a speech in the session of “Internationalization of Universities” chaired by University of Bucharest.



Vice-Chancellor Prof. Mugur Zlotea, stated that the quality of education can be increased with internationalization. Vice-Chancellor of Boğaziçi University Rector Prof. Gürkan Kumbaroğlu, stating that Boğaziçi University has taken rapid steps in internationalization from the first moment due to its founding characteristics, talked about the university's bilateral cooperation. Vice-Chancellor Prof. Shefik Shehu, starting his speech by giving information about Tetova University, said that they are ready to develop bilateral cooperation in order to ensure internationalization on issues such as climate change, clean energy and R&D.

West Timișoara University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Catalina Ancuta, emphasizing that they act with a certain strategy in internationalization, pointed out that the balance that has deteriorated in favor of developed countries in the change in higher education can be achieved through internationalization. SNSPA Vice-Chancellor Crina Radulescu, talking about the student profile in their university, said that they attach great importance to exchange programs, especially the Erasmus Student Mobility program.

Ukraine Zaporizhzhia National Polytechnic University Rector Advisor Sergey Beylikov, saying that it was a very difficult feeling for him to talk about internationalization as a country in the war, gave information about the history of the university and the city where it was founded. He stated that while they were preparing to host many international events after the pandemic, they had to postpone all their work due to the war. The second day of the meeting ended with the completion of the sessions.

The leading universities and university associations of Europe came together on the last day of the Congress on "Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and Black Sea Region". Speaking at the meeting, chaired by Vice-Rector Prof. Sorin Costreie from University of Bucharest, EUA Board member. and Former Rector of University of Belgrade, Prof. Dr. Ivanka Popovic said that today's academics are not only expected to conduct scientific research, but also to develop relationships with other universities and academics. Prof. Popovic expressed that they have some responsibilities as universities, and stated that it is necessary to work together to solve the problems. Prof. Popovic stated that they had great experiences from the meetings that brought scientists from different disciplines together. Rector of University of Bucharest, Prof. Marian Preda said that they have new platforms to evaluate the new opportunities that have arisen and will arise. Prof. Preda expressed that they think the same ideas even though they speak different languages, Prof. Preda stated that they should focus on all universities in the world, not just Western Europe or America.



Vice-Rector of Rome Sapienza University and President of the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA) Prof. Luciano Saso said that cooperation between universities and university associations will definitely have successful results on the basis of trust and sincerity. Stating that BSUN is an important union for the region and Europe, President Prof. Karin Markides pointed out that the union should have more members in terms of coverage, and said that the pandemic and the subsequent war situation hindered its work. Stating that the processes experienced draw attention to the importance of working together and cooperation, Prof. Markides emphasized the importance of realizing joint projects by focusing on the solution of problems. Expressing his belief that regional and global development of cooperation will improve education and increase quality, BUA Term President and Former Rector of University of Bucharest Prof. Mircea Dumitru stated that the region gave them a historical mission and called for cooperation from all universities.

Trakya University Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu started his speech by talking about the establishment and development stages of the Association, and said, “As the Association, we have completed the development phase by preparing a very good regulation. We are hosting our general assembly, which we have not been able to hold for two years due to the pandemic, hosted by the University of Bucharest. We got involved to the Black Sea Universities Network with Secretary General Prof. Eden Mamut’s offer. Later, as the secretaries’ general of the two unions, we put forward the idea of holding a joint congress and this idea was accepted by the boards of directors. For the holding of this comprehensive meeting, I thank to BUA Term President Prof. Dr. Mircea Dumitru, Rector of University of Bucharest, Prof. Dr. Marian Preda,

Vice-Rector Prof. Sorin Costreie, BSUN Term President Prof. Dr. Karin Markides and Secretary General Prof. Dr. Eden Mamut. We have engaged the two unions with their support.”



Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu talked about his work as BUA Secretary General and Permanent Board Member and said, “We touch all universities in the Balkan geography. We visit their places and meet with the rectors and officials. I’m in the field myself. Our union, which we started with 17 universities, will reach 90 members today. Maybe we are small one by one, but when we come together, we become a strong union. As Union member universities, we have 1 million 270 thousand students and more than 73 thousand academicians. The Black Sea and the Balkans are a fragile region with problems. As Turkey, we experienced the Syria and Iraq crises, and now we are experiencing the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Therefore, the stress in the region increased. Unfortunately, there are countries that see the countries of the region as pawns to be sacrificed. Although these countries want the turmoil and chaos in the region to continue, we, as the people of the region, do not want more problems, we want peace.





Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu stated that universities and university unions have gained great importance as the institutions most affected by the situation in the region and said, “The union of the Balkan Universities Association and the Black Sea Universities Network has increased our power of influence. In addition to these two unions, many unions, especially the European University Association, came together. In the European Universities Association, of which we are also a member, we are the country with the most members after Germany with 65 universities. Unfortunately, the representation of the Balkan region and Turkey in the European University Association is not at the desired level. BUA and the European University Association can work together to eliminate this situation and respond more quickly to the demands of the region.”

Rector Tabakoğlu pointed out that although the Cross-Border European Union projects are known, many universities have weak project writing and development skills, Rector Tabakoğlu said, “At this point, as BUA, we can work together with the European University Association (EUA) on projects about environment, education and energy that will increase the quality of the universities in the region. Again, as BUA, we can provide representation of regional universities within the EUA. It would be meaningful for the European University Association to take this step, especially after the Ukraine-Russia crisis.” Trakya University Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu emphasized that they will continue to be the hope of regional universities by continuing to develop and grow as the Balkan Universities Association.

“In the session "The Role of Universities in the Future of the Balkans", the importance of university associations was emphasized. On the last day of the Congress on Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and the Black Sea Region, hosted by the University of Bucharest,

the importance of university associations in sustainability and scientific development was emphasized. Milla Popovic, who made a speech at the panel chaired by Trakya University Retired Faculty Member Prof. Dr. Hilmi İbar, shared information about her intercultural studies in the field of environment and equal opportunity.



Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu started his presentation with the verses of the great Turkish poet and mystic Yunus Emre, “Come, let’s meet / Let’s make things easy / Let’s love and be loved / The world will not be left to anyone”. He continued that “Everything can be carried out easily and quickly when people meet face to face, hearts are touched, and a sense of trust is created. The best example of this is BUA. Our Association, which was founded in 2008 and held its first meeting in 2014 with 17 universities in our University, the second meeting in Sofia, under the chair of Prof. Dr Ivan Ilchev, the third meeting in Tetovo under the chair of Prof. Dr Vulnet Ameti, and the fourth meeting in Thessaloniki under the chair of Prof. Dr Pericles Mitkas, gathered in ever-growing and developing meetings. Although we postponed our fifth meeting due to the pandemic, we continued our work. Our contacts with the University of Bucharest continued everlastingly.”



Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu stated that they carried out a historical event hosted by University of Bucharest and said, “I find it meaningful that the highest authorities of the Romanian state, the heads of higher education in Turkey and Greece, and many university Rectors in the region come together in this meeting. We took part in this historical meeting with a large delegation led by our President of Council of Higher Education from our country. As a good bond was formed between the two unions, contacts and cooperation ideas arose between hundreds of universities. I would like to thank all the institutions and organizations involved here.” Rector Tabakoğlu, who shared the image of the commemorative stamp printed for the Second Balkan Conference convened in Istanbul in 1931 with the initiatives of Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, ended his speech with the following sentences “One of the roots of the olive tree, which is used on this stamp and symbolizes peace, is in Istanbul, one in Sofia, one in Athens, one in Belgrade and one in Bucharest. This is what this picture tells us ‘We are stronger

together'. I find it very meaningful that we are gathered here 91 years after that conference. This bridge of friendship was collapsed by the Second World War, but perhaps it can be rebuilt after the Russia-Ukrainian War as a result of historical irony. I think that the state, private sector and academia play a very important role in the management of the Balkan countries. Countries that give importance to the balance between government, private sector and academia will be successful. Sometimes the value of academia can be underestimated. University associations remind us of this value. At this point, the Balkan Universities Union implements studies and projects under the leadership of Trakya University. As academics, it will be easier for us to meet at the center of science and reason and solve problems peacefully.”

Turkish scientist and New York Tirana University Rector Prof. Dr. Erkan Erdemir pointed out the need for institutions to act jointly in order to develop universities, increase their project making capabilities and ensure sustainable development, and stated that universities also play a major role in cultural interaction.

Rector of Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Prof. Dr. Hristina Yancheva stated that they are happy to have students from different cultures and countries, even though they are a small university, and drew attention to the importance of agriculture in this challenging period of time that the world has been going through.



Vice-Rector of University of Tuzla, Prof. Jasmin Suljagic talked about the history, development and studies of Tuzla University, stated that the successful results to be obtained by working together will serve the sustainable development of the region. The panel ended with

the general evaluation of BUA Term President and Former Rector of the University of Bucharest Prof. Mircea Dumitru.



In cooperation with the Association of Balkan Universities (BUA) and the Black Sea Universities Association (BSUN), a workshop was held at the congress hosted by the University of Bucharest, bringing together the officials of the international relations and project offices of the universities. The idea of strengthening cooperation between universities in the Balkans was expressed by all participants. The workshop, which was moderated by Trakya University Technology Transfer Application and Research Center Director Prof. Dr. Muharrem Tolga Sakallı, was attended by Lecturer from Burcu Ören Özer. Rector of Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Prof. Dr. Adem Korkmaz, Advisor to the Rector Dr. Assist. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kılınc, International Relations Coordinator Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ali Karakaş, Kırklareli University International Relations Coordinator Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Fatih Çömlekçi, Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University Foreign Relations Application and Research Center Director Dr. Öğr. Prof. Dr. Hasan Selçuk Eti, Vice Rector of Tetova State University Prof. Dr. Shefik Shehu, Prof. Dr. Dwight Read from the University of California, Prof. Dr. Fadwa el Guindi from Qatar University, Gina Kafedzhian from the Plovdiv Academy of Arts, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Desislava Atanasova, Vice-Rector of Ruse University, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Manuella Kadar, from Alba Iulia University, 1 December 1918, Alina Christovici, Coordinator of Foreign Relations at the University of Bucharest attended the meeting. Possible projects were discussed in the event, which started with the institution officials giving information about the projects they have carried out. The ideas on digitalization, innovation, educational technologies, university-industry cooperation, culture and art events, educational technologies, media, environment, etc.

were exchanged. Future-oriented regional collaborations and joint project studies were discussed in the workshop.



The General Assembly of BUA was held at the Congress on Dialogue and Cooperation in the Balkans and Black Sea Region. Member universities and new candidates participated in the General Assembly of BUA, of which Trakya University is the Permanent Secretary General and Member of Board. The assembly was chaired by Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, the Rector of Trakya University, Prof. Mircea Dimitru, the BUA Term President, and Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, the Rector of University of Bucharest. The candidates' demands were evaluated, and the future projection of the association was planned. The applications to BUA by Istinye University, Istanbul Medeniyet University, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, University of Telecommunication and Post in Sofia, University of Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Galati University in Romania, Ferizaj University in Kosovo, Rezonanca Medical University in Kosovo and Bursa Technical University were evaluated. After the candidates introduced their fields of activity and study, they were unanimously accepted to BUA by the members.



Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakođlu talked about Trakya University’s works, contacts and projects specific to BUA and then presented the items on the agenda to the member universities for a vote. Rector Tabakođlu mentioned that they are working for BUA to be represented by more universities and for increasing its power and influence area with each passing day. He stated, “We continue to contact all universities in the Balkans to expand our association and to develop the region. As Trakya University, we are ready to carry out all duties for the future of the region.”. While the new term president of BUA will be Tuzla University in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bođaziđi University will chair the new term of BSUN.





The Rector of the University of Bucharest Prof. Dr. Marian Preda, who expressed that they were honored to host an important congress in cooperation with the Balkan Universities Association and the Black Sea Universities Association, thanked all Trakya University and member universities in the presence of Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu for their great contribution to this organization. Trakya University Rector Prof. Dr. Erhan Tabakoğlu, who expressed that they are very happy to have signed a historic meeting hosting important universities of the Balkans and Black Sea coastal countries and important names from the countries in the region, said, "As a union, we are increasing our sphere of influence day by day. In our congress, which hosted hundreds of universities and academicians, we shed light on the future of the Balkans. At our meeting, where the state, diplomacy and bureaucracy were represented at the highest level, we took the pulse of the region and held important talks in order to ensure permanent peace and sustainable development in the region."





The historic meeting, hosted by the University of Bucharest, ended with a family photo session.

