

**Speech for Alexander Fricke, Town Twinning II, Opening Ceremony
2 November 2023**

Dear Dr Hayri Baraclı, General Secretary of Union of Municipalities of Türkiye,
Dear Mr Bulent Ozcan, Director General for EU Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Mr Barbaros Murat Kose, the Head of the Central Financing and Contracts Unit,
Dear Mr. Gilberto Terente Fernandez, Advisor of Spanish Embassy,
Distinguished representatives of the towns and local authorities, civil society organisations,
academia and the press.

- I am very pleased to attend today's opening ceremony for the EU-funded Town Twinning II project and the start of a two-day training programme for the winning municipalities. I truly congratulate all of you, the 26 Turkish towns and their partners, for the award of an EU grant in support of your town partnerships and the project proposals that you have put forward.
- The Town-Twinning programme is an important part of the EU's support to civil society and local authorities in Türkiye. It stimulates interaction and cooperation between peer cities and civil societies, offering a platform to jointly tackle common problems, and find mutually beneficial solutions.
- The strong interest in the programme is demonstrated by the high number of applications received. We are very pleased with this interest, in particular as we know well that many municipalities across the country had to deal with the consequences of the devastating February earthquakes.
- Our cities and towns are important actors for economic and political progress, social welfare, climate change, and cultural strategies and policies. This round of Town Twinning focuses on the environment and climate change, the key global challenge that requires determination and cooperation at all levels of society.
- Providing support to towns and municipalities - to strengthen their efforts to fight climate change - is an important step forward in the right direction. This has the potential to raise environmental awareness, change behaviour where necessary, and ensure citizens' ownership on climate change adaptation efforts.
- This is because we realise more and more that it is this level - it is the local authority - that we need to mobilise to help mitigate the climate crisis. Through effective urban planning and management, cities and towns have the potential to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- At the same time, our cities also need to urgently engage in climate adaptation, for example to be prepared for periods of extreme weather conditions. It is estimated that during the summer 2022, more than 60.000 people died in the EU prematurely due to extreme heat. Another example is intra-city flooding during torrential rains that have become the new normal.

- In so doing, city-to-city cooperation is considered as a possible and effective solution. It allows us to engage in sustainable change that matters for citizens, and to promote and spread the use of best practices.
- The Union of Municipalities can equally promote the active participation of citizens in tackling climate change and the preservation of the environment. And civil society has demonstrated during the earthquakes how essential its role can be in disaster response.
- This EU initiative, that brings us together today, is complementary to other EU projects in Türkiye that aim at enhancing the capacities of municipalities to work jointly with civil society. Let me mention here the EU-funded “Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning” initiative or the recently launched “civic engagement” project.
- I hope that this Town-Twinning programme, along with the embedded technical assistance, will help ensure that all of you successfully implement your projects. I would like to thank you all for your commitment, and in particular the Union of Turkish Municipalities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for being professional counterparts in this undertaking.
- I wish all stakeholders a successful project implementation and fruitful training days in Ankara.