Local Diplomacy Analysis of Marmara:

Global Connections of Local Governments

MARMARA MUNICIPALITIES UNION

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LOCAL DIPLOMACY ANALYSIS OF MARMARA: GLOBAL CONNECTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Editor:
Burcuhan Şener

Authors:

Research Report:
Özge Sivrikaya
Merve Ağca
Ayşe Göç Yalçınkaya

Article | "The Role of Local Diplomacy in Changing International Politics":
Prof. Birgül Demirtaş

Translator:
İrem Gül Özdel

Contributors:
Birgül Demirtaş
Büşra İnce
Duygu Şenyol
Ebru Ertugal
Ervin Sezgin
Metin Güleç Yalçın
Samet Keskin
Sevdenur Alkaya

Design:
sonntag.agency

Design of Figures:*
Şulenaz Ünlü
Büşra İnce

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Eminönü 34134 Fatih-İstanbul, Türkiye
Phone: +90 212 402 19 00
info@mbb.gov.tr
www.marmara.gov.tr/en
www.mbbkulturyayinlari.com

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
C40	C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group
CoM	EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy
ELDW	European Local Democracy Week
EU	European Union
EWWR	European Week for Waste Reduction
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GWOPA	Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance
ICLEI	ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOPD	International Observatory on Participatory Democracy
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MMU	Marmara Municipalities Union
MARUF	Marmara Urban Forum
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TDBB	Union of Turkish World Municipalities
TİKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
TÜBİTAK	Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye
UCLG	World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

FOREWORD

Today, cities have become powerful actors not only within national borders but also on the global stage. As they are increasingly gaining significance on a global scale, cities are establishing sister city relationships, creating international city networks, and developing thematic collaborations and projects with numerous international stakeholders. In this ever evolving landscape, local diplomacy emerges as a critical tool, complementing traditional diplomacy and enabling cities to play a more active role in addressing global issues.

Since its establishment, Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) has been carrying out multifaceted efforts to promote a culture of local diplomacy among municipalities, support capacity development for foreign relations, and encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience among municipalities. In addition to supporting the dissemination of international best practices, ensuring coordination among municipalities, and providing a platform for creating collaborative networks, MMU also represents local governments at the international level. We work to ensure that the local diplomacy activities of municipalities are aligned with national policies and international agreements, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals, and are connected to the global agenda. At the same time, we strive to shape national and international norms and agendas to reflect the demands and needs of municipalities. Through MMU's Local Diplomacy Platform, which brings together representatives from the international relations departments of our member municipalities, we aim to promote collaboration, solidarity, and a culture of dialogue with international stakeholders. Furthermore, we encourage the use of local diplomacy as an effective tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation on a global scale and addressing global issues with local ramifications, such as climate change and migration.

To identify the institutional structures of municipalities' foreign relations, their local diplomacy activities, and the challenges they face in their international relations efforts, we conducted a comprehensive study involving representatives responsible for foreign relations and project development from 187 municipalities across the Marmara Region. The resulting report sheds light on the obstacles these municipalities encounter in their foreign relations work and offers policy recommendations and solutions, providing a mirror to the local landscape. Guided by the belief that solutions to global challenges will originate at the local level, this report titled "Local Diplomacy Analysis of Marmara: Global Connections of Local Governments" aspires to enable local governments to contribute to national policies and international norms while ensuring that these norms and policies are shaped according to the needs and demands of municipalities.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Birgül Demirtaş, Burcuhan Şener, Özge Sivrikaya, Merve Ağca, and Ayşe Göç Yalçınkaya, who devoted significant effort to the preparation of this study; to Marmara Municipalities Union's esteemed Executive Board Members, General Assembly Members, and Secretary General; and to the team of MMU's Data and Technology Center for their contributions to the report's data analysis and visualization processes. I hope that this report, developed based on the current situation and needs in the field and with a holistic perspective, will contribute to the development of a local diplomacy approach aligned with national policies and serve as an inspiration for concrete steps to strengthen local diplomacy activities.

Mustafa Bozbey

President of Marmara Municipalities Union

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City administrations, shaped within the framework of today's political system and spanning different regions of the world, have been interacting with institutions beyond their national borders since the first half of the 20th century. Although cities have long been associated with central governments, they have stepped onto the international stage to conduct diplomatic activities for a range of reasons, including addressing global and local issues, fostering peace across borders, building solidarity and cooperation with institutions through cultural and historical ties, and contributing to the shaping of international policies. Today, in addition to the foreign policy activities of central governments, the significance, activities, and roles of city administrations in international relations are growing. Operating within the political, administrative, and legal boundaries of their countries, municipalities are emerging as vital players in shaping international relations.

Yet, the nature of cities' activities in foreign relations, the tools of local diplomacy they prioritize, the institutions they engage with, their needs in foreign relations, and the challenges they face in external interactions vary not just from one country to another but even among cities within the same nation. To understand the nature of efforts in foreign relations across the Marmara Region, identify differences among municipalities, address institutional, legal and financial challenges related to foreign relations, and propose actionable policies to overcome these issues, Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) conducted the "Marmara Region Local Diplomacy Research" between December 2022 and January 2024. The findings and recommendations of this research are summarized in the report titled "Local Diplomacy Analysis of Marmara: Global Connections of Local Governments".

The field research included all MMU member municipalities from different scales across 11 provinces in the Marmara Region: Balıkesir, Bilecik, Bursa, Çanakkale, Edirne, Istanbul, Kırklareli, Kocaeli, Sakarya, Tekirdağ, and Yalova. Feedback from municipal representatives was collected through a survey consisting of open-ended and multiple-choice questions conducted via face-to-face interviews, over the phone, and via email. The findings were analyzed under eight main titles. These categories include an examination of the institutional structures municipalities have in place for foreign relations under the heading "Institutional Structures of Municipalities Regarding Foreign Relations", an analysis of municipal staff evaluations and perceptions of foreign relations based on their personal experiences in "Opinions of Municipal Personnel on Foreign Relations", and an exploration of local governments' memberships in international city networks and the nature of their relationships under "Memberships of Municipalities in International Networks". They also encompass an assessment of municipalities' sister city relationships, including the reasons for establishing these partnerships and the challenges encountered, in "Sister City Relationships of Municipalities", as well as an evaluation of municipalities' access to international funds and grants and their involvement in international projects in "Municipalities' Participation in International Projects". Additionally, the research addresses collaborations municipalities engage in with foreign institutions and international organizations beyond sister city protocols under "International Cooperation Agreements of Municipalities", examines

their participation in international events and visits to Türkiye's foreign missions in "Municipalities' Participation in International Events", and highlights their awareness of and initiatives related to various global agendas (including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the Paris Agreement, the Global Compacts on Migration/for Refugees, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) in "Municipalities' Awareness and Activities Regarding the Global Agendas".

Following the holistic evaluation of the research findings, analyzes were made broken down by municipality scale (metropolitan municipality, provincial municipality, metropolitan district municipality, provincial district municipality and town municipality) and by province. The prominent findings of the research are summarized below.

Institutional Structures of Municipalities Regarding Foreign Relations

- Only 29% of municipalities have a dedicated foreign relations unit. While all metropolitan municipalities possess such a unit, this figure drops to a mere 3% for town municipalities. Among provinces, Istanbul leads with the highest proportion of municipalities having foreign relations units (64%), followed by Kocaeli (38%) and Bursa (35%).
- Approximately 85% of municipalities reported that these units were established primarily to manage project-related activities. Whereas creating a foreign relations unit at the mayor's initiative was the least commonly cited reason, 67% of municipalities still selected this option, reflecting a relatively high proportion.
- Foreign relations units typically operate with a personnel of 1 to 5 people (76%), with most employees holding degrees in Political Science and/or International Relations (22%), Engineering (21%), or Political Science and/or Public Administration (20%).
- A total of 76% of municipalities employ personnel proficient in 1 to 5 foreign languages. English dominates as the most widely spoken language (99%), followed by German (18%), Arabic (10%), and French (9%).
- Consultations with mayors or deputy mayors regarding foreign relations occur in 83% of municipalities, with 33% of municipal representatives indicating that such consultations take place more than once a month.
- The most significant factor shaping foreign relations activities was identified as the direction provided by the mayor (81%).
- The primary expectation of municipal leadership from foreign relations units is the development of projects, cited by 79% of municipalities.
- Additionally, 53% of municipalities reported communicating with municipal associations in their foreign relations activities. The rate of communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is 47%.

Opinions of Municipal Personnel on Foreign Relations

- Among municipal personnel, 58% believe that national foreign policies influence their municipality's foreign relations, while 42% see no such impact.
- The majority of participants expressed that they think local diplomacy contributes to global peace. Specifically, 24% rated this contribution as very high, and 37% as somewhat high.
- An overwhelming 93% of municipal representatives agreed that municipalities should play a more active role in foreign relations. This highlights municipalities' desire for greater international visibility.
- A total of 88% of respondents emphasized the necessity of establishing a dedicated foreign relations unit. This result underscores the pressing need for specialized structures within the context of institutionalization.
- Regarding challenges, 69% of respondents identified budget constraints as the primary obstacle to conducting foreign relations activities, while 43% highlighted a lack of qualified staff with relevant educational backgrounds.
- Additionally, 85% of municipal representatives suggested that amendments to the Municipal Law or other relevant legislation are needed to improve the effectiveness of foreign relations activities. Key needs include improvements on permanent staffing regulations as well as staffing norms and standards for graduates of international relations-related disciplines.
- Finally, 83% of municipalities stressed the importance of employing graduates of Political Science and/or International Relations in their foreign relations units. Graduates of Translation and Interpreting Studies ranked second, at 63%, among the most sought-after personnel profiles.

Memberships of Municipalities in International Networks

- Only 36% of municipalities are members of at least one international city network. All provincial municipalities are affiliated with at least one network, whereas town municipalities have no membership in international city networks. Over half (53%) of municipalities that are not members cited a lack of information about these networks as the main reason for not joining.
- Among the participating municipalities, the "Union of Turkish World Municipalities (TDBB)" emerged as the most popular international city network.
- Of the municipalities affiliated with international networks, 52% engage in collaborations primarily focused on "climate change and the environment". This theme stands out as the most significant area of cooperation across most types of municipalities.
- Additionally, 58% of municipalities participating in international networks attend at least one event organized by their respective networks annually. Attendance rates are particularly high among metropolitan municipalities. In the provinces of Kırklareli and Çanakkale, all municipalities that are members of international networks participate in at least one event per year.

- 73% of member municipalities report that they participate in general assemblies organized by international networks they are a part of. This makes general assemblies the most attended event type among municipalities.
- Key contributions provided by international networks to their member municipalities include facilitating collaborations with other cities and institutions, offering platforms for knowledge and experience sharing, and disseminating best practices. These contributions were most prominently highlighted by member municipalities in the Marmara Region. However, 12% of representatives stated that membership in these networks provided no contributions to their municipality.
- Additionally, 85% of municipalities reported that they contribute to the networks they are part of, primarily through knowledge and experience sharing. This dynamic suggests a mutually beneficial relationship between city networks and their members, rather than a one-sided, assistance-based model.

Sister City Relationships of Municipalities

- Approximately 65% of municipalities participating in the research have at least one sister city abroad. Five out of six metropolitan municipalities and three out of five provincial municipalities in the Marmara Region reported having international sister cities. Across all types of municipalities, the proportion of those with international sister cities exceeds 50%. Examined by province, Istanbul leads in this regard, with 82% of its municipalities having at least one sister city abroad.
- Regarding the first establishment steps of sister city relationships, 81% of municipalities indicated that these relationships were initiated at the discretion of the mayor or deputy mayor. Leadership-level initiatives are the most frequently cited motivation for establishing such relationships across all types of municipalities. Examined by province, mayor's initiative is also the most commonly mentioned motivation in all provinces surveyed, except for Bursa and Edirne.
- Thematically, cultural affinity emerged as the leading reason for establishing sister city relationships, cited by 73% of municipalities. Religious affinity was the least significant motivator, with only 12% citing it as a reason. Cultural affinity was also the dominant factor across all types of municipalities except provincial municipalities and in all cities except Istanbul, Edirne, and Sakarya.
- In terms of activities municipalities conduct with their sister cities, hosting sister city representatives ranked first at 91%, followed by visiting sister cities at 90%. Reciprocal visits were the most frequently mentioned activities across all types of municipalities and provinces.
- 70% of municipalities reported variations in the frequency of communication and collaboration with their different sister cities. Such differences while conducting sister city relationships were noted in at least 67% of municipalities across all types. Notably, 60% of municipalities indicated having at least one sister city with which they have no communication at all.

- Budget constraints were the most commonly mentioned challenge municipalities faced both in establishing and maintaining sister city relations. This was followed by a lack of qualified personnel and language barriers. Cultural differences were the least reported issue in both processes. Budget constraints were cited as the primary challenge in most provinces in both processes.
- Among municipalities with sister cities, 22% reported having terminated relations with at least one of their sister cities. The majority (62%) attributed this to problems stemming from national foreign policy, while 38% cited the passive nature of the relationship as the reason for termination.
- Only 33% of municipalities with sister cities reported implementing original projects in collaboration with them. The number of municipalities carrying out original projects with their sister cities remains relatively low across provinces.

Municipalities' Participation in International Projects

- 45% percent of MMU member municipalities reported having completed or ongoing projects that included foreign institutions as partners or were funded by an international organization. All metropolitan municipalities participated in international projects, while the percentage decreased for other types of municipalities. In all provinces except Bilecik, at least one municipality reported involvement in an international project.
- The majority of these projects (53%) were financially supported through European Union grant programs, excluding "Erasmus", "Horizon Europe", the "Black Sea Cooperation", and the "Town Twinning Grant Program between Türkiye and the European Union". Erasmus, at 49%, stood out as another significant funding source. These funding sources were prominent across various municipality types and provinces.
- The theme of "climate change and environment" featured in at least one project for 61% of municipalities involved in international projects. This was the most commonly addressed theme across all types of municipalities, with at least one municipality in 10 provinces working on it.
- Municipalities most frequently participated in international projects as "partners" (78%) and "lead applicants" (65%).
- In terms of partnerships, foreign municipalities other than sister cities accounted for 65% of international project collaborations among MMU member municipalities. Other prominent partners included non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and research centers in Türkiye (55%). Metropolitan municipalities demonstrated more diversity in the types of institutions they partnered with compared to other municipality types. Partnerships with ministries in Türkiye, international NGOs, and universities/research centers in Türkiye were observed in at least one municipality across nine provinces, making these partnerships the most geographically widespread.

- 45% percent of municipalities lacked a dedicated unit responsible for international projects. Instead, international projects are mostly being coordinated by multiple departments.
- The most frequently mentioned issue in international projects was unsuccessful application outcomes.

International Cooperation Agreements of Municipalities

- Only 24% of MMU member municipalities reported engaging in collaboration through formal agreements or protocols. This form of collaboration was less preferred compared to other models, such as sister city protocols, partnerships in international projects, or memberships in international city networks. While this model was commonly used by metropolitan municipalities, collaboration through protocols/agreements was significantly less prevalent among other types of municipalities. Collaboration through agreements was observed in all provinces except Çanakkale.
- "Culture" theme emerged as the most prominent focus of collaboration through agreements of municipalities, followed by "climate change and environment", which also stood out in partnerships with international city networks and international projects. This theme was the most commonly addressed in collaborations across all types of municipalities. Moreover, "culture" and "climate change and the environment" were themes that were addressed in collaborations in most of the provinces.
- The most frequently observed issues in implementing partnerships through agreements and protocols were their tendency to remain on paper only/remain inactive and the lack of personnel proficient in foreign languages. Larger municipalities in terms of population highlighted the tendency to remain on paper only/remain inactive of agreements as the primary challenge, while smaller district and town municipalities prioritized human resource and personnel shortages as the key issue.

Municipalities' Participation in International Events

- 56% percent of MMU member municipalities reported participating in international events. Participation rate in international events is highest among metropolitan municipalities.
- The main barriers to participation in international events were identified as "lack of sufficient financial resources" (67%), "lack of awareness about international events" (34%), "lack of personnel available to attend" (30%), and "language barriers" (27%).
- The international events most frequently attended by municipalities included: "events organized by their sister cities" (66%), "events related to international projects" (56%), "events organized by international networks they are members of"(47%), and "events held by international organizations" (44%).
- Regarding the types of events attended, "technical tours/study visits" ranked first (69%), followed by "conferences/symposiums/seminars" (57%), and "fairs/expos/exhibitions" (55%). Additionally, 41% of municipalities participated in training sessions, 38% in workshops, and 36% in events hosted by international organizations they are members of.

- While the frequency of participation in events varies among municipalities, approximately 73% of municipalities stated they attended at least one international event annually.
- Among 105 municipalities that participated in international events, 60% visited Türkiye's overseas diplomatic missions during their trips abroad. Of these, 83% visited embassies and consulates, 38% visited the Yunus Emre Institute, and 30% visited the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).

Municipalities' Awareness and Activities Regarding the Global Agendas

- Among the six global agendas, the Paris Agreement was the most recognized, with 63% of municipal representatives stating they were aware of it. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction had the lowest awareness rate at 19%. In metropolitan municipalities, awareness of all global agendas except the New Urban Agenda exceeded 67%. However, awareness levels varied significantly among other types of municipalities depending on the agenda. Across all provinces, the Paris Agreement emerged as one of the most well-known global agendas.
- The most frequently addressed agenda among municipalities when it comes to going into action was the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 29% of municipalities reporting activities related to it. Despite being the most recognized agenda, only 14% of municipalities engaged in activities concerning the Paris Agreement. The level of activity on global agendas varied significantly based on the agenda itself and the type of municipality. In Balıkesir, Istanbul, and Tekirdağ, at least one municipality was found to be working on all six agendas included in the research.
- Raising public awareness emerged as the most common activity undertaken by municipalities regarding global agendas, with 41% prioritizing this approach. The least emphasized activity regarding global agendas was report preparation, at 11%.
- Regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the most common activity (21%) was highlighting these frameworks within international projects. Report writing and public awareness initiatives related to the 2030 Agenda were the least undertaken activities, with only 10% of municipalities engaging in such efforts.