

**Nomination of the
European Capital of Culture in Bulgaria 2019**

Selection Panel

Pre-Selection Report

**Sofia
10-12 December 2013**

Introduction

In accordance with the Decision 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019 (hereinafter called “the Decision”), a competition has been launched to nominate a Bulgarian city to the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) title in 2019.

The managing authority of the ECOC competition in Bulgaria is the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture (the Ministry). The procedure for implementing the competition in Bulgaria was set out in the document “Rules of procedure for the competition for the 2019 European Capital of Culture title in Bulgaria” signed by the Minister and published on the Ministry website on 28 May 2013

(http://www.ecoc2019bulgaria.eu/images/content/4/Rules_bg.pdf)

The Ministry appointed the 13 members of the Selection Panel and published their names on the Ministry's website on 5 December 2013. As set out in Article 6 of the Decision, seven of these members had been nominated by the European institutions and the remaining six had been nominated by the Ministry in consultation with the European Commission.

The Ministry issued a call for applications for the 2019 ECOC title in Bulgaria on 18 December 2012 with a deadline for submitting applications of 18 October 2013.

Eight candidate cities submitted an application by the deadline in the form of bidbooks to the Ministry, which forwarded them to the Panel members.

The candidate cities are: **Burgas, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Ruse, Shumen, Sofia, Varna and Veliko Turnovo.**

According to Article 7 of the Decision the Selection Panel has to assess the applications in accordance with the criteria set out in Article 4 of the Decision and following this assessment, agree on a shortlist of cities to be examined in greater depth in the Final Selection round, and to submit a report containing recommendations for those shortlisted cities.

The Ministry organised the pre-selection meeting in Sofia from 10 to 12 December 2013, and invited to it the Panel as well as all candidate cities.

The Panel designated Mr Steve Green as chair and Prof. Assoc. Svetlana Hristova as vice-chair in accordance with Article 2 of the rules of procedure. Members of the Ministry and the European Commission attended as observers. One member of the members appointed by the European institutions was excused on compassionate grounds. As indicated in Article 3 of the rules of procedure, members of the Panel cannot be replaced by substitutes.

In accordance with Article 5 of the rules of procedure, each candidate city had 30 minutes to present their bid, followed by 45 minutes of questions and answers.

The Panel carried out a thorough assessment of the written applications as well as the presentations and answers to the questions during the hearings. It appreciated the considerable efforts made by all cities to prepare and to present a convincing bid for the European Capital of Culture in 2019. The Panel recognized

the desire expressed by all cities to host the title and the work they had already undertaken – many including a strong involvement of their local communities. Many cities described their historic and current cultural activity and heritage which could form as foundation for the future programme on which the competition is based. The Panel noted that the proposed programmes were all very stimulating and quite different in scope and in the themes addressed. The Panel also noted that the work undertaken by each city would certainly have positive effects on the role and nature of its cultural life whatever the outcome of their bidding. It hoped that all applicants, regardless of the eventual winning city, would implement as much of their proposed programmes as possible.

To draw up the shortlist of cities to be put forward to the final selection stage, the Panel

- thoroughly evaluated the extent to which the candidate cities proposed programmes meeting the objectives of the European Capital of Culture initiative, as set out in Article 3 of the Decision, and the criteria defined in Article 4 of the Decision, namely “the European Dimension” and the “City and Citizens” dimension,
- assessed the accuracy and quality of the responses provided by the cities to the questions included in the bidbook,
- assessed the presentation delivered by each city and discussed the applications with the delegations in order to gain a better insight into their respective proposals,
- considered the potential impact of each of the programmes designed by the candidate cities for the title-year of European Capital of Culture at the national and European levels,
- considered that in order to be pre-selected, the candidates would have to satisfy all requirements, show that they were capable of ensuring the delivery of the designed programme of the event in practice and have a real chance of receiving its recommendation at the final selection stage.

2. Presentations by the candidate cities and the Panel’s assessment.

All eight candidate cities presented their respective programmes for the ECOC 2019 title in Bulgaria to the Selection Panel. All of the delegations were led by the Mayor or a senior elected representative. An important feature of all candidates was the uncertainty of the proposed budget and in many cases the contribution of the national government. The Panel noted this as a common factor.

The Panel also noted candidates including in their budget forecasts the Melina Mercouri prize of €1.5m. This prize is not automatic. The prize is conditional on a specified set of criteria and if awarded would be decided in 2018 by the European Commission on the recommendation of the Monitoring Panel.

The Panel thanks all the participating cities and especially all the people who contributed to the bidbooks and presentations.

Burgas

The delegation introduced their bid in the context of a leap forward in the city over the last few years. The city has been awarded various titles including best business city, best place to live, best festival city etc. The attitude towards culture changed towards it being a key part of city life and development. It has a vibrant cultural life especially built around festivals. The bid process started in 2008. It has the support of cultural

operators in the city, of all 13 participating municipalities and all political parties. The ECOC project aims to continue the transformation so that Burgas becomes a sustainable centre for the cultural industry in the region and in Europe as a whole.

The delegation presented their programme based around the “Cultural Collider” concept which functions through three processes: Flows, Spheres and Projects. The flows are divided between cultural industry, social innovation and knowledge. There are five spheres: city, territories and dimensions, creative flows, people and next step while projects are the results of the collisions and take place within each sphere.

The proposed operational budget for the programme is €7.5m of which €6.075m is for programme activities. The funds will come from the city, the region, the national government, sponsorship and sales income. A detailed breakdown will follow in the next stage.

The ECOC would be managed by the Association for cultural development of Burgas and the region. All the participating municipalities (13) will be members, represented by their mayor. The Artistic Director would be appointed after the selection of Burgas as an ECOC.

Panel assessment

The Panel appreciated the commitment of the presentation team and their evident enthusiasm for the project. It matched the professionalism of the bidbook. The Panel appreciated the concept of the “cultural collider” but had difficulty in understanding how this would translate into projects. The proposed programme put forward was felt to be sound but lacking Europe-wide artistic imagination, being too locally based. The Panel did not see a clear link between the programme outlines and the objectives and challenges outlined in the bidbook. There were fewer new initiatives indicated than the Panel would expect at this stage. The European Dimension was also less developed at this stage than the Panel would expect. The budget was relatively small for an ECOC to propose at this stage.

Gabrovo

The delegation introduced their bid by highlighting the reputation Gabrovo has as a city of humour and a city of entrepreneurship, often labelled as the “Bulgarian Manchester”. The bid process started in April 2013. The main objectives centre on the lack of information between the city administration and its citizens, the need for the cultural policy to open up more to independent cultural operators who pursue an unusual and sometimes audacious type of contemporary arts production. The bid seeks to balance the cultural heritage with contemporary arts and increase the city’s international visibility.

The programme is built around thematic clusters under the overall concept of “Balancing Europe”. The clusters cover “past and future”, “young and old”, “democracy and autocracy”, “have and have not”, “city and nature”, “centre and periphery”, “local and global” and “humorous and serious”. Specific projects may fall in one or more of the clusters.

The proposed operational budget is €42m of which €31.5m is for programme expenditure. The forecast main funding sources are the city (€6m), national government (€5m), private sector (€6.2m). The expectation is that €17.7m will be sourced from various EU programmes (Creative Europe, Horizon 2020, Cohesion funds and Digital Agenda).

The ECOC candidature has bipartisan support in the City Council. A non-for-profit organization has been set up to manage the ECOC programme. The Artistic Director will be recruited through an open call.

Panel Assessment

The Panel appreciated the candidacy from a small city and the strategy to overcome the acknowledged challenges the city is facing. The bid however suffered from its short development phase. The shortage of preparation time only allowed an outline of the theme “Balancing of Europe” but no clear programme or elaboration was presented. Whilst the overall strategy was seen to be sound the approaches to the main criteria of the European Dimension and the City and Citizens were not as developed as the Panel would expect at this stage.

Plovdiv

The delegation introduced their bid by underlining its origins in 2010 by a group of civil society and cultural sector representatives. The municipal administration and the leaders of all political parties then adopted the initiative. The city faces numerous challenges. In particular, citizens are living in disconnected bubbles with many vulnerable members. The Roma community area (officially 40,000, unofficially far larger) has invisible walls with little interaction with the rest of the city. There are also other vulnerable people in the city, young, elderly, LGBT etc. Against this background the ECOC is seen as an element of a policy of human rights and dignity and a way to unite the divisions through participation and inclusion. Civic participation was a luxury; the ECOC seeks to focus on participation and inclusion. The city wants to transform its relationship with Europe, to learn from other cities, to seek excellence in scientists and artists. The bid is supported by five regional districts in South-Central Bulgaria.

The programme is planned under the theme of “Together” and has four platforms: Fuse (uniting the various groups of citizens), Transform (putting the urban and rural landscapes so that young people have a reason to stay and develop further their skills), Revive (bringing the tangible and intangible heritage into a contemporary context rather than just a tourist destination) and Relax (returning to European values, well-being, the culture of “Ayliak”, a Turkish word to express a relaxed attitude to life). Culture is a binding element throughout the four platforms. Plovdiv initiated and hosted the round table for the Italian and Bulgarian candidate cities.

The proposed operational budget is €22.3m of which €14.7m is for programme activities. The forecast income sources are city €7.3m, national government €10m and sponsors €3.5m.

The ECOC would be managed by an independent foundation set up in 2011 with a unanimous vote of the City Council. The management will have a strong focus on respect for legality and transparency. The Artistic Director was appointed in 2013.

Panel Assessment

The Panel appreciated the open assessment of the challenges facing the city and its evident determination to address them using culture as one of the tools. The outline of the programme was lively with rich and interesting approaches. It was ambitious in its objectives. The programme themes were well presented and indicated a high degree of citizen’s engagement in their

development phase. This was confirmed during the presentation which also demonstrated a high degree of coordination and unity between those responsible for the bid. The European Dimension and the focus on the bohemian spirit of a creative city were adequate at this stage and the bidbook indicated areas where it can be further developed. The Panel had a concern that at times it appeared the social objectives were overwhelming the creative and artistic elements of the programme.

Ruse

The delegation introduced their city as a cosmopolitan, river gateway city. It is in the poorest region of Bulgaria and the European Union. The aim of the ECOC project is to emphasize the need for decentralization, to strengthen the cultural capacity of the region and to overcome knowledge gaps. It seeks to capitalize on the city's Danube location and its partner city of Giurgiu in Romania in order to develop the complex convergence of the two neighbouring cultures and, more widely, to build mutual trust between all the cultures of the Danube region. The city council unanimously approved the candidacy in 2011.

The programme is based around the acronym CAPITAL: cultural and creative industries, arts and talents, potential and capacity, innovative cultural policy platform, transnationality and cross-border identity, access and participation and long-term effects. The programme uses the Bridges concept to highlight its objectives. It will be built around four thematic modules: Bridging City, Bridging River, Bridging Minds and Bridging Future that are supported by project ideas in line with the overall concept,

The proposed operational budget is €30.19m of which €20.19m is for programme expenditure. The main forecast funding sources are EU Cohesion Funds (€11.14m), city (€7.32m), national government (€8.6m), sponsors (€0.64m).

The ECOC will be managed by the Ruse-Free Spirit City Foundation which was set up in 2012. The Artistic Director will be selected by a procedure to be decided by the Foundation.

Panel Assessment

The Panel considered the programme and concepts set out in the bidbook to be sound and interesting. There were elements of originality and using the Danube as a catalyst in the European Dimension had great potential. The Panel was less certain on the role of citizens in the development of the project. The clarity of the bidbook was not developed during the presentation where the "Free Spirit" driving force was not so evident. The Panel was not convinced of the integration of the project between the creative and administrative elements and the weakness of the governance strategy.

Shumen

The delegation introduced their bid which has been two years in development. It sits alongside urban infrastructure and the development of partner networks, with considerable EU funding. The ECOC's objectives seek to create a climate of trust between business and the arts, involving disadvantaged groups. Participation by people from different ethnic groups would improve the multicultural environment. The

ECOC bid has the support of all political parties and 10 neighbouring municipalities have signed a Cooperation Agreement.

The programme is based around the concept of “The Sea of Shumen – A sea of culture” and has seven directions: a wave of signs, of scenes, of sounds, of colours, of shapes, of movements and a green wave.

The proposed operational budget is €15.9m of which €7.2m is for programme expenditure and €7.9m for administration costs. The anticipated sources of income are the city (€3.7m), national government (€10.8m) and €50k from the private sector.

The management of the ECOC would be undertaken by the “Different Shumen” Association. The members will elect a secretariat who will coordinate the events and activities. The Artistic Director would be recruited through an open call.

Panel Assessment

The Panel appreciated the understanding the delegation presented of the challenges facing the city which have been building up over the last twenty years and the potential role that culture could play in resolving them. The bid was pitched at a realistic level however there was little understanding of the importance of the European Dimension. It was not clear how citizens had been engaged in the development of the bid. The Panel appreciated the realistic approach to the budget but remained unclear about the possible growth of the budget and the relationship between the programme and administrative expenditures.

Sofia

The delegation introduced their bid for a city which has great potential not yet fully utilized. The bid process started in 2004 and has the unanimous support of the city council. The city has doubled in size in the last decade from internal, Bulgarian, and external migration. Building trust was a key theme of the ECOC project. The objectives are to provide a meeting point for citizens enabling them a free and safe environment for diversity and creativity, to produce active citizenship, to place culture securely in the city’s long term planning and to strike a new balance between heritage and contemporary production, to renew the cultural sector model and to promote a higher degree of internalization between Sofia and Europe. The programme emphasizes the role culture can have in social cohesion and inclusion encompassing, amongst others, the Roma community, vulnerable age groups and newcomers. The bid would encompass the South Western region.

The programme is based on the concept of “Sharing Sofia” and is divided into three thematic seasons (past imperfect, present continuous and future reflective) which in turn have three programme areas each. One-third of the budget would be for European co-operation projects.

The proposed operational budget is €89.5m of which €68.5m is for programme expenditure. The main funding sources are the city (€27m), region (€3.7m), national government (€26m), EU structural funds (€17m) and €14m from the private sector. The city and regional funding is secured.

The management of the ECOC would be undertaken by the Sofia Development Association, established in 2010 by the city for major project delivery. A separate ECOC steering committee will be set up to directly manage the ECOC. The Artistic Director will be appointed through an open call.

Panel Assessment

The Panel appreciated the in-depth analysis of the city as well as the connection between the programme and the city's cultural life and future strategic choices. These were well set out in the bid book. The concept and draft programme was solid and well presented. There had clearly been a good approach to engaging citizens with ideas for the programme. The idea to create a Sofia Tech Park and an Art Academy, encompassing regional partners, was seen as a sustainable legacy. The intention to use 30% of the budget for European partnerships was a sound point which forms a useful basis for elaboration. The Panel praised the city's ambition to provide a stage for a European dialogue. However, the Panel felt that the linking of the city analysis to the proposed programme lacked a sense of dynamism and innovation; it was less evident how the ECOC programme would differentiate itself from the normal business as usual life of Sofia.

Varna

The delegation introduced their bid by highlighting the vibrant and exciting cultural life of the city all year round. The city is host to prestigious festivals, is a centre for alternative urban culture and active youth policies. However the city desires to change: to broaden the tourist season, to overcome the sporadic social and cultural changes, to become a better place for creation and with greater social cohesion. There is a need to win back the trust of citizens. Culture and the ECOC title in particular, are seen as a way to bring about qualitative improvements and to unite people in the city. The bid process started in 2006 and a Memorandum of Regional Partnership was signed in 2011 by 12 cities and towns from the surrounding region.

The programme is devised around the theme of "Port of Inspiration" and comprises of five programme strands: Euphoria (festival culture), Welcoming Sea (artistic production), Plant a Future (multi-annual educational programme), Field of Potential (research and entrepreneurial) and Environment of Trust (community involvement).

The proposed operational budget is €68m of which €37m is for programme expenditure. The funding sources are the city (€31.5m), national government (€22.5m), EU programmes (€5m) and private sector sponsors (€5.5m).

The ECOC would be managed by a new management company with an independent Chair. The Artistic Director will be recruited if the bid is successful.

Panel Assessment

The Panel noted the vitality of the city's current cultural life and the desire of the programme team to improve upon an existing high provision. The aims of the ECOC were well set out and the programme intentions were sound. There was clear evidence of the engagement of cultural operators in the city and its sustainable development, less so the citizens. The European Dimension was, in the opinion of the Panel, under-developed at this stage but the potential for a port city was clear. The Panel felt that the opportunities for using the Black Sea region as a possible element in

the European Dimension were underplayed. The Panel had a concern that the rebranding for tourist purposes might outweigh the artistic and citizens engagement for a cultural legacy beyond tourism.

Veliko Turnovo

The delegation introduced the city where 56% of its GDP comes from culture, services and tourism and with the highest per capita concentration of university students in the country. However in recent years there has been a reduction in the participation in the cultural life of the city by local residents and the students tend to live in their own closed cultural community. Concurrently there has been a large increase in tourist numbers. One of the aims of the ECOC is to create more of a shared and united community. The city aims to improve its cultural production, refurbish the cultural infrastructure, and to develop the dialogue between the cultural sector and local authorities

The ECOC programme will be based around the slogan “we create happiness” as a way of challenging the emphasis on economic factors of life and a way of improving the well-being of its citizens. A “Happiness Index” would be developed. A “Volvox” concept (understood as an organism built by a large number of cells that inter-connect such as the cultural perspective, the local and the international etc.) and the urban underpins much of the programme. The programme will be structured alongside twelve synonyms for happiness, such as, love, solidarity, health and freedom. There will be a major monthly event underpinned by smaller projects with a changing theme every month. A key feature of the programme is the revitalizing of the community centres as places for local cultural production and engagement.

The proposed operational budget is €80m of which €56m is for programme activities. The forecast funding sources are city, region and national governments (€23m each) and sponsorship €9.5m.

If selected the ECOC would be managed by an Agency, a new independent structure. The Artistic Director would be selected on the basis of a competition.

Panel Assessment

The Panel appreciated the clarity and enthusiasm of the presentation which helped overcome some of the weaknesses of the bidbook which at times was confusing. The strategic issues facing the city, with its increasing short stop tourism numbers and fragmented communities, were well presented. The overall approach of tackling these issues through behavioural change linked to cultural activities is innovative. The “happiness” and “well-being” agenda is increasingly looked at across Europe and indeed the world. The Panel noted the participation of people from other EU countries now resident in Veliko Turnovo as an expression of the European Dimension. The sample projects listed in the bidbook indicated interesting approaches to the European Dimension (former capital cities, the world of gold, Roma brass orchestras, the letter A etc.). The Panel was unclear on how involved the various communities in the city are in the development of the bid and the engagement with neighbouring municipalities. The Panel had concerns about the capacity to manage the ambitious project and how legacies from the project will be sustained.

3. Recommendation to the Ministry of Culture.

After a thorough discussion of the bidbooks, the presentations and the subsequent answers, the Panel decided to recommend to the Bulgarian government that it invites the following four cities to the final

selection stage for the European Capital of Culture in Bulgaria in 2019. The decision rests with the Bulgarian government.

Plovdiv, Sofia, Varna, Veliko Turnovo

4. Recommendations to the shortlisted cities.

After a careful assessment of the bidding documents, the presentation and discussions during the question-and-answer session, the Selection Panel felt that all the bids needed to be worked on intensely in order to reach the required level of quality of such a demanding event as the European Capital of Culture and to be successful. There is a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection.

Candidate cities are advised to refresh their understanding of the Decision

(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:304:0001:0006:EN:PDF>)

And of the Guidance issued to candidates by the Ministry

(http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/doc633_bg.pdf)

They are also advised to review the formal evaluations of recent ECOCs, available on the Commission's website

(http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/evaluation-commissioned-by-the-eu_en.htm)

The focus of the final selection is the operating programme between 2015, when the ECOC will be formally designated and the ECOC year of 2019 and the subsequent legacy. A city's previous cultural history and heritage and its current cultural offer may form a basis for this programme but plays no part in the decision.

The following points, raised by the Panel, apply to all four shortlisted cities:

1. **European Dimension.** At this stage the proposals are too inward looking in their local context in the city, region and Bulgaria. The Panel would wish to see a greater deepening and widening of programmes to ensure the European Dimension was met. That a city is in Bulgaria, in Europe, has projects with the companion ECOC in Italy and has a programme to attract tourists is not in itself a strong interpretation of the European Dimension.
2. **Citizens and the City.** The bidbooks should highlight in more detail how citizens, as well as cultural operators, have been involved in the development of the programme (rather than being informed) and how the programme has been (and will be continue to be) influenced by their concerns. It is expected that such engagement encompasses the wide range of citizens in each city (and region if appropriate). The bidbooks should also explain how the programme will raise the interest of citizens from abroad over and above the normal tourist offers of the city.
3. All four bids offer an interesting approach to the idea of ECOC, but nevertheless this remains a **cultural** capital. The four cities should work out their artistic programme more clearly indicating

partners who have signed up and those who are potential. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) this should be indicated. Cities may wish to highlight their approach to digital content (not just social media marketing and promotions) as integral parts of their programme.

4. Urban development programmes, general cultural heritage restoration projects and new or re-generated cultural premises are useful as background and were very useful for the context at pre-selection. The final selection is more focused on those building projects which directly impact on the programme activities (e.g. a new cultural centre in a restored building which becomes a focal point for community arts projects contained in the programme).
5. Cities are reminded that the programme in the bidbook becomes a *de facto* contract for the award of the title. The subsequent Monitoring Panel will closely monitor variations from the programme and the successful delivery of the bidbook programme will be a major element in the discretionary award of the Melina Mercouri prize.
6. All bids should include realistic budgets for the operating programme including full details of the proposed sources of funding. An indication should be given on whether funding bodies have formally agreed to fund or have only indicated willingness at this stage. If elements of the programme are planned to be funded from competitive programmes (e.g. the Creative Europe programme) then the amount should be noted as conditional funding. Shortlisted cities are reminded that the Melina Mercouri prize is not automatic but conditional on set criteria being met during the monitoring phase 2015-2018. The finance section should indicate the external auditing arrangements. For the selected city the Monitoring Panel will require to see annual audited accounts.
7. The Artistic Director plays a key role in all ECOCs. The selection, preferably through an open call, of the Artistic Director before the final selection and that candidates' appearance at the final selection meeting will be to their advantage. It is acknowledged that the appointment may be conditional on the outcome of the meeting. The final selection Panel will seek to establish a cities capacity to manage a complex project such as an ECOC.
8. At Final Selection stage the monitoring and evaluation plans of an ECOC are reviewed. All cities should detail in their bidbook their objectives, (both qualitative and quantitative) they seek to achieve and how these will be monitored from 2015 and through to and after the ECOC year. Cities may find the methodology used by Leeuwarden2018 (http://www.2018.nl/Portals/0/v4_ONLINE_BID2_LWD2018.pdf) a useful guide.
9. The Panel recommends that the Ministry issue guidance on any contribution from the national government so that all candidates may use the same basis. The Panel accepts that this will be a conditional arrangement.

5. Final Selection

The deadline for submission of revised applications to the Ministry is **21 July 2014**.

The final selection meeting will be held in Sofia in September 2014. The Ministry will inform the candidates of the exact dates.

Four members of the Selection Panel will pay a visit to the short-listed cities shortly before the final selection meeting to obtain more complete information for the final selection process. The content of the visit is determined by each city. During the visits, the members of the Selection Panel will be accompanied by representatives of the European Commission and the Ministry as observers.

In accordance with article 8 of the Decision the Panel will make a recommendation to the Ministry at the end of final selection meeting on the city to be awarded the title of European Capital of Culture in 2019.

Sofia, January 2014

The Selection Panel:

Mr Steve Green – Chair

Prof. Assoc. Svetlana Hristova – Vice Chair

Dr Manfred Gaulhofer

Sir Jeremy Isaacs

Ms Maria Kashukeeva

Mrs Anu Kivilo

Prof. Kamelia Nikolova

Mr Jordi Pardo

Mr Georgi Toshev

Dr Lyudmil Vagalinski

Prof. Ivaylo Znepolski

Prof. Elizabeth Vitouch

Mr Norbert Riedl (excused)