



**Plovdiv**

**European Capital of Culture 2019**

**Second Monitoring Meeting**

**Report by the Monitoring and Advisory Panel**

**Brussels, April 2018**

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture  
Directorate Culture and Creativity  
Unit D2

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## Introduction

This report follows the meeting in Brussels on 18 April 2018 between Plovdiv, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2019, and the monitoring and advisory panel (the "panel")<sup>1</sup>. Plovdiv was designated as European Capital of Culture in May 2015 on the basis of the panel's selection report<sup>2</sup>; its bid-book is available on the Plovdiv Foundation 2019 website<sup>3</sup>. There was an informal meeting between Plovdiv and the panel in September 2015, and a first formal monitoring meeting in October 2016. A panel's delegation also paid a visit to Plovdiv in May 2017.

The report is addressed to the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation (the "Foundation") and will be published on the European Commission's website<sup>4</sup>.

## Attendance

The panel members:

Sylvia Amann (Chair) and Cristina Farinha (Rapporteur), appointed by the European Parliament 2018-2020

Jiří Suchánek and Tamas Fejerdy, appointed by the Council of the European Union 2016-2018

Ulrich Fuchs and Suzana Žilić Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2017-2019

Elisabeth Vitouch, nominated by the Committee of the Regions 2016-2018

For Plovdiv 2019:

Stefan Stoyanov, Vice Mayor and Vice Chairman of the Board

Kiril Velchev, CEO of Plovdiv 2019 Foundation

Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva, Artistic Director

Gina Kafedzhian, Deputy Director Programme

Radost Ivanova, Deputy-Director Marketing, Advertising and Commercial Activity

Victor Yankov, Deputy Director International Relations

Nadja Luisa Grizzo

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<sup>1</sup> The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision 1622/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2007 to 2019, which provides for two formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and a monitoring and advisory panel. See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1476455600669&uri=CELEX:32006D1622>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2019-report-bulgaria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2019-report-bulgaria_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/Documents%20General%20Plovdiv%202019/Bid%20Book/EN%20Bid%20Book.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en)

Also in attendance as observers were Sylvain Pasqua and Gérald Colleaux from the European Commission (Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture), Petar Markov, Head of the "European programmes" Unit in the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture and Rossella Tarantino, Development and Relations Manager of the Matera-Basilicata 2019 Foundation.

## **Report from Plovdiv 2019 and discussion**

The Plovdiv Foundation 2019 submitted a comprehensive report in advance of the meeting. The report reflected on the status of the ongoing intensive preparation for the ECOC year as well as on the recommendations included in previous monitoring reports.

In addition, the Plovdiv 2019 delegation focused their presentation on the following points:

- In what comes to programming, the Artistic Director announced that a majority of the bid-book projects was now being implemented (around 85%), maintaining the "four platforms" system that gives flexibility to operate freely with the content. Some calls are still ongoing, which allows opening the programming to diverse operators, from the local to the international levels. The ECOC year will provide a total of around 350 events.
- For the highlights of the Year, 30 major events will attract wider audiences and the Foundation is working actively on the Opening. The procedure to select the external partner is ongoing, and one condition is cooperation with the local cultural scene. Alongside the Opening there will be a collateral weekend programme. The city will be used as a stage and local operators will be involved alongside international ones.
- Regarding legacy, the Artistic Director stressed the new skills and capacity acquired by cultural operators – the "open calls" approach allows an intensive communication with the Foundation, that gives support in terms of management and communication; as well as the new model for revival of abandoned areas such as Kapana Creative District and now the Tobacco Factory and the positive response to Chitalishta. Creative proposals are coming from all quarters of the city; pride in the city is raising, brain drain is being counteracted. This all paves the way for a promising legacy.
- As far as the European Dimension and City and Citizens criteria are concerned, the Deputy Director of the Programme stressed that, inspired by the bid-book, they had been breaking the ghettos and working with isolated and excluded citizens and communities in a long-term process, boiling down to some 20 projects. "Plug into Europe", which was developed with around 50% of European partners, gave confidence for local operators to interact with international peers. Mahala, Chitalishta, Cyrillisation, and Balkan focus, are the projects among the most representative of the European dimension of the Year. The collaboration with ECOC Matera 2019 is being very fruitful in many dimensions, covering projects such as Bread Route, Urban Games, Cosmic Jives, opening weekends etc.

- The Vice Chair of the Board and representative from the City Council reaffirmed the strong support from the Mayor and the City, and emphasised how the economy was now growing leading to new positive perceptions of Plovdiv. He admitted though several challenges regarding infra-structure: few projects are now finished, such as the sport hall. The new archaeological sites and the Museum of the Bishops Basilica will be ready for next year. Kosmos Cinema is being refurbished and it is expected to open next year as a new cultural and social centre. The budget is secured for these capital projects. The biggest challenge is the Tobacco City for which an agreement was finally reached between the Ministry of Culture, the owners and the City. In two months, the circulation in the surrounding streets will be reorganised and the Foundation will move its headquarters to this area.
- The CEO addressed the funding issue, stressing that the Foundation was the first in Bulgaria to implement such a big-scale event and that they had the support of all authorities, including the State, the region and the Mayor, who is personally involved, securing hence the global budget needed for the functioning and running of the ECOC. In the last ten months, they contracted 240 projects based on 8 open calls.
- In what comes to staffing, 27 people are currently part of the team, which should reach 35 members in mid-2018 and 49 in 2019. They have five departments: Artistic, Marketing, Administrative, International and Production. The artistic department was also involved in the past in production alongside the administration and marketing, but will now focus more on the artistic dimension.
- The responsible for marketing presented the new logo launched late in time but with successful results: it led to enthusiastic debates thus got national attention. The will to make the ECOC Plovdiv internationally known, supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism and the City Tourism Board, is already bearing fruit: the number of tourists doubled compared to the bid-book stage. The Foundation has organised an international journalists' seminar and keeps building a long-lasting relationship with the press. Other international media visits are in the pipeline. There will also be a campaign in Rome and Milan, working with Matera and with Ryanair that has flights to Plovdiv. The Foundation is also working with the Brussels-based Representations and the international embassies in Bulgaria. The programme will be announced in September alongside an international promotion campaign.
- Finally, the International Relations Deputy Manager stated that Plovdiv had been sending out relevant European messages of unity and reunification ("together"). They have achieved so far several relevant partnerships with EUNIC, the Deutsche Telekom (on an exhibition about the 30 Years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in collaboration with the City Gallery), embassies, other ECOCs, and Ars Electronica that enrich the programme and contribute to the European dimension. A book was also published with ECOC Timisoara 2021 to celebrate Bulgaria's and Romania's ten years in the EU. They have been collaborating with the British Council and

Liverpool as well under the motto We2023 to present on 9 May 2019 a Brexit Blues festival, showing the British music influence in Bulgaria.

## Discussion

During the discussion part of the monitoring meeting, the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. The following topics were addressed:

- Starting up with the **programme**, the panel asked about the intentions regarding Kosmos as well as its legacy plans. Since it will be under renovation until mid/end of 2019 (and also for safety reasons), only some activities have been planned – mostly in the surrounding Square. Yet as the Square is partially privately owned, some negotiations are still ongoing. The team reminded that this project resulted from a strong citizens' involvement and that it was meant to become a multidimensional hub. Therefore, the Foundation was acting as a mediator between the City – in charge of the renovation – and the artists' collective. It has already proposed a business plan for the centre's sustainability. Kosmos has been subject of collaborations with other ECOCs, especially Pafos 2017 due to its similar experience with Mouttallos, but also Matera.
- The panel inquired about the team's capacity to manage the various ongoing open calls and asked for the state of the art regarding the contracting of projects. It was answered that the main projects had been signed and that the whole procedure regarding the current open call would be finalised within one month after the deadline for submission. The team is now bigger, which makes it possible to work faster; a specific team will be in charge of the finances and management of the signed contracts.
- On the **programme budgeting**, the panel expressed doubts about the high budget foreseen for some projects and wondered whether the partners would have the capacity to manage them. The team clarified that the budgets also included a minimum of 30% co-contribution from the implementing partners, including in-kind contributions. Only around 10% of the programme will be produced by the Foundation itself. Most initiatives are implemented by partners and the Foundation only contributes with a small percentage to the budget of the big initiatives.
- The panel showed concerns on the **Opening weekend** and asked further clarification, mainly on the links between the event and the themes of the Year and how citizens would be involved. The CEO, Artistic Director and Deputy Director for Programme are now in charge of the bidding phase and the project will then be handed over to the production team with a well-known manager. They are also currently working on the related security issues. It will be a full weekend programme with direct participation of the citizens (as performers or volunteers) supported by an open call for projects to be proposed by citizens and artists.

- The panel asked for deeper insight into the **community's involvement**, especially the Roma community. It was said that volunteering was challenging in a post-communist country, yet being a University city allowed to work with students. The Foundation is also working with elderly people, as well as welcoming international volunteers. The Chitalishta project is promoting this dimension. Volunteering is counted as a self-contribution. Furthermore, for the Mahala call, they have received some unexpected international interest. It is the most crowded cluster. The Foundation works with Roma, but also with Armenians, Jews, and the newly coming Italians, Ukrainians, and Russians, involving youth from the diverse communities. Ethnic Kitchen is one of the most attractive projects; they also have common projects with Leeuwarden, Matera, and Kaunas.
- The panel wanted to clarify further how the Foundations managed the media and NGOs' denouncements of **Roma** mistreat, notably concerning housing policy. It also asked how this particular issue would be dealt in terms of **legacy**. The Foundation replied that they were giving the local perspective to allow better understanding and avoid one-sided international journalists' points of view insisting only on clichés to create buzz. The City is investing in creating career opportunities for the neighbourhood: training is provided, notably on social skills and a social innovation challenge event was organised. Some factories opened in the Roma neighbourhood, creating some local jobs. The Foundation joins forces with the City and the Swiss Foundation in Bulgaria to create a health centre in the quarter. They also work with schools' teachers in a segregate neighbourhood to tackle the stereotype issue. Moreover, there are projects with cultural institutions aiming at involving the Roma community in artistic activities, which are particularly successful as there are many talents notably in the field of music. They also have partners in the community that act as mediators.
- The panel wanted to better understand the current status of the **Adata island** project. For this area, an Artists' in residency programme invited 37 selected artists to spend 1 to 2 months in Plovdiv to suggest visions and art works dedicated to the island and the river. The Foundation provides accommodation and working spaces. A second phase will then support the implementation of some of the imagined projects. A programme dedicated to the river already started, with land art installations in the river bed, on the way out of Plovdiv. The programme's summer event will be focused on the river.
- The panel inquired about the **governance**, notably how was the relation between the team and the Board and if there were any improvements on the financial autonomy of the team. The team currently considers that the cooperation with the Board is positive and efficient. It was explained that in mid-2017 almost the entire Board changed. 36 000 Leva/approx. 18 000 EUR is the new – and increased – financial threshold of the team to act without prior agreement from the Board. The new members of the Board were fast getting on track thanks to regular meetings. The team feels empowered and trusted by the Board.
- The panel asked why the **Public Board** had been suppressed and absorbed by the Board of Directors. It was clarified that the Public Board was active in the bid

phase, integrating public figures at the national level to ensure recognition. The governance being now more operational, this organ had no function any longer; some of its members integrated the Board of Directors.

- Regarding **staffing**, the panel showed concerns about the Foundation's complex HR procedure and asked how they would manage to recruit 15 extra staff from now up to 2019. It also enquired about how many staff members were previewed to stay after 2019. The team replied that procedures were now smoother than in the past, yet they needed to have the people in-house as subcontracting had strong legal limitations. They are currently hiring for the artistic team and negotiating the procedure to recruit new members for the production team. There are ten new positions open at the moment. They have also interns from Goethe Institute and receive many applications, even at international level. There are Bulgarian professionals coming back from abroad or moving from Sofia to Plovdiv – for example the new coordinator is coming from London. They will keep on hiring yet do not expect to have the 49 people at their desk on the first of January. After 2019, the administrative and accountant's team and their team-managers will stay for the reporting, as well as a part of the artistic team will stay too. The City secured budget for one extra year. However, the Foundation admitted that the discussion on the future of the Foundation was still to take place.
- Further insight was then requested by the Panel on how they would deal with the decrease of the **budget**, both the public and the sponsorship components. The team explained that the national contribution of € 8 Mio – out of the 10 originally planned – was channelled to the City for infrastructure and that the Foundation would be paid for the ECOC content production. It is by re-evaluating the costs of each initiative – as the Foundation can now have more precise and realistic budgeting than at bid-stage – that the Foundation is coping with the loss of the € 2 Mio extra originally planned. Regarding the private component, they hope it will increase compared to the amount being currently negotiated. So far, 50% of the planned 1 million is secured, including in-kind contributions. They are confident they will have more than 1 million and believe this year is a good warming period for all partners to attract more private investors. The Foundation has a contract with a Bulgarian beer company; and there is a wine company that intends to be a business partner as well. They are using tailor-marketing models – co-branding to collect some amounts.
- The existence of appropriate plan Bs for the **infra-structure** was another concern of the panel. The Foundation considers that the 4 000 m<sup>2</sup> of warehouses hired in the Tobacco Factory to be their Plan B. The City will also be used as a stage and they encourage their partners to use non-formal locations. The team considers that the programme is secured in what comes to venues.
- The panel sought clarification regarding the timetable in relation with the planned TV series aiming at increasing national and international **visibility** of Plovdiv. Shooting will start in September and end in December. The team in charge is now working on the casting, the content and scouting the location places. It is a sitcom

produced by the Bulgarian Television, aiming to make Plovdiv more popular and recruit local actors (about 50) and extras.

- Further insight was asked on **communication**, notably the results of the promotion efforts made during the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU in the 1st semester of 2018. The team considers that the promotion events during the Presidency served as a promising test so they keep on in the EU agenda. The Foundation is working with the Presidency and with the Bulgarian Tourism Ministry to communicate together the ECOC. There were only few joint events with the Presidency. At the moment, there is the Balkan Traffic festival in Bozar in Brussels with artists coming from Plovdiv. The ASEM cultural ministers meeting that took place in Sofia also served to communicate the ECOC.
- The panel investigated also on how the rich built **cultural heritage** of the city would be showcased. It was clarified that Plovdiv 2019 wasn't focused much on heritage, though their main venue was the Roman open theatre; and a new Bishop's Basilica Museum will be open in connection with new archaeological sites. There are events planned for the old town too to highlight this important Bulgarian Renaissance heritage. It was also said that the ECOC promoted the recognition of industrial heritage that was a brand-new concept in the country. Cultural heritage is also being used for promotion to give more reasons for visitors to stay longer in the city.
- Finally, with regard to the question on **legacy**, the team concluded that the Kapana Creative District, the Kosmos cultural centre, the Tobacco City and the many "together" partnerships might be the main long-term contributions of the ECOC.

## The Panel Opinion

Overall the panel welcomes the considerable improvements achieved since the panel visit to the city in May 2017, notably making the governance more operational and stabilising the budget. It also takes note how the panel recommendations have been taken in consideration.

In what comes to the **programme**, the panel sees the advantages of the open calls system in terms of promoting the local operators' initiatives and capacities; it also appreciates how the Foundation, despite complex procedures, remains flexible and keeps ongoing calls until the last minute. The panel recognises the importance of being able to integrate potential new proposals, yet it recalls the extra management resources this approach demands, therefore the need to have clear and realistic plans in this respect.

The panel is very happy with the good in-depth collaboration that is taking place alongside Matera, the second ECOC for 2019, not only in terms of programme but also communication wise; as well as the work done with other Bulgarian candidate cities opting to implement projects in their own territories. Moreover, the wide interest and

diverse partnerships at local, national and international levels set up for the programme ensure good **European dimension** prospects.

In what comes to the **citizens' involvement**, especially the **Roma** community, the panel considers that the vision and efforts made are significant, though they might not have been duly and specifically communicated yet. Therefore, it urges the Foundation to be pro-active and clearly communicate in advance its intentions and plans.

Furthermore, it considers that the fact that 10% of the ECOC year projects will be produced in house by the Foundation is promising yet reminds that management and guidance is still required to deal with the myriad of partners. The panel also recognises that this strategy gives optimism about the legacy as these partners will increase their skills, enabling them to act in the future.

Regarding the **Opening**, though prospects are sound, the delay in the process is real and the team efforts should therefore focus as much as possible on it to ensure the production may start before the summer and all key elements are settled by then.

The panel would like to praise the increase in confidence of the team and the city as well as the fact that there is vivid interest from professionals nationally and internationally to collaborate with Plovdiv 2019. Despite the complex procedures and slow pace regarding the **staffing** process, improvements have been made since the last visit in May 2017, when there were still fears that the city and the project were not competitive and attractive enough to gather the needed expertise. However, staffing should continue, especially in the production team.

In relation to **infra-structures**, the panel would like to draw the attention on the delays that might occur. Therefore, the Foundation needs to act cautiously when publicly announcing provisional dates for inaugurating Kosmos and other infra-structures during the Year, so as to avoid creating expectations and potential disappointment. There is also a need to define alternative plans to ensure the smooth production of the ECOC programme planned for these sites.

The panel draws further attention of the Foundation to the strategic planning of the **legacy** that is very much needed at this point, notably in view of upcoming elections. It is crucial to start debating the future of the Foundation and make clear what is expected in terms of ownership and sustainability plans for the projects and infra-structures to be created.

## The panel recommendation

- The panel encourages the team to keep the pace on filling the vacancies, most especially the production team to get the needed operational capacity.
- The panel recommends defining a clear control mechanism as well as holding regular meetings with the project partners, to see progress, notably through the appointment of specific staff members to follow up these projects.
- The panel also suggests making visible what is the contribution of each partner in the budgeting as well as a re-evaluating the budget costs as it is important to remain careful with partners less experienced in dealing with budgets.
- The opening weekend is a demanding event and a dedicated specific manager must therefore be nominated from among the team. Besides the production, International Relations managers should also be directly in charge. The panel recommends to further clarify the responsibilities and coordination schemes of the different entities involved, namely the team of the Foundation, the external contractor and the City Council. Moreover, broadcasting on main major media shall be contracted as soon as possible.
- The panel advises that honest and clear communication be planned and put forward regarding the timing and sequence of projects and infra-structures to be opened during 2019 (or even at a later stage). It should be clear that the legacy is as important as the Year itself, if not more important, as this is what will remain for the city and its citizens. It also suggests that when feasible (and as long as safety is ensured), visits or specific activities could be programmed on the reconstruction sites, so that everyone feels "invited" and part of the process.
- The panel also recommends a pro-active communication regarding its positive vision, expectations and intervention in the Roma neighbourhood. An interesting initiative to increase the visibility of such an effort would be to have some promotional material in Romani language; and potentially invite young members – students and/or artists – of this community to visit Matera.
- The panel recommends dedicating resources to the strategic planning of the legacy of Plovdiv 2019 – including a programme of activities for the following year – with a participative approach involving the team of the Foundation, the City as well as further stakeholders.

## Next steps

- The panel congratulates Plovdiv 2019 for the efforts made so far and its dedication to the preparation of European Capital of Culture in 2019.
- In view of the compliance with the criteria of strong European Dimension and City and the Citizens involvement, and the take up of most of the recommendations of the panel during the preparation phase, the panel recommends the Commission to award the Melina Mercouri prize to Plovdiv 2019.
- The panel thanks the Plovdiv 2019 delegation for their report and the open discussion and looks forward to the implementation of the ECOC in the coming year.

