



Selection of the European Capital of Culture 2028 in a city from an EFTA/EEA country a candidate country or a potential candidate

**The ECoC expert panel ´s report
Selection stage
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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the final selection stage of the competition for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2028 title in a city from an EFTA/EEA country, a candidate country, or a potential candidate to EU membership.

The European Commission (the “Commission”) is the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by:

- Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 as amended by Decision (EU) 2017/1545 (the “Decision”)¹ and
- The Rules of procedure in relation with the competition for the 2028 European Capital of Culture title for cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates participating in Creative Europe, issued by the European Commission and posted on its website in December 2021².

Selection panel

A panel of 10 independent experts was established for the selection process in line with Article 2 of the Rules. The members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the European Committee of the Regions). The competition took place in two phases.

Preselection phase

The Commission issued a call for submission of applications in December 2021³. The call was open to cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries, or potential candidates to EU membership participating in the EU Creative Europe programme at the time of publication of the call. There were two applications submitted by the closing date of 11 November 2022, by Budva in Montenegro and Skopje in North Macedonia.

The panel met online on 16 December 2022 for the pre-selection meeting. The panel elected Marilyn Gaughan Reddan as its Chair and Else Christensen-Redzepovic as its Vice-chair. The panel recommended to the Commission that both applicant cities (Budva and Skopje) progress to the final selection stage. The panel’s pre-selection report is published on the website of the Commission⁴.

The Commission accepted the panel’s recommendation and invited the two cities to submit revised applications with a deadline of 28 August 2023. The two short-listed cities submitted their revised applications (“bid-books”) by this deadline. It

¹ [EUR-Lex - 32014D0445 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [ECOC Rules of procedure CALL 2028 EAC/A04/2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [CALL FOR ECOC 2028 EFTA EEA EAC/A04/2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [Pre-selection report for the 2028 European Capital of Culture in a non-EU country \(europa.eu\)](#)

appeared that the application received from Skopje was based on the pre-selection questionnaire instead of the final selection questionnaire. In such cases, the call foresees that the application “may be considered ineligible and not examined further”. Given that the Skopje bid-book covered the six criteria included in the final selection questionnaire, making a full evaluation possible, and the panel had the possibility to ask questions during the hearing on some of those aspects that were not covered in the written application, it was decided that the application was eligible.

The following steps took place between the pre-selection and final selection meetings: the two cities met with the panel’s Vice-chair Else Christensen-Redzepovic and representatives from the Commission via video conference to seek clarification of the recommendations in the pre-selection report. In September 2023, one member of the panel (Hrvoje Laurenta) visited Budva, while in parallel one other panel member (Else Christensen-Redzepovic) visited Skopje, spending one day in each city. Observers from the Commission attended both city visits. The visiting panel members reported their observations to the full panel at the selection meeting.

Selection meeting

The panel met with the two short-listed cities in Brussels on 19 September 2023 for the final selection meeting.

On 19 September, the panel confirmed Marilyn Gaughan Reddan as its Chair and Else Christensen-Redzepovic as its Vice-chair. Panel member Jorge Cerveira Pinto was excused from the meeting. Representatives of the Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel’s deliberations or decision. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality.

At the meeting each candidate, in alphabetical order, presented their case (in 45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel members (in 75 minutes). Delegations had up to ten members.

The Chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation at a public event in the House of European History in Brussels on 20 September 2023.

Context

The panel recognised two solid bids reflecting different situations in their respective countries and acknowledged a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The panel noted that both cities have further used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies, strengthen their local artistic and cultural scene as well as position the role of art and culture in their overall socio-economic development and in their connection with cooperation partners in Europe. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition. The panel encourages the city not winning the ECoC title to continue with the development and implementation of its strategies and parts of its programme and to foster the connections and cooperation between its cultural operators and partners across Europe.

Assessments of the candidates

The panel assessed each candidate against the objectives of the ECoC action (Article 2 of the Decision) and the six specific criteria in Article 5:

- Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy of the city,
- European dimension,
- Cultural and artistic content,
- Capacity to deliver,
- Outreach,
- Management.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the proposed programme set out in the bid-book and presentation session.

Budva

The bid was put forward by the City of Budva with the support of the surrounding area of Bay of Kotor, otherwise known as Boka.

Contribution to long-term cultural strategy

- The city's cultural strategy was adopted in August 2023 and identifies the following strategic objectives: capacities, cultural heritage and arts and the audience. The cultural sector actively participated in its formulation. It covers two periods: i) 2023-2028, centred on Budva and ii) 2028-2033, extended to the whole of the region. Yet, it is not completely clear how the region is involved in the long-term strategy.
- The long-term impact of the ECoC on the city is sound; however, the link between the city strategy and the ECoC is not sufficiently coherent. Furthermore, the bid-book highlights the most pertinent challenge of over-tourism and the imperative to formulate a sustainable tourism model, yet this crucial aspect is not adequately addressed in the strategy.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is comprehensively described and time-framed and will be carried out by two faculties from Montenegro.
- Numerous indicators for measurement are presented, but almost entirely focused on quantitative data. A cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the economic impact of the ECoC will be conducted, but the qualitative approach and measurement of the cultural value of the ECoC is vague. It is not entirely clear how the increased level of subjective well-being and mental health, happiness of the citizens and visitors' quality of life resulting from the ECoC project will be measured and evaluated.

Cultural and artistic content

- The panel acknowledged the step change in the quality of the programme from the pre-selection stage. The development in the theme of the Budva bid, transitioning from "Top" to the "Hero's Journey" (inspired by the myth of Cadmus setting foot on the Boka coastline), is a journey of self-discovery and transformation for the city. It aims to

shift from being solely a holiday tourist destination to becoming a place suitable for both living and working, making it a very interesting evolution.

- The artistic vision and the programme strategy are strong and solid. Projects overall are interesting and ambitious. The programme has a clear structure around three themes, Heroes of the Land, Heroes of the Sea and Heroes of the Light.
- The panel was pleased to have detailed programme plans with dates and budgets presented. However, the very limited winter programme may neglect the local community and other national and international visitors during off-peak tourist seasons and hinder maintaining cultural vibrancy throughout the year.
- The programme is well balanced across artistic genres ensuring a comprehensive cultural experience for a diverse audience. It is not entirely clear who will organise the projects, i.e. how many of them will be in-house productions and how many are produced externally.
- The panel welcomes the work undertaken to consult with and map the independent and institutional cultural scenes. It was also interesting to learn about the Montenegrin artists living and studying abroad having been involved in the programming. However, the panel was not convinced about the local independent scene's leadership in driving the project ideas and designs, thereby raising questions about the inclusivity and responsiveness of the local artists and their cultural needs in the overall programming.
- Sustainability concerns arise regarding the legacy plans post-2028/29 as well as some uncertainty about funding sources in terms of legacy overall.

European dimension

- The panel appreciates the clear overview of the European partners connected to the projects as well as their geographical distribution, diversity and the status of some of the contacts. Solid cooperation has been established with other ECoCs. However, the panel was not fully convinced about the depth of the European partners' cooperation and co-creation of the projects.
- The panel recognizes the endeavour to build an engaging cultural programme featuring highly acclaimed international artists. Nevertheless, an ECoC programme should also feature compelling cutting-edge artistic and cultural elements (that are not necessarily big names) to allure a broad local and European audience to attend ECoC events, also outside the tourist season.

Outreach

- The panel welcomes the strong involvement of the local population and civil society in the creation of the cultural and artistic content, which took place through a three-phase process that entailed direct (targeted) and

open calls for the artists, cultural institutions, and civil sector. However, artistic involvement is not clear in relation to the involvement of civil society.

- Different groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly and marginalised populations were identified, and research was conducted for audience participation. On the other hand, the needs of groups such as victims of domestic violence, women, immigrants, refugees etc., and wider tools of inclusion of all those groups could have been explored in more detail.
- Some real social problems of the region are presented, but the concrete tools for overcoming them are vague.
- The outreach strategy weakly targets the main potential audience, represented by the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit Budva every year. The panel contends that failing to adopt a creative and sustainable approach to engage with mass tourism might represent a missed opportunity in this bid.

Management

- The Budva 2028 programme is based on a sound operating budget of €42 million, which is the same as at the pre-selection stage.
- The team presented firm financial commitments from the City as well as the State to cover operational costs. The planned equal income of €19,5 million from the City and from the State seems realistic. On the other hand, the Region plays a very strong and important part in the bid, but the panel considers the income of €1 million (2,41% of the overall operating budget coming from the public sector) from the Region as low.
- Planned income from the EU (€1,5 million) and from the private sector (€0,5 million) for covering operating expenses is achievable and the fundraising strategy from these sources is well developed.
- The timetable of the operating expenditure spending is detailed, but the panel is concerned with the high amounts that will be spent for the programme in 2024, 2025 and 2026, and the higher amount for the programme in 2027 than during the ECoC year 2028.
- The organisational structure is well thought through with clear division of roles, tasks and responsibilities, and the establishment of an independent foundation for the governance and delivery of the ECoC is foreseen. There is slight concern about sourcing highly qualified members from local municipalities and communities for the three different boards.
- The marketing and communication strategy is solid but focused more on the region than on the whole of Europe (and the world).
- Potential risks are recognized, accompanied by suitable measures for mitigation.

Capacity to deliver

- The City Council unanimously adopted a Conclusion to support the candidacy. A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the four municipalities from the surrounding region, and the Government of Montenegro adopted an official document (Conclusion) to support the Budva 2028 project.
- All cultural infrastructure projects are budgeted for and the completion of infrastructure plans related to the implementation of the proposed ECoC programme is planned on being ready in time for the title year. In the event of a delay in the construction works, a detailed plan B is presented for holding various programmes in other spaces.
- The panel is highly concerned with the lack of existing cultural infrastructure, as well as local independent and institutional cultural operators that should carry out a major cultural project such as a European Capital of Culture.

Summary

Budva 2028 presented a well-formulated long-term cultural strategy; however, coherence between the city strategy and the ECoC is weak, particularly in addressing over-tourism and ensuring a sustainable tourism model. The cultural and artistic content demonstrates a positive shift in quality, with a solid programme structure; however, concerns arise regarding inclusivity and leadership within the local independent scene. The European dimension is appreciated, but deeper cooperation with European partners was missing. Outreach efforts commendably involve the local population, but more detailed tools for inclusion of various groups could have enhanced the bid. The capacity to deliver is supported by governmental backing, but the lack of existing cultural infrastructure raises significant concerns.

Skopje

Skopje is bidding together with the ten municipalities that are part of the city of Skopje as a separate unit of the local self-government.

Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy

- The ten-year cultural strategy, which runs from 2021 to 2030, is well explained, solid and clearly related to the bid-book. The cultural sector actively participated in its formulation.
- A comprehensive presentation and detailed explanation of diverse qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring cultural, social, and economic well-being are provided.
- There are good and clear tools and methods for how the city plans to strengthen the capacities of the cultural and creative sector.

- Cultural, economic, and social impacts of the ECoC are well thought through and presented in detail.
- Links with tourism, education, urban regeneration, CCI and IT are emphasised, but creating deeper links between cultural and creative sectors and economic and social sectors could have been explored in more detail.
- It is not entirely clear who will carry out the monitoring and evaluation, but, as stated in the bid-book, it will be entrusted externally to experts from associated ECoCs, such as Maribor (Slovenia), which is positive.

Cultural and artistic content

- Skopje 2028's vision, encapsulated in the motto "Culture over Division", remains unchanged from the pre-selection stage. The aim is to celebrate European arts and culture as a unifying force and align with European core values. Embracing diversity in nationalities, religions, traditions, generations, and abilities, it sees culture not only as a realm of art but also as a catalyst for addressing societal challenges. As such, the leitmotiv has a strong sense of place in the innately diverse city of Skopje while having a strong European resonance.
- The panel noticed a substantial upgrade of the programme from the pre-selection stage, though the programme stays at too generic a level with too little description on what will be presented in 2028.
- The conceptual framework revolves around four themes — Art4Hope, Togetherness, rECOvering, and CreARTing — encouraging widespread citizen participation and aligning with European values of inclusivity and civic engagement. Though the framework is sound, there is a lack of a clear red line uniting the various pieces together, which would bring the bid's motto "Culture over Division" to the fore.
- The programme is distributed across the year, although a detailed time schedule for each project as well as project budgets are not included in the bid.
- An open call for projects was conducted after the pre-selection. The resulting programme is well rooted in the local artistic and cultural scene and has been evolving steadily since 2019. It also includes many projects for youth and children as well as marginalised groups.
- The programme covers a wide variety of artistic disciplines ensuring a comprehensive cultural experience for a diverse audience. It is not entirely clear if projects are produced in-house, by the municipality or externally.
- In consultation with the local artistic and cultural community, the Skopje 2028 Foundation will propose a collection of legacy projects to be financed by the public funds – national and city.

European dimension

- The strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international audience is well developed.
- Skopje 2028 is well connected with most important European networks as well as with other ECoC cities. The cooperation with neighbouring regions and the South of Europe is very strong as well as the cooperation with Baltic countries. However, cooperation with North and Western Europe is not fully explored.
- The vision of bridging differences and fostering interculturalism is highly relevant and important in North Macedonia as well as in the rest of Europe; however, the way it is translated in the programme could have been deepened further.

Outreach

- The bid has a clear and solid strategy in place for inclusive opportunities for the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups as an integral part of the Skopje 2028 project with a detailed description of the inclusion of these groups and strong links between outreach objectives, strategy and concrete projects.
- The city has a strong and lively independent cultural scene that has been strongly involved in the preparation of the bid and programme since 2019. Bottom-up processes have been conducted in the period of candidacy since 2014.
- The overall strategy for audience development, built upon five primary objectives, is well thought through and detailed, especially in the scope of educational and school participation.

Management

- The panel welcomes the exceptionally high increase of more than €100 million for the operating budget from the pre-selection phase. In the total operating budget of €125,55 million, the State contributes with more than €100 million, while the City contributes with €20 million and 10 municipalities contribute with €5 million. The team presented firm confirmations for securing funds from these sources. However, this high increase in operating budget is not reflected in the programme or in the other parts of the bid-book. A professional, clear and detailed plan for spending such a high budget is of utmost importance and priority.
- The operating expenditures are well balanced, with 72% of the budget intended for the programme, 14% for the promotion and marketing, 12% for wages, administration and overheads, and 2% for other expenses.
- Planned income from the EU (€0,15 million) is considered low and a clear plan for securing these funds is not presented satisfactorily. Income of €3 million from the private sector for covering operating expenses is

realistic and the fundraising strategy for these sources includes various tools and methods.

- The organisational structure with numerous tasks and responsibilities for each presented position or department is provided in detail. The establishment of an independent foundation for the governance and delivery of the ECoC is envisaged. However, several important areas are not covered in the organigram, and it needs further development. Together with that, the role of the Board is not entirely clear and this could endanger the independence of the CEO/Artistic Director and the programming team, which must be unconditionally guaranteed. Projects such as this require the highest level of professionalism and full independence of key actors, and strong CEO and Artistic Director selected through an open call (together with the rest of the team) are essential for the ECoC's success.
- The marketing and communication strategy is solid, but needs further development and a detailed action plan.
- Potential risks are clearly identified with appropriate mitigation measures.

Capacity to deliver

- The candidacy has strong support from city and national authorities.
- Investments in infrastructure are presented in detail, with clear budgets and timelines for their realisation. All cultural infrastructure projects are planned to be completed by 2027, in time for the ECoC year.
- There is a great capacity for the realisation of projects such as the European Capital of Culture in Skopje, primarily with regard to the existing cultural infrastructure and experience in staging large-scale events and the critical mass of established cultural professionals, cultural institutions and cultural operators.

Summary

Skopje 2028 exhibits notable strengths in its thoroughly worked over ten-year cultural strategy, which is based on a bottom-up process. The bid stands out for its conceptual framework focusing on inclusivity and civic engagement, symbolised by the leitmotiv "Culture over Division", which is important in North Macedonia as well as across Europe. The programme reflects a substantial enhancement with themes encouraging citizen participation and aligning with European values. The outreach strategy underscores inclusive opportunities for marginalised groups. Financially, the bid secures significant support, with an exceptional increase in the operating budget and detailed plans for infrastructure investments. However, some weaknesses include a lack in programme details, budgets and detailed schedules for the programme.

The Panel's Decision

The panel was presented with bids from two distinct cities in different countries, each grappling with unique challenges and contexts, and presenting their own interpretation of the ECoC criteria. The bids had notable strengths, they also exhibited some weaknesses.

Following the presentations, the panel deliberated on the merits of each city against the six criteria. In this connection, it is important to note that in accordance with Article 4 of Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, the cultural programme of an ECoC bid must have a strong European dimension and be created specifically for the ECoC title.

Subsequently, during the concluding discussion, the applications were weighed against one another. The panel assessed the responses of the two cities based on the criteria outlined in their bid-books, as well as the presentations and the question-and-answer sessions. Consequently, the panel recommended that the Commission designate Skopje as the European Capital of Culture 2028 in a European Free Trade Association country which is a party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, a candidate country, or a potential candidate.

Designation

The report has been sent to the Commission, which publishes it on its website. In line with Article 11 of the Decision, the Commission will formally designate the city to hold the ECoC 2028 title in an EFTA/EEA country, candidate country, or potential candidate, based on the recommendation included in this report. Subsequently, it will notify the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, and the European Committee of the Regions. This formal designation allows Skopje to use the title "European Capital of Culture 2028".

Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel recommends that the Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to Skopje, based on this report. However, the payment of the €1,5 million Prize is deferred until 2028 and is conditional, in line with Article 14 of the Decision.

The ECoC panel will make a further recommendation to the European Commission in late 2027 at the end of the monitoring process on whether to make the payment.

The conditions for the payment are as follows (Article 14):

- The ECoC honours its commitments made in the application;
- It complies with the criteria;
- It considers the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports;
- There has been no substantial change to the programme and strategy set out in the bid-book:
 - The budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high level programme and at a level consistent with the bid-book;
 - The independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
 - The European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final programme;

- The marketing and communication strategy and material clearly reflect it is a European Union action;
- Plans for monitoring and evaluation are in place.

Reputation of the European Capital of Culture brand

A city awarded the ECoC title receives considerable international attention. It carries the responsibility of upholding the reputation of the ECoC brand, considering its value for both past and future titleholders. City administrations should be mindful that decisions made, not limited to the cultural sector, may attract formal media and social media scrutiny well beyond their usual scope. This introduces a unique and novel dimension to decision-making in the city, encompassing a broad spectrum of issues extending beyond cultural matters.

The monitoring phase

Once an ECoC has been designated, it enters the “Monitoring Phase” (Article 13 of the Decision). Under the auspices of the Commission, the panel will work with the ECoC to ensure the quality of the ECoC brand and to offer advice and experience.

The bid-book at final selection becomes the *de facto* contract between the designated city, on the one hand, and its own citizens, the panel and the European Commission, on the other hand. It has an important role in the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize. The panel will expect a close alignment with the bid-book during the preparation phase and during the ECoC year. Significant variations from the bid-book should be discussed with the panel, through the Commission, in advance of decisions being made.

There are three formal monitoring checkpoints in the autumn 2024, in mid-2026 and in the autumn 2027, when the ECoC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the Commission. Prior to each meeting, the Commission will invite the ECoC to provide progress reports. The Commission, after consultation with the panel, will indicate areas that specifically need to be addressed in the reports. In addition, the panel may decide, with the agreement of the Commission, to visit the city to observe progress.

The panel’s reports after all three formal monitoring meetings will be published on the Commission’s website. The ECoC may decide to publish its own progress reports in the interest of transparency.

The panel’s recommendations to Skopje

Skopje is now transitioning from a bidding phase to the more formal European Capital of Culture delivery structure, which is independent of local city administration. The panel expects Skopje to further develop cooperation with Budva, Budweis (ECoC 2028 in Czechia), and the French city that will be selected as the ECoC 2028 in France in December 2023, as well as with the broader artistic and cultural community in Europe. The ECoC 2028 provides a national opportunity, which will have international implications not only for Skopje but also for the entire country.

The panel will expect the first progress report to be sent ahead of the first monitoring meeting in the autumn 2024, to consider the recommendations and comments in the assessment of the bid and summed up below.

Experience has shown that successful ECoCs use the first year after selection to establish all the governance, management and administration structures and systems. This essential role needs to run concurrently with the first stage of the project preparations in 2024.

Recommendations below are based on the experience of previous ECoCs combined with specific recommendations based on the overall assessment of the Skopje bid.

The panel expects the following:

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The work continues on the implementation of the cultural strategy and further arrangements are made for a reinforced integration between policy areas (culture / urban development / innovation). All documents are published to ensure transparency.
- Strong connections between the cultural sector and the city administrative staff are secured with involvement of both in the capacity-building activities.
- Long-term links between the cultural and creative sectors with the economic and social sectors in the city are being developed.
- The continuous strong involvement of civil society, artists, independent organisations and respected individuals remains one of the main pillars of the realisation of the cultural strategy and its further development.
- The independent body for the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation of Skopje 2028 is sourced and contracted as a priority as soon as possible.
- The impact assessment for Skopje 2028 is detailed, incorporating monitoring tactics. Baseline figures are clearly defined, and initial efforts are made to outline specific targets. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) include European sources of information, such as Eurostat, as well.
- An early baseline is established to accurately assess the impacts of the ECoC from the outset.

Cultural and artistic content

- The vision and strategy is fully developed and the connection between the vision, strategy motto, themes and actual projects is clear.
- The programme provides more detailed descriptions of the content scheduled for presentation in 2028, addressing the current level of generality, with a clear narrative thread that unites the diverse components to emphasise the bid's motto, "Culture over Division".
- The programme involving local and regional stakeholders is very demanding. An open communication towards dozens of programme partners needs to be done in a transparent and professional way in order to create one big ECoC team.
- Innovative, experimental, and digital programme elements are strengthened to ensure the ECoC 2028 meets the needs of the 21st century.
- The production capacity of the delivery structure in terms of programme implementation is reviewed and addressed.

- The programme is clear and developed, its potential is effectively communicated, and there is a clear picture of what will actually be delivered before and during the ECoC year.
- The panel invites Skopje to include more innovative, daring and ambitious projects in the overall programme in order to reach the high artistic and cultural standards required of an ECoC and to attract people from all parts of Europe and the world.

European dimension

- The translation of the vision "Culture over Division" into the programme is strongly enhanced, to underscore the significant relevance and importance of the concept of bridging differences and fostering interculturalism not only in North Macedonia but also throughout Europe.
- The range and quality of initiatives fostering the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue, and enhanced mutual understanding among European citizens are ensured, intensified, and cultivated. Additionally, the commonalities in European cultures, heritage, and history are underscored.
- Cooperation and communication with partners in Europe, ECoC titleholders, and other international partners are reinforced and deepened. Furthermore, new cultural cooperation partnerships are cultivated across Europe and the world.
- The presented strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international audience is implemented, and actions to generate widespread interest are actively promoted.
- Given the current geopolitical situation in Europe, it is necessary to underline that: "In accordance with the EU Council Regulation 2022/576, Article 51, it shall be prohibited to provide direct or indirect support, including financing and financial assistance or any other benefit under a Union, Euratom or Member State national programme and contracts within the meaning of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, to any legal person, entity or body established in Russia with over 50% public ownership or public control."

Outreach

- Work continues to ensure social innovation in line with the ECoC mission and vision.
- ECoC audience development strategies and plans for local, regional and international audiences are further developed. A special focus is dedicated to reaching out to European and international audiences.
- Involvement of the different nationalities, young generation and marginalised groups (beyond formal cooperation with universities and schools) is further developed to increase its scope.
- Audience development and community engagement are included in capacity building activities involving all relevant partners.

Management

- The delivery structure is established. Information about the registration of the Skopje 2028 delivery structure and its statutes are publicly available.
- A detailed organogram and staffing plan up to 2029 is created. The role of the Board is clear, and the full independence as well as the highest level of

professionalism of the CEO, Artistic Director, programming team and the rest of the team is unconditionally guaranteed.

- International calls for the CEO and Artistic Director are launched to ensure sound governance and artistic leadership and vision for the ECoC.
- Financial contribution from all stakeholders is clarified and the funding timeframe and conditions allowing smooth implementation of the ECoC is agreed with all funders. A professional, clear and detailed financial plan is in place.
- The strategies and copyright issues of the “Culture over Division” concept including authorship rights of related merchandise and services are developed and publicly communicated.
- The communication message (including a European dimension) is clearly articulated for use by the ECoC team and other relevant stakeholders.
- The marketing strategy for attracting international audiences is further developed.
- The activities of Skopje 2028 are supported by the tourist strategy of the City, the Region, and the State.
- The marketing strategy for international audiences is translated into a European narrative.
- The financial structure regarding private involvement is solid and confirmed.
- A clear plan for securing funds from the EU is in place.
- The plan for implementation of the programme is presented with a clear structure for decisions regarding the production activities.
- The inclusion of minorities and marginalised groups is evident.
- The communication strategy is implemented. This covers communications within the Skopje 2028 organisation, between the organisation and the city (and regional) administration, between the organisation and the Ministry of Culture and between the organisation and the European Commission.
- The organisation ensures that in all its (on and offline) marketing and communication there is recognition that the ECoC is a European Union action.

Capacity to deliver

- Political support from city and national authorities for Skopje 2028 remains strong and unconditional.
- The urban development plans affecting the ECoC delivery are clarified. The Skopje 2028 has clear information on the status of the implementation of these projects.

Thanks

The panel wishes to place on record its thanks to DG EAC of the Commission for their efficient management of the competition.

Signed

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