

Brussels, 18th November 2019

Dear Mayor of Elefsina, Mr. Argirios Oikonomou

Dear Chair of the Board of Eleusis ECOC 2021, Mrs. Despina Geroulanou

Dear CEO of Eleusis ECOC 2021, Mrs. Maria Philippi

In June 2019, a delegation of Eleusis ECOC 2021 presented its 2nd progress report to the European Union's panel in charge of the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) selection and monitoring in Timisoara. In the monitoring report sent to Eleusis ECOC 2021, the panel stated its assessment and recommendations and proposed a second monitoring visit to the city in autumn to assess all expected necessary changes.

On the 24th of October 2019 a monitoring visit to Elefsina took place with the participation of panel members Cristina Farinha, Alin-Adrian Nica and Suzana Žilič-Fišer, as well as the representative of the European Commission, Gerald Colleaux. The panel met with the following: the Secretary General in charge of Contemporary Culture and delegation from the Greek Ministry for Culture; the Mayor and Vice-Mayor in charge of Culture and other Vice Mayors; the majority of the members from the newly nominated Board of Directors; and the CEO and the Artistic Director of Eleusis ECOC 2021. We thank all for organising and hosting us and providing all necessary insight in the current status of preparations of Eleusis 2021 – European Capital of Culture.

Building on the background and all former recommendations featured in the last monitoring report, as well as all the input gathered upon these meetings, the panel would like to draw the attention to Eleusis ECOC 2021 on the following observations and recommendations.

During the visit, the panel members were encouraged and pleased to acknowledge the strong political and financial support for Eleusis ECOC 2021 from different levels of governance:

- The ECOC project has got both political and financial commitment from the city, the region and the national level;
- The newly elected Mayor of Elefsina assumes the ECOC process and recognises its importance and priority for the city development;
- A newly elected member of the City Council has been appointed as Vice Mayor for Culture. In this capacity, he intends to follow up closely the project via the Executive Committee to be created;
- The members of the newly nominated Board of Directors, with diverse competent profiles and backgrounds, are committed and have clear ownership of the project;
- The region of West Attica will finally have a representative in the Board;
- The Greek Ministry of Culture recognises the national dimension and the relevance of the ECOC 2021 in Elefsina and is supporting actively the project, notably financially and having a representative in the Board.

- Moreover, the Greek Government is establishing an Inter-Ministerial Committee, composed, notably, by members from the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, Interior, Transport and Infrastructures and Economy, with the mission to support the ECOC project on different legal, policy and political dimensions.

The panel identified the persistence of several areas of concern, most of them already referred in the last monitoring report as well as discussed with all the stakeholders during this visit. These issues are causing delays and blockages in the ECOC preparation process and need to be tackled with the highest priority, especially:

- Staffing
 - The efficiency and internal cohesion of the executive team is essential in order to ensure good management, interactions and communication, and more generally an effective implementation of the project;
 - A strong close collaboration between the CEO and the Artistic Director is essential for good implementation of the programme;
 - The recruitment plans need to be revised accordingly and proceed at a fast pace to reach the necessary human resources required for the project implementation during the most intensive period ahead – 2020 and 2021;
- Programme
 - The final projects' detailed description and planning (including partners, production, budget, venues and human resources allocated) need to be decided and then the team should proceed with diligence to contracting;
 - Joint efforts from local to national level are needed to overcome persisting legal and administrative issues that may complexify the contractualisation process;
 - A year-long timetable for programme should be available as soon as possible;
 - The capacity-building programme needs to continue and even be expanded in order to include the city administration employees, the hospitality sector, the cultural sector professionals in the city, region and even national wide – notably in order to create links to other ECOC candidate cities;
 - The outreach and community involvement features need to be further developed and disseminated so that the city's full engagement and ownership of the project is assured. In this respect, a good balance between the different art forms having in view the various target audiences should be envisaged.
- Cultural Strategy
 - The Vice Mayor for Culture needs to be in close relation with the ECOC 2021 executive team to ensure the due coordination with the City services and the full implementation of the cultural strategy in view of the ECOC legacy.
- Infrastructure

- As the priority is the implementation of the ECOC programme and only 14 months are left before the title-year starts, final decisions have to be made regarding the venues and infrastructure needed and when necessary alternatives have to be put in place;
- The City should take in charge the infrastructures and all related capital investments - even those smaller-scale - to ensure the implementation of the artistic programme and further on the legacy.
- Evaluation and monitoring
 - A monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be settled to guarantee that the collected data is analysed and the overall procedure is in place in due time. This is also a condition for the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize.
- Communication and marketing
 - Make the necessary recommended links to the city, the regional and the national tourism stakeholders to ensure appropriate strategic and communication measures, especially at international level;
 - Put forward local and national communication actions to overcome the potential effects on public opinion of the present crisis;
 - Translate the programme and its relevant European features into clear messages for the wider audiences at national and international levels;
 - Create fast strong relationship with tourist stakeholders at local, regional and national levels regarding the accommodation capacity and promotional activities at national and international levels.
- Governance
 - The new Board of Directors should assume a strategic role, ensuring the necessary partnerships and contacts, financing as well as envisioning the ECOC legacy and overall control of the executive operation. The daily management and implementation of the artistic and cultural programme which has the bidbook as its main reference is the responsibility of the executive team and its independence should be guaranteed.

Next steps

We invite the team to continue to work on the recommendations from the 2nd monitoring report and also on the complementary recommendations contained in this letter.

The panel would like to ask for a brief update on the following issues by the end of November 2019:

- Final composition of the Board of Directors
- Governance and organisational structure of the ECOC 2021 company
- Staffing plan and team composition
- Milestones for programme implementation
- Any other issue considered important to share

Once this information is received, we also would propose a meeting, possibly still in 2019, with the City Mayor and Vice Mayor in charge of culture, the CEO of the Company, the Chair of the Board of Eleusis 2021 and the European Commission.

Based on the state of play that will be presented during the meeting, the submission of an updated report might be needed at a date to be further defined. A possible extra monitoring meeting during the first semester of 2020 might also be a needed extra step.

We would like to thank again the competent organisation by the hosts, the Eleusis ECOC 2021 team and the Mayor, the members of the local Council present, as well as the active participation of the delegation from the Ministry of Culture, including the Secretary General for Contemporary Culture.

We recognise all the engagement and efforts made so far from the involved stakeholders and wish you a productive and successful preparation of the upcoming European Capital of Culture 2021 in the city of Elefsina.

Cristina Farinha (Chair and rapporteur)

Alin-Adrian Nica

Suzana Žilič-Fišer