

# 2019 European Capitals of Culture: Plovdiv and Matera

European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, said: *“The programmes for Plovdiv and Matera show how these cities envisage both their own future and that of Europe, whilst celebrating their extraordinary centuries-old heritage. The European Capital of Culture initiative brings people together and highlights the role of culture in building a European identity. Both cities will help ensure a long-term impact of last year’s successful European Year of Cultural Heritage, which has demonstrated how culture can transform our cities and regions for the better. I wish Plovdiv and Matera every success in the coming year.”*

Plovdiv is the first ever Bulgarian city to be chosen as European Capital of Culture. With a full programme under the motto **“Together”**, 2019 will bring new opportunities to the region and international visibility for the city. More than 300 projects have been organised in Plovdiv, as well as the South Central Region of Bulgaria, and the cities of Varna, Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo, including festivals and community-based projects, structured around themes linked to the characteristic features of Plovdiv, its history, cultural heritage, as well as the challenges facing the city. From discovering the Cyrillic alphabet through various exhibitions, to joint theatre productions with the Western Balkans and the Roma and Turkish communities, visitors will have an array of activities to participate in. The opening celebrations will take place from 11 – 13 January, with a series of indoor and outdoor events, including a music, light and dance performance on the evening of 12 January. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** will attend the official opening ceremony on 12 January.

The programme for Matera has been organised under the motto **“Open Future”**, and will have a special focus on social and cultural inclusion and collaborative innovation. Highlights include *“Ars Excavandi”*, a contemporary look at the history and culture of subterranean architecture; *“Re-reading Renaissance”*, a journey through the artistic past of Basilicata and Apulia; and *“Poetry of primes”*, an exhibition on the central role of mathematics in the work of artists throughout the ages. Matera will also stage the first open-air performance of the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* in co-operation with Teatro San Carlo, as well as 27 projects developed with local creative communities and partners from Europe. The opening celebrations will take place on 19 and 20 January and will gather 2,000 musicians from all the villages of the Basilicata region and many other parts of Europe. Commissioner **Navracsics** will attend the official opening ceremony on 19 January.

## Background

Melina Mercouri, the then Greek Minister of Culture, took the initiative to start the European Capital of Culture in 1985. It has since become one of the most high-profile cultural initiatives in Europe. The cities are selected on

the basis of a cultural programme that must have a strong European dimension, promote the participation and active involvement of the city's inhabitants and contribute to the long-term development of the city and its surrounding region.

Holding the title of European Capital of Culture is also an excellent opportunity for the cities to change their image, put themselves on the world map, attract more tourists and rethink their development through culture. The title has a long-term impact, not only on culture but also in social and economic terms, both for the city and the region.

In 2018, Valletta in Malta and Leeuwarden in The Netherlands were European Capitals of Culture. Following Plovdiv and Matera in 2019, the future European Capitals of Culture will be Rijeka (Croatia) and Galway (Ireland) in 2020, Timisoara (Romania), Elefsina (Greece) and Novi Sad (Serbia, candidate country) in 2021, Esch (Luxembourg) and Kaunas (Lithuania) in 2022, and Veszprém (recommended) in Hungary in 2023.

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