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17.12.2024 No 9-1/1467-1

**Estonia's position in public consultation of
the European Capitals of Culture initiative**

Honourable Commissioner Micallef,

I am delighted to extend my warmest congratulations on your appointment as the Commissioner for Youth, Culture and Sport. This position carries immense responsibility and opportunity. I am confident that your leadership will make a significant contribution to the shared goals and priorities of the European Union during the next Commission mandate.

In this spirit, I would like to bring your attention to Estonia's key positions regarding the European Capitals of Culture initiative, particularly in view of the public consultation launched by the European Commission on June 18, 2024, ongoing evaluation and planning the new programming period.

After careful consulting with our stakeholders and the culture sector we would like to bring to your attention the following important elements for Estonia regarding European Capitals of Culture initiative:

Estonia emphasizes the importance of maintaining the European Capitals of Culture initiative in the future. This program is crucial for promoting shared EU values such as freedom, democracy, equality, inclusiveness, and cultural diversity, especially in the current complex geopolitical landscape. Estonia's positive experiences with Tallinn in 2011 and Tartu in 2024 have demonstrated that this title enhances international visibility, fosters international cooperation among cultural professionals, attracts investments, and creates job opportunities through increased tourism.

We believe that the initiative's structure should continue to ensure conditions that allow local governments in smaller countries to realistically compete for the title. The framework should accommodate both large and small cities, including regions.

The conditions of the initiative should flexibly consider both current and future horizontal priorities of the EU, such as digitalization and sustainability. Nevertheless, the new legal

framework should ensure that cities base their programs first and foremost on local challenges while remaining responsive to evolving EU priorities.

The financial value of the Melina Mercouri Prize awarded to the titleholder should be increased to meet high expectations associated with implementing this EU initiative effectively. The prize should also be adaptable based on the EU's overall living standards and inflation rates to guarantee equal footing to all capitals of culture.

We advocate for establishing an obligation for the independent committee to provide advisory support to candidate cities during their application process and preparations for the title year. Open dialogue with experienced experts would enhance candidates' applications without influencing final decisions.

It is also essential that the independent selection and monitoring committee continues to include local cultural experts familiar with the candidate country's conditions. Their insights are invaluable for understanding the context.

Finally, we find it necessary to ensure continuity in sharing experiences gained during each title year with future European Capitals of Culture in the network of ECoC family. The knowledge accumulated over 40 years by over 60 cities should be systematically shared to enhance sustainability and impact.

In conclusion, Estonia acknowledges the positive impacts of the European Capitals of Culture program on local identities and international cooperation. We look forward to contributing our insights in preparing the future legal base for this esteemed initiative and working closely with you during your mandate and mission.

Yours sincerely,



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Minister of Culture

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