Mrs. Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography

At the Opening Ceremony of Rijeka – 2020 European Capital of Culture

At the Croatian national Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc, on the 1st February 2020, at 17:00 hours

**Respected Madame Minister Obuljen Koržinek,**

**Respected Mr. Mayor Obersnel,**

**Esteemed Guests,**

I am very pleased to be here with you today in Rijeka, at the official opening of the 2020 European Capital of Culture. I know that all of you, just like me, have been looking forward to this moment since your city was appointed to host the title.

In 35 years of existence, the title of the European Capital of Culture has been allocated to more than 60 different cities across Europe. Almost every one of them witnesses today about the positive influence this title brings. From incentives to the city's economy, to a sense of belonging to a common European cultural area. From rebuilding urban centres, stimulating creativity and new ideas to international recognition.

Now, it is your turn to take advantage of this deserved brand!

Rijeka is the first Croatian city to hold the title of the European Capital of Culture, and that is certainly a reason to celebrate. Europe and the European Union are not only involved in regulations, policymaking, trade control, customs and border protection. The European Union is also culture and values, what we as Europeans are and what we want to be. I am extremely pleased that Croatia, only seven years after its entry into the EU, in 2013, has Rijeka that managed to become the European Capital of Culture. With its rich cultural history and an ambitious programme for the year, the city of Rijeka shows that Croatia is not just a member of the EU; it is since centuries part of the European cultural area.

At a time when some believe identity consists of only one single element, we must strengthen the sense of European identity by enriching the local, regional and national components of our identity. These components coexist and upgrade each other. Rijeka's motto "Port of Diversity" is complementary to the frequently used slogan of the European Union, "United in Diversity".

The year 2020 will be an exciting time for Rijeka and Europe. Let us unite in the Port of diversity!

Mr. Mayor, on behalf of the European Commission, it is my honour to present to you a plaque and a diploma, in recognition of the great work invested by the Rijeka 2020 Team and your City Administration in preparation for this exciting year!

**I want Rijeka - as well as its twin city of the European Capital of Culture Galway in Ireland – success in 2020, and much beyond that!**

Thank you!