## Welcome speech by the Emina Višnić, Director at Rijeka 2020, at the Opening of the European Capital of Culture 2020

Dear respected friends, distinguished guests,

Welcome to Rijeka – European capital of culture! Welcome to a city of culture where we create freely and celebrate freedom through art!

Today is a big day for all of us because with tonight’s' celebration and many other programs happening today we are opening the year when Rijeka is becoming one of the most interesting European cities. The rich and diverse program we are presenting will justify our lack of modesty. All of you who have ever worked in culture know how truly resonate the words of the great lady of the Croatian theatre, Ms. Mani Gotovac: „ To make a good programme is a difficult and pitilessly serious business. It's like a tightrope dance, of the most dangerous kind. “

Our own „tightrope dance“, our program, has been created with utmost seriousness and responsibility. We hope that in it you will recognise the values that guided us. We endeavoured to be courageous, to overcome fear and to resist the lure of easy lines.

Instead of familiar, often trodden paths, ready-made solutions and clichés, we went searching for unusualness. Instead of following the confirmed, the obvious and the conventional, we opted for a more progressive approach. While respecting the tradition, we insisted on its contemporary interpretation, aiming at creating what in the future will be recognized as new tradition.

Knowing that we perform on a European or even a global stage, we strived to be ambitious and relevant not only for our local people, but for the world beyond the borders of the area where we feel quite safe, where we are at home. We turned towards topics that are important for our city, region and the country, but which also create bonds between all of us as citizens of Europe.

These are the topics that make us proud and happy, but there are others as well that are painful and difficult. There are topics that bond us through our joint past, as well as those that speak about our possible futures. Our three main thematic concepts – water, work and migrations – are intertwined through our entire program creating our Port of diversity.

The program of Rijeka – European Capital of Culture sprouted from a long creative process of bid book preparation, maturing and growing during the last three years. It is fully justified to state that it represents the great richness of the cultural diversity of our city and the entire region surrounding it, as well as that of our country and the entire Europe. It has carefully been composed of intertwined visions and ideas of a large number of people – artists and cultural workers, scientists and experts, as well as our denizens.

There is an exciting and rich year ahead of us, with more than 600 events not only in Rijeka, but all over the region of Kvarner and Gorski kotar. Behind it there are more than 200 partners and numerous artists from more than 40 countries. I would like to use this opportunity to thank them all wholeheartedly. I would also like to thank all our strategic partners, cultural institutions and associations, numerous other organisations, as well as media and business partners, without whose support this program would have never been possible and the messages we are sending to the world would have never been heard.

It is my great pleasure to celebrate this day as the official beginning of the program Rijeka 2020 – Port of Diversity with all of you, as well as with our citizens, guests and visitors.

Besides this wonderful program staged by the Croatian National Theatre Ivana pl. Zajc, to celebrate together the Port of Diversity we have prepared many other events involving thousand performers, which have started early this morning and will go on until tomorrow.

We will very soon literally find ourselves in the port of Rijeka, a key space for the identity of our city, which symbolically, and physically, with the sea, connects us with others and opens our horizons towards the whole world. Hundreds of artists, performers and other participants have created a spectacle of sound and light that will, I believe, present Rijeka as the one I experienced myself when I chose it for my city: fascinating in its pride and insolence, in its uniqueness, be it rain or sunshine that often appear together – or as our super-band Ri-Val sings, the city that leaves you breathless.

Through the program in the port, in front of the eyes of Europe, Rijeka will pay respect to its workers and its industrial heritage, its avant-garde art and the tradition of its surrounding region, at the same time reminding us of the core values the modern Europe was built on.

I rejoice that we jointly celebrate the year when Rijeka, alongside our friend Galway, becomes centre of European culture. Ahead of us is a year in which, one step at a time, program by programme, together we become, only to, I believe, remain a true European capital of culture.

Visit us again this month already, or at any moment throughout the year. We will host you as our dear guests, and bid you farewell as our temporary citizens, impatiently waiting for your return.

Thank you for choosing to be part of the Port of Diversity today. Let us celebrate together!