**Welcome speech by the President of the Primorje Gorski Kotar County, Mr. Zlatko Komadina, at the Opening of the European Capital of Culture 2020**

 Distinguished guests, dear friends, I wish to welcome you to the most beautiful of the Croatian regions, the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County. Our territory is extremely rich in cultural and historical heritage, deeply rooted in the identity of this region and of its people who inhabited these lands over the course of history but also it is the identity of all of us who live here today. As a Region we are a unique blend of the sea, the mountains and the islands, of different stories and strong emotions. On top of all that we are a tolerant multicultural environment, a region in which numerous nationalities coexist mutually respecting and appreciating each other. And this diversity is precisely the feature that enriches us, expands our horizons and unites us with the European culture and the European civilisation that this region has always belonged to.

The moment in which Rijeka, as the first Croatian city, was named the European Capital of Culture 2020, we have been given the opportunity to summarize all those things that make us special and different - our cultural heritage, our centuries-long tradition woven into the current technologically advanced century and to present all that through numerous events, cultural and artistic programmes and to offer it as a unique experience to our guests and our citizens. From whatever direction you come and in whichever part of our County you wonder into, you will find people, events and places that tell the tale of our history, culture and traditions, framed in the unique natural richness of our green and blue region. This is precisely what encouraged us in the County to use the „27 neighbourhoods“ programme to show the beauty of our diversity in forming an informal network of cultural actors in our local communities. We wanted to highlight our “blue component”, the sea alongside which and from which we live. The flagship “Lungomare Art” has a particular value since it puts small places located along our coast or on the islands in the spotlight. This project and the participation of famous world artists will enable them to become visible on the cultural map of Europe.

 I believe that as the European Capital of Culture we will live up to the expectations that this prestigious and challenging title poses for us. To all of our dear guests our doors are always wide open, and through the 2020 programmes we offer many new, good reasons for you to pay us a visit. So if you still haven’t had a chance, come and get to know our Port of Diversity.