**Rijeka, February 1st 2020**

**PRESS RELEASE**

During the opening ceremony in Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajca, Rijeka - as the new European Capital of Culture - sent a message: Unto peace, unto peace!

**Mayor of Rijeka received the official plaque with the title of European Capital of Culture**

In **Croatian National Theatre Ivana pl. Zajca**  in Rijeka, during the afternoon hours of February 1st 2020, the Vice-President of the European Commission presented the Mayor of Rijeka with  **the official plaque of the title of European Capital of Culture**

The receipt of this great title was celebrated with the verses **“Unto peace, unto peace!'** as a take on the original melody and verses “To battle, to battle“ from the **final aria of opera Nikola Šubić Zrinjski**  by composer Ivan Zajc. By this act, Rijeka designated a direction it will follow in the year during which it will speak, via culture, to both Europe and the world. Courage, unusualness and the messages of inclusivity lead the audience through the celebration in Croatian National Theatre Ivana pl. Zajca. These are the messages that Rijeka will carry on into the 2020.

“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”, said **Dubravka Šuica.**

Visitors of the opening ECoC ceremony in theatre were greeted by **Mayor of Rijeka Vojko Obersnel,** who said the following:

“Rijeka is at the eve of the biggest happening ever occurred in our city and we are ready to accept this great challenge. Get ready, we are setting sails for the big journey, for the great adventure of our generation, we are steaming to our destination, to The Port of Diversity. The target of the journey was not chosen by accident. Rijeka already has its own story: its history that created it and changed; an identity so diverse that it is sometimes elusive; a mentality always seeking for better and more; attitudes that do not allow the different to be less valuable. We have put together all of this in our programme we offer for your journey and experience during the 366 days ahead of us. The Port of Diversity will be an intriguing intersection of projects, ideas, artists and creative minds, and themes that connect them and us will be Water, Work and Migration.”

The opening ceremony of the European Capital of Culture in Croatian National Theatre of Ivana pl. Zajca has been attended by the dignitaries from Europe and Croatia, **the minister of culture of the Republic of Croatia Nina Obuljen Koržinek who came in the capacity of emissary of the president of The Republic of Croatia and Croatian prime minister, the minister of the sea, transport and infrastructure Oleg Butković, Vice-president of European Commission Dubravka Šuica, the representatives of European Commission, ministers of culture of European countries, representatives of former and future European Capitals of Culture, ambassadors, diplomatic core** and many other dignitaries, including the host, **Mayor of Rijeka Vojko Obersnel,** prefect of Primorsko-goranska county **Zlatko Komadina** and Rijeka 2020 CEO **Emina Višnić.**

**Courageous Rijeka appears on the European stage**

Rijeka 2020 CEO **Emina Višnić** emphasized how themes that will be tackled in ECoC programmes are essential for Rijeka, region and Croatia alike, in the same time being he themes that interconnect us all, as the citizens of Europe.

“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.“, said **Višnić**.

**Zlatko Komadina**, the prefect of Primorsko-goranska County, an important partner in ECoC project, welcomed dignitaries – to borrow his words – to the most beautiful Croatian region

“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.“, said prefect **Komadina**.

As the emissary of the President of Republic of Croatia and Croatian prime minister, **Nina Obuljen Koržinek** said the following: *“*Rijeka as the European Capital of Culture coincides with the Croatian presidency of the Council of the European Union. These two important roles on the European level overlap for the first time, providing us with a unique opportunity to present our vibrant contemporary art and rich cultural heritage to European audiences.”

**Rijeka's cultural heritage in the spotlight**

In her video message **Mariya Gabriel,** European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth stressed that both Rijeka and entire Primorsko-goranska County will be in the public spotlight. *“*This year will be vital for Croatia. For the first time, the youngest member of the European Union is hosting its first European Capital of Culture – in Rijeka. Moreover, in the current six months Croatia will be holding its first presidency of the European Union. Congratulations! Two great successes that show the importance of Croatia in the European Union“, said Gabriel.

The opening ceremony included Galway, an Irish city which will carry the title of the European Capital of Culture in 2020, together with Rijeka. Galway representative were poet **Moya Cannoa** and harpist Kathleen Loughnane who performed a song tiled **Song od Imbolc,** that was created specially for the spring part of **Galway 2020**, and which had its world-premiere here in Rijeka's theatre.

The opening programme featured choir Putokazi, Mr.Lee & Ivanesky, Diana Haller, members of ballet ensemble of Croatian National Theatre Rijeka, ,Kristina Kolar, Robert Kolar, Domagoj Dorotić, Rijeka Opera Choir, Rijeka Symphony Orchestra and String Quartet made of musicians from Rijeka Symphony Orchestra. The programme was concluded by Rijeka super band RiVal.