

Open Letter about the European Commission's announcement that the planned 2023 European Capital of Culture pre-selection in the UK will not take place.

This letter is sent collectively by members of the informal network of European Capitals of Culture, the "ECoC Family" as we are usually referred to. All signatories below have had, have or will have a significant position in their respective European Capitals of Culture, and they represent 23 European Capitals of Culture, past and future. From inside the European Union and from outside.

We were shocked and dismayed to hear of The European Commission's proposal that the UK, based on the five candidacies received: Belfast, Dundee, Leeds, Milton Keynes and Nottingham, should not be allowed to be one of the hosts of European Capital of Culture 2023.

The timing and manner of the announcement seemed especially mean spirited. Less than a week before the first candidates from the UK were due to present their Applications to the shortlisting panel. We know from first-hand experience how demanding the Application process is and how much the teams invest personally in the task. The timing of the announcement seemed very dismissive of the commitment of the teams and of the positive messages about continued cultural connections with Europe which we have no doubt their bids contained.

Our own programme concepts talk of building bridges, of togetherness, of beauty and of light. Concepts which bring out all of the most positive features which Europe's most high profile cultural programme can bring to its citizens. Given the challenges that Europe faces at the moment, we think that the Commission should have applied these values to the decision on the UK's participation in 2023. It has not done so.

Even though we fully understand and respect that, due to Brexit, both relationships, obligations and agreements need to be redefined between EU and UK, our cities and our cultural organisations are keen to continue to work with our UK friends. We want the UK to have the opportunity to deliver a European Capital of Culture. We want the EU's culture programmes to continue to be a force for positive dialogue. Something we need more than ever now. Positivity rather than punishment. Friendship rather than fragmentation. Inclusion rather than exclusion.

We urge the Commission to apply these values to our continued cultural relationship with the UK. To quote the concept of one of this year's European Capitals of Culture, please Rethink this decision.

Stavanger (2008)

Marseille-Provence (2013)

Plodiv (2019)

Liverpool (2008)

Umea (2014)

Matera (2019)

Linz (2009)

Pilsen (2015)

Galway (2020)

Pècs (2010)

Mons (2015)

Rijeka (2020)

Essen/Ruhr (2010)

Wroclaw (2016)

Novi Sad (2021)

Turku (2011)

Leeuwarden-Friesland (2018)

Eleusis (2021)

Maribor (2012)

Valletta (2018)

Timisoara (2021)

Guimaraes (2012)

Kaunas (2022)