

PROPOSAL

**of the National Book Centre regarding the realisation of the
Euro-Bulgarian Cultural and Information Centre with Bookshop –
Component of the EC PHARE – Cultural Development Programme,
Project number: BG 9606**

Overview

Bulgaria has a wealth of resources and traditions, which place it at the forefront of international cultural and arts activities, dating back over many centuries. It is the home of a rich cultural tradition with an outstanding heritage in its archaeology, museums and living arts. Various traditions form mosaic deeply rooted in the past but also resonant in its present life and national identity. Despite economic hardships in the last years and the lack of consistent cultural policy until the spring of 1997, a significant cultural potential has been preserved capable of making substantial contribution to the social and economic development of the country in general. This basic concept underlies the new cultural policy initiated by the government of the UDF in the last year. Its long-term strategic goals are based on three major principles:

- ❑ Moving away from existing practice of seeing the state as megafoundation for culture and creating the conditions for the functioning of culture in market environment;
- ❑ Development and passing of suitable legislation;
- ❑ Re-vitalising the communication with the best EU practice.

In accordance with the general orientation of Bulgaria's foreign policy and the 2001 Programme of the government a priority in the international activity of the Ministry of Culture is the further development of the ties with European countries and institutions. The Association Agreement constitutes an important focus both in the administrative and legislative adjustment and in Bulgarian participation in EU cultural programmes. The Ministry of Culture sees the implementation of the PHARE programme as a vehicle for designing and testing new approaches in line with best existing practice in the EU. The key objective of eventual EU membership and the corresponding need to promote EU-Bulgarian exchange and introduction of appropriate standards and policies form the background of the programme. Its realisation is seen as a continuation and strengthening of already established contacts and using the experience and conclusions from MC activities supported by the Council of Europe, such as the national cultural policy review (the Charles Landry report), the current Bulgarian book policy review and other joint projects and seminars. These activities have created positive social attitudes evident in the subsequent public debate, especially focusing on the present preparation of legislation relating to culture.

Purpose and Functions of the Euro-Bulgarian Cultural and Information Centre with Bookshop

The Centre will support and encourage the cultural collaboration between Bulgaria and the European countries, especially the EU members. This is an essential part of the complete social and economical integration of the Central and East European countries in the next decade. In this direction the Centre will actively work towards maintaining the cultural contacts with other Central and Eastern European countries by exchanging experience and realisation of joint projects. For the need of its activity the Centre will create and maintain a database containing information about the Bulgarian and other European cultural landscape for national and international use and will accumulate and disseminate know-how regarding the procedures for applying for funds from European programmes and institutions.

An important function of the Centre will be to facilitate and enable events and projects of cultural institutions and persons in Bulgaria and abroad aimed at closer European integration through networking, search for partners and ensuring public support and media attention. The Centre will provide the needed mediation role in the co-operation between Bulgarian cultural organisations and the existing cultural institutes of European countries in Bulgaria improving public awareness and allowing for wider and more effective social results in their activities. Another of its aims will be to maintain close connection and provide programme ideas, information and assistance to the Bulgarian cultural institutes and organisations working in Europe. Within the context of its activity the Centre will establish contacts and co-operation with other ministries and institutions. Last but not least, a focus in its activity will be the support of all forms of education and training in the fields of culture and arts, providing information on scholarships, courses and other opportunities for professional training and carrying out various seminars, meetings and workshops encouraging international co-operation.

Establishing the Centre

1) Realisation of the Centre as a physical space

Repair of the premises, equipment and design should absorb no more than 60% from the envisaged PHARE funding. Apparently the amount of money is limited but this should not be considered an obstacle. The following should be taken into account:

a) the danger of a reverse, negative public effect because of the too luxurious facade at the background of the economical distress in the country as a whole and in the cultural sectors in particular;

b) the possibility of additional, gradual improvement and upgrade of the material infrastructure of the Centre by attracting finances from interested companies provided the Centre is able to demonstrate social and cultural vitality and activity.

The analysis of the initial estimation of the renovation costs shows that it is possible to achieve a certain reduction of the expenses and its realisation in stages.

2) Realisation of the Centre as an organisation

The Centre is based in the building of the Ministry of Culture but its activity is obviously not limited to the existing premises. It will need to co-operate with interested partners and organise events at other suitable places in and out of Sofia aiming at variety of audiences and maximum social effectiveness. The exchange of experience will encourage collaboration among the various participants in the national cultural life and with their respective European partners. Thus the Centre would not be a self-oriented, isolated organisation with only administrative and representative functions.

The two sides of the realisation of the Centre – rehabilitation and organisational setting up – should be developed concurrently in order to make the best use of the limited resources.

The role of the Ministry of Culture

The main problem that the Ministry of Culture had to face was its own part and participation in the project in its different stages. In the context of its new policy for decentralisation and uniting the efforts of both the public and the private sectors for transition from state-managed to market-oriented cultural environment, the MC will only create the “framework” for the Centre’s existence and will assign its realisation to experienced professionals in the various sectors.

In the present situation the MC sees its function as development enabler without directly interfering into the cultural process. Creating the environment does not mean leaving things floating in the market forces acting quite disorderly in the transition period.

The role of the MC is to ensure optimal conditions and guarantees for the realisation of the aims of the Centre in accordance with the PHARE regulations and the and the long-term programme of cultural integration with united Europe.

The role of the National Centres for the Arts

The four National Centres for the Arts are seen as real guarantees and main content providers for the activity of the Centre. They are budget organisations as separate legal persons, established with the task to support the cultural reform in the most dynamic art spheres – books and multimedia, theatre, cinema, music and dance. Their direct participation in the setting up and running of the Centre will be very helpful for the integration of the efforts in the various cultural fields. The National Centres will in this way find their practical outlet for carrying out their dialogue with the European countries. In the year after their autonomy was re-established they proved the political rationale behind their creation as driving forces for the transition to market environment. They have achieved administrative maturity and have consolidated the professional branches they represent and work for. This makes their participation in the Centre the best way to ensure that the voice of the Bulgarian cultural communities is heard in the common European dialogue.

The involvement of the National Arts Centres in the running of the Centre will help the MC realise two important goals:

- Allowing the practical cultural integration to be carried out by the interested communities themselves;
- Without direct administration of the Centre will be able to support and influence its activity through the programmes of the National Arts Centres which act as mediators between the state policy and the real cultural sectors.

Operational structure

Three options were considered and discussed.

A. The Ministry of Culture rents the premises of the Centre completely or partially to external organisations, which have to carry out its activity. There is a risk for the Ministry to become disengaged and the activity of the Centre to be dependent on the desire for quick profit of the tenants.

B. The Ministry directly funds and conducts the activity of the Centre. As there is a shortage of money from the state budget this does not seem to be a viable option. It also contradicts to the decentralisation line in the cultural policy of the Ministry of Culture.

These first two options were discarded, as their viability could not be guaranteed.

*The most prospective is **the third option** developed on the basis of the positive production, managerial and economical experience of National Palace of Culture (NPC) which has proved its*

vitality and effectiveness in practice. NPC uses the premises of the complex to realise a wide variety of cultural activities of a national significance. In the process of organisation of the cultural programme NPC signs contracts with various subjects - state-owned, private, municipal or free lance artists - that perform particular activities from the general spectrum of the programme. In this way NPC incurs expenditures but also realises substantial revenues. Without funding from the state budget it succeeds in achieving its main purpose - to be a national cultural and congress centre.

C. Euro-Bulgarian Cultural and Book Centre

Organisation and Structure

The Centre is registered as an independent legal person with its own managerial staff and its own bank account.

Director

The Director of the Centre is assigned by the Minister of Culture, respectively an authorised Deputy Minister. The Minister ratifies the Centre status and the number of the personnel on the basis of the Director's proposal.

Chief Accountant

Board of Directors

The Board includes four programme directors for the different cultural fields (books and multimedia, arts, theatre and cinema, music and dance) designated by the National Arts Centres.

Staff

Programme Council

Includes representatives of the National Centres for the Arts, the European cultural institutions in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian cultural institutes in Europe.

The Centre realises its activity in close collaboration with the National Centres for the Arts, the National Cultural Institutions and with relevant Ministry of Culture departments. It periodically presents its programme to the Ministry Collegium and the PHARE Steering Committee.

The programme is developed on operational (short-term) and strategic (long-term) level by a Programme Council. For the different components of the programme the Centre signs contracts with private or state-owned companies, organisations or physical persons.

Financing

In order to be viable in the market environment the Centre is based on the model of mixed funding. The initial expenses for the setting up of the Centre will be covered jointly by:

- ❑ the PHARE programme (as envisaged in the Financing Memorandum)
- ❑ the Ministry of Culture – provision of the premises, maintaining a minimal staff (3-5 persons)

- National Centres for the Arts – up to 10 % share participation in the initial capital of the company. *Note: The funds for the share participation will be from the Centres' own revenues and not from the state budget.*
- Other state, public, municipal organisations, as well as foreign, can participate in the activities and financing of the Centre with share participation up to 10% for each shareholder
- Private companies - share participation up to 10% for each shareholder which will not affect the general cultural policy and goals of the Centre.

The model of mixed financing is the only possible scheme allowing both the protection of the cultural aims and quality of the Centre's activity and the ensuring of healthy financial conditions and vitality in its operation.

For the financing of individual events and for hiring additional staff on concrete projects the Centre provides money from its own activities, sponsorship, foundations and alternative sources.

The Memorandum of Agreement will provide secure guarantees that the various shares of financial participation will not lead to deviations from the general aims and standards of work of the Centre.

After the expiring of the PHARE programme the MC retains its engagement with the Centre by providing the premises for its work free of charge.

The social necessity for the existing of such Centre integrating national and international cultural event – in its own premises as well as on the territory of the country – is a serious argument in favour of its prospect for financial stabilisation in a short period of time and transition to its self-sustained operation.

Activity areas

The activities in the premises of the MC will make use of the existing three operational areas:

BOOKSHOP

The project for the bookshop includes all contemporary components of the book trade - introduction of ordering books through the Books in Print catalogue developed by the National Book Centre; offering of a wide range of Bulgarian and foreign titles with the possibility of placing an order by publisher's and commercial catalogues; opportunity of ordering books and multimedia products by Internet; bring into use cash registers with fiscal memory and bar-code reading.

Additionally to the above mentioned the bookshop will:

- provide a possibility of professional training, practice and exchange of experience in the book trade sector;

- provide promotion and marketing services and will consult publishing houses and cultural organisations;
- serve as a linkage between the National (Spring and Christmas) and International (once in two years in November) Book Fairs which take place in the National Palace of Culture; the bookshop will support the preparation as well as the continuation of activities and contracts realised during the period of the fairs especially in relation to the European participation;
- provide funds for the running of the Centre without any compromises with the subject of its activity.

CINEMA-VIDEO HALL

The cinema-video hall will be used for:

- showing of high quality feature films meant for the general public; the film selection will be made in close co-operation with the film-chain "Eurimages", the foreign cultural institutions and bureau in Sofia, the National Film Centre, The Union of the Bulgarian Film Makers - The House of the Cinema, The Bulgarian National Film Archive - Odeon Cinema as well as the distribution companies;
- lecture courses, panoramas, film showing for interested and selected public;
- showing of films related to the cultural events organised by the Centre - book premiers, exhibitions, celebrations, conferences, seminars, etc.

EXHIBITION HALL

The exhibition hall will show various kinds of expositions. There should be searched balance between the classical and contemporary, Bulgarian and European, intelligible and experimental art. There should be searched a reasonable balance between the use of the exhibition hall for events organised by the Centre and maintaining its own calendar and public. The exhibition hall as well as the cinema-video hall will also host suitable musical and theatre events and performances.

Along with these three main focuses of the cultural activity there would be designed and situated in a suitable way

INFORMATION ROOM/READING ROOM and A COFFEE SHOP.

Note: A more concrete business plan will be developed after the model for the establishing of the Centre is confirmed.

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Director*