



The project «Citizens for Europe» was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"

Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.1 "Town-Twinning"

Participation: The project involved more than 400 citizens, notably 35 participants from the city of Xanthi (**Greece**), 35 participants from the city of Braila (**Romania**), 35 participants from the city of Strumica (North Macedonia) and more than 300 participants from the host city of Shumen (Bulgaria).

Location/ Dates: The event took place in the city of Shumen, Bulgaria, from 04/09/2019 to 08/09/2019

Short description:

The day **04/09/2019** was dedicated to the arrival and accommodation of the participants.

The day **05/09/2019** started with a welcome greeting from the hosts to the participants, presentation of the objectives, the project activities and the planned work programme. The first part of it was the event "**Side by side before EU**", which was held in "Stiliyan Chilingirov" Regional library. It passed in the form of an open discussion on topics on which every European citizen has an opinion – education and realization, family and traditions, business and travel. The participation of different generations – older people, who are traditionally more eurosceptic, and youngsters, who enjoy the utmost benefits that EU membership provides, has given the opportunity to hear perspectives on the topics before The European membership of our countries and beyond. Special attention has been paid to European education and exchange programmes which broaden the horizons of young people and enhance their sense of European belonging. The discussion was attended by representatives of local authorities, educational and cultural institutions, youth organizations, tourism industry, young entrepreneurs, public figures, journalists, whose different profiles and interests contributed to the conduct of wide-ranging debate on the topics.

Later in the day, a meeting between the official representatives of the partner cities was held in the context of "**Side by side into EU**" event. They were welcomed by the mayor of Shumen – Mr. Lyubomir Hristov in one of the restored Revival houses in the town. Members of the foreign delegations were municipal councilors, heads of directorates of municipal administrations, experts in the field of preparation and implementation of European projects. Each of the municipalities presented some of their successful European projects and the benefits for the local community. Serious intentions were also expressed to continue the partnership in areas of mutual interest and formalise cooperation between cities.

The day **06/09/2019** coincided with the celebration of one of the official Bulgarian holidays - The Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. The beginning of the day was dedicated to a solemn military ritual of laying wreaths and flowers. Becoming part of the celebration of this day,

symbolizing The Unification of the Bulgarian people, foreign participants had the opportunity to experience an important moment of Bulgarian history as part of the European one.

Later in the day the National historical-archaeological reserve "Madara" was visited, within which the rock relief Madara Horseman is located – the only one of its kind in Europe, and a global symbol of Bulgaria. The participants could also enjoy the natural resources of the region – the Madara Caves, which, because of their beautiful acoustics, became an informal stage for the implementation of a lot of Balkan music by the participants.

Musical and dance performances and the symbolic unification of the participants with the means of culture and traditions continued during the event "**Side by side on the stage**", which was held on open-air stage in the area of Shumen Plateau Nature Park. Besides the traditional folk dances of the partners, old customs and crafts were presented, children's sports games of the past, typical local culinary specialities. The event was attended by people from different generations - older people who are the true guardians of national folklore and culture, children who know and perceive not only their own but also foreign cultures, their parents who educate them in a spirit of tolerance and knowledge of Europe's cultural diversity. This active intercultural dialogue has led to the mutual acquaintance and social cohesion of the participants, friendships have been created, and the concept of Europe has acquired a human image.

The day **07/09/2019** was dedicated to acquaintance with the cultural and historical heritage of Shumen and the partner cities. In the information centre of the Shumen Plateau Nature Park was held a tourist exposure under the motto "**Side by side on the map**", in which through multimedia presentations and advertising materials each of the cities presented their most significant tourist sites. Emphasis was placed on the large-scale cultural events organized by each of the partners and their use as a tourist resource, good practices and ideas for their expansion were exchanged. Innovative products related to the popularization of significant historical sites from Shumen were presented. Representatives of the tourist industry, cultural institutes, museum workers and experts from the municipal administrations, responsible for the development and implementation of policies in the field of culture and tourism took part. Exceptional value of the event added the participation of representatives from the National contact point of the programme "Europe for Citizens". In their presentation, besides the highlights of the programme and its implementation in Bulgaria, a special focus was placed on 2018 European Year of cultural heritage and the key role of culture for the future of EU. Good opportunities provided by the programme for the continuation and deepening of the partnership created with the project were also presented.

Later on the same day one of the most emblematic sights in Shumen - "Founders of the Bulgarian State" monument was visited, retelling by sculptural compositions the history of the First Bulgarian state. Thus, in an attractive and pleasant way the participants have enriched their knowledge for the past of Bulgaria as part of the European cultural heritage.

On **08/09/2019**, the guests departed from Shumen with wishes for new meetings.