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"Skopje 2014" Artists Defend Their Projects

Macedonian artists gathered on Wednesday to discuss the overhaul of the capital's downtown area, dubbed "Skopje 2014" and defend its aesthetics, as the project continues to stir controversy.

By Biljana Nestoroska

At the gathering, sculptor Konstantin Janev, one of the creators of the lion statues which will be placed on the bridge Goce Delcev, said that he considers the installation of so many sculptures and monuments from different artists in Skopje to be a small art revolution.

Artist Aleksandar Stankovski said that with Skopje 2014 "the government represents the taste of the citizens, who vote and thus make an aesthetic choice".

In another meeting on the government's controversial project to revamp Skopje's downtown, the Institute Pavel Shatev on Tuesday organised a debate called: "The aesthetics of the monuments of the project "Skopje 2014". Participants included Macedonian architects, writers, professors and some of the sculptors who are creating the monuments.

"The word monument comes from the old expression say my name, leave a mark after me," said architect Vangel Bozinovski, who designed some of the buildings that are part of the project, as well as the controversial Mother Theresa memorial house, and was a member of the commission which voted for the first projects to be chosen for the revamp.

Sculptor Dimitar Filipovski, the creator of the monument of Metodija Andonov -Cento, the first president of Macedonia, said that he is more supportive of humanist and realistic representations, rather than modern art, which he said is not in fact modern, but rather quasi art.

The first two of many statues to come as part of the much-debated revamp project dubbed "Skopje 2014" were erected on Sunday in Skopje's main square, surprising many due to their unannounced arrival.

The five metre tall bronze statues of two Macedonian revolutionaries from the Ottoman era, Goce Delcev and Dame Gruev, mounted on horses, were set on both sides of the Stone Bridge, one of Skopje's most well-known landmarks.

At least 15 other sculptures depicting heroes from Macedonian history are expected to arrive soon in the main square and its surroundings. The arrival of the statues is part of the [government funded project for overhauling the Skopje downtown area](#). Some ten new buildings as well as renovations of existing buildings are envisaged, and much of the work is already underway, with the project set to be completed by 2014.

By far most controversial is the announced 22 metre tall fountain with a statue of the ancient warrior king Alexander the Great, whose origin is currently a matter of harsh debate between Skopje and Athens. The bronze statue is set to arrive from Italy next year, while construction on the fountain has already begun.

The plan, which promotes classical architectural styles, was frowned upon by Macedonia's Association of Architects as being poorly drafted and against the current setting of the city.

The association last night released a statement in which they said they would not give up on, as they called it, their Don Quixotian battle to improve the quality of the "Skopje 2014" project, with the support of the International Union of Architects; UIA.

The group of architects once again offered to collaborate with the government, and sent a letter to the Board for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Ministry of Culture.

"We propose that all elements of the "Skopje 2014" project which are intended to have a lasting impact be re-evaluated," the letter reads.

Macedonia's opposition, as well as various NGOs, have objected to what they called the non-transparent process of selecting the architects for the planned buildings and monuments and raised concern that the project will be too costly for the state.

The government has not released exact projections for the project's cost, but various estimates say it may cost close to €200 million.

Meanwhile, the Cultural center "CK" is currently hosting an exhibition entitled "Skopje 28.03- upgraded", which is organised by the First Arhi Brigade, an informal group of young architects and students from the Faculty of Architecture.

The exhibition is dedicated to the one year anniversary of what the group calls the "first architectural revolution". Last year, [several hundred young people demonstrated against what they considered to be the usurpation of public space](#), but they were met by a group of protesters with opposing views and clashes ensued.

The exhibition contains student projects and projects which are set to be installed in various locations in Skopje, about which the public has not yet been informed.

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