

Eurovision to Sprinkle Gold Dust on Kyiv



Lee Reaney

City bets fans and journalists will spend \$20 million in May to attend Europe's big music contest; if no hitches, publicity could be priceless



KYIV – Kyiv is primed to cash in on Europe's coolest and kitschiest music festival to the tune of \$20 million when the city hosts upwards of 20,000 European fans and journalists for the May 1-14 Eurovision Song Contest.

"We expect 20,000 fans to visit Kyiv during the two weeks", Kyiv Deputy Mayor Oleksii Reznikov told the UBJ in an interview. "We hope that the event has a good impact on the development of tourism."

Organizers say they have recovered from the hiccups that plagued the run-up to the grandiose spectacle which culminates the Sat. night May 13 final. In what should give a positive boost to Ukraine's image in Europe, the final is expected to be watched by 230 million Europeans. In the lead up, headlines have focused on the negative: the departure of more than 20 staff members alleging mismanagement and botched initial attempts at ticket sales.



Eurovision semi-final stage

Pavlo Hrytsak, who is in charge of the event as the deputy head of Ukrainian state television, expects each tourist to spend about \$110 per day. If each were to spend one week, that would bring in a total of nearly \$15 million. Many hotels are booked solid as TV crews from across Europe lock down two-week reservations.

Kyiv hopes to build a Eurovision legacy of facilities and "beautification" projects across the city. The city has partnered with the Ukrainian government to invest \$7.5 million over two years toward the event's total budget of \$24.3 million.

“We expect nearly \$30 million return on the \$24.3 million budgeted for the event,” said Reznikov, with most coming from ticket sales and advertising.

Ukraine won the right to host the event after Jamala won last year’s contest in Sweden with her moving ballad “1944”, devoted to Josef Stalin’s mass deportation to Central Asia of the entire population of Crimean Tatars, including her great-grandmother.

Reznikov expects as many 1,500 journalists to cover the event, which has a history of performances of varying quality and allegations of collusion in voting. The anticipated television audience this May is more than double the number that tuned into February’s Super Bowl.



Kyiv Deputy Mayor Oleksii Reznikov expects a \$30 million return on Eurovision’s \$24.3 million budget.]

Kyiv gets renovation of roads and a metro station

Kyiv City Council has allocated \$26 million for local improvements.

These include: repaving city streets, the refurbishing of three large buildings, a general city “greening”, and \$9.25 million spent on renovating the Livoberezhna metro station, the Left Bank red line station near the International Exhibition Center, where the event will be held. Reznikov, the deputy mayor, also said a ferry would carry visitors from the right bank to the left bank of the Dnieper, a more scenic way of getting to the event center than the metro.

Eurovision organizer Hrytsak hopes visitors will leave with a positive impression of Kyiv.

“They will take home some great memories and will have new friends after coming here,” he said.

In addition to the IEC, several districts of Kyiv will get a taste of Eurovision:

- All red carpet events will take place near Mariinsky Palace, the official ceremonial residence of Ukraine’s President, adjacent to the Rada.
- Parkovy Convention & Exhibition Centre will host exclusive “Euroclub” events for the artists and their delegations from May 1-14.
- Kyiv’s central Khreshchatyk Street will host “Eurocity,” Eurovision’s open-to-the-public fan area. Like during the EURO 2012 soccer tournament, the site will feature live broadcasts, daily concerts, a food court and other entertainments. This site will operate from May 4-14.

“We hope that our visitors begin to see that Kyiv residents are the same European citizens as the rest of Europe”, said Reznikov.



Eurovision organizer Pavlo Hrytsak says preparations are back on track after earlier problems

Advance stumbles

The event's organization has had its share of setbacks.

Among those who walked out in February alleging that the organizing team was prevented from getting on with its work were Executive Producers Victoria Romanova and Oleksandr Kharevin..

Hrytsak said their departure from the project was "based on a lack of understanding of the budget process".

He said the dispute focused on delays and procedural issues, partly because organizers wanted tenders to go through Ukraine's new Prozorro public e-procurement system.

"It may take more time", he said. "But we wanted to be transparent".

Organizers cancelled the initial sale of tickets due after the country's antimonopoly committee voiced objections. Fans also were annoyed by an initial refusal to allow pre-sales to Eurovision fan club members and because tickets to the final sold out in less than an hour.

"The venue is one of the smallest in the last 10 years", said Hrytsak, "We have the venue that we have."



The International Exhibition Centre was originally built for Eurovision 2005. It is one of the smallest venues in the last decade.

Ukraine's Second Eurovision

When Kyiv hosted Eurovision in 2005, the city had hiccups

The political upheaval surrounding the Orange Revolution, the disputed 2004 presidential election, nearly forced the city to forego hosting the event in 2005. Organizers managed to pull everything together on time, but not everything was ideal.

"The IEC was originally built to host Eurovision in 2005", Pavlo Shylko, who also worked on the first Eurovision, said on a tour of the facility. "It just wasn't ready on time".

"We have hundreds of people working, including international experts," said Hrytsak. "We're moving forward with preparations as intensively as possible and we've made huge progress."



Poltava's O. Torvald will represent Ukraine in the Eurovision final on May 13 with their song "Time".

Ukraine sees Russia's entry as 'a provocation'

Another challenge is how to handle Russia in view of Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea and its military and economic support for separatists in Ukraine's southeast. Russia announced last week that Yuliya Samoylova, a wheelchair-bound Russian X-Factor runner-up, will be the country's representative in Kyiv.

Just days earlier, Eurovision's International Public Relations Manager, Victoria Sydorenko, said Russia had not yet registered and was the only country not to have booked hotel rooms.

It is unclear whether Samoylova will be allowed to compete. She performed in Crimea in 2015. Ukraine's policy is to bar any artist who publicly supports the Donbas separatists or who has performed in Crimea since the occupation, without entering through Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin called her selection "a provocation" and said Ukraine's security services would have to investigate. Ukraine has barred 140 Russian cultural figures for violating those terms.

It wouldn't be the first time Russian politics caused a withdrawal at Eurovision.

Georgia's 2009 entry "We Don't Wanna Put In" was banned by the European Broadcasting Union – Georgia said at Russia's behest – because of perceived political lyrics, a violation of the contest's longstanding guiding principles. Russia and Georgia had been locked in conflict a year earlier, with Russian troops moving far into Georgian territory.

This May, Ukraine's entry will be the rock group O. Torvald. The Poltava group won a national selection competition last month with the song 'Time.'

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Slider photo: Jamala wins for Ukraine last May (supplied)

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