

FACADE

Museum of Communist Bulgaria

For 45 years, from 1944 to 1989, Bulgaria was governed by a communist regime that reshaped the country's institutions, economy, culture, communities and private lives. Yet nearly four decades after the regime's collapse, Bulgaria still lacks a permanent, public space for understanding how the system functioned, reflecting on its consequences and considering what this history can teach us today — particularly at a time when populism, extremism, nationalism and authoritarianism are gaining ground in many parts of the world.



This is why we designed FACADE – the first and only permanent, experiential museum of Communist Bulgaria, located in Sofia, and a separate mobile museum that will travel to schools and communities across the country. Led by the Sofia Platform Foundation, the project aims to launch the mobile museum in 2027 and open the permanent museum on 10 November 2028, the date marking the fall of communism in Bulgaria in 1989.

Why this museum is needed

Young Bulgarians are the first generation with no lived memory of communist rule. Their understanding of the period is therefore mediated through family stories, political narratives, notions of nostalgia, social media, and, often, silence. According to Alpha Research's 2022 findings, only 1 in 17 young Bulgarians report a deeper understanding of the totalitarian repression of the period.

The need for a clear-eyed understanding of this period is especially acute in Bulgaria today. Years of political instability and declining trust in institutions coincide with growing exposure to disinformation and foreign information influence, including narratives that seek to exploit social divisions and weaken confidence in democratic institutions. In this environment, understanding how propaganda, political dependency and authoritarian power operated in the past goes beyond historical knowledge and provides a frame for recognizing some of their contemporary forms.

The challenge is therefore larger than the transmission of historical facts. It concerns how young people – our children and grandchildren – will understand freedom, responsibility, power and the fragility of



democratic institutions.

FACADE will not be a museum of nostalgia, nor will it reduce 45 years of history to a catalogue of crimes.

It will be historically rigorous and clear about the undemocratic character of the regime, while also examining the complexity of life within it: belief and disappointment, adaptation and compromise, fear and privilege, conformity and resistance, private relationships and acts of dignity.

Its central civic question will be:

What does this history have to do with me since I have not lived it?

The interpretive framework: Promise and reality

The name FACADE captures the museum's central idea: the contrast between the regime's public image and the realities of everyday life.

The communist regime presented itself through promises of equality, security, participation, progress and a better future. Behind that public façade, everyday life was shaped by censorship, surveillance, political dependency, restricted movement, coercion, unequal access and systems of privilege.

The museum will place these two dimensions in a conversation. Visitors will encounter the regime's official language and imagery alongside archival evidence, personal testimony, objects and lived experience. This tension between promise and reality will run through the permanent museum and the mobile museum alike.

The museum will use an experiential, choice-based approach, allowing visitors to encounter the dilemmas, constraints and trade-offs of everyday life under communism and to understand the period through individual experiences rather than a single narrative.

The visitor experience: Experiencing real life's choices in communist Bulgaria

Choice will be at the center of the visitor experience.

Visitors will face a sequence of historically grounded decisions concerning education, employment, travel, culture, freedom of expression, personal identity and relations with state authority. Their path will connect them to real people who lived under the regime, allowing them to follow the consequences of similar choices within an actual historical life.

The experience will make abstract political structures concrete:

- What could you study, and who decided?
- Where could you live, work or travel?
- What could you read, listen to, wear or say publicly?



- What happened when personal conviction conflicted with institutional pressure?
- When did accommodation become complicity?
- What possibilities remained for resistance, solidarity or private dignity?

The purpose is to help visitors understand what it means when the range of possible choices is gradually narrowed by a political system.

Personal stories will include not only well-known victims and resisters but also teachers, engineers, doctors, workers, librarians, students, parents and civil servants. These ordinary lives will illuminate the grey zone in which most people lived: neither heroic resistance nor complete identification with the regime.

The experience will combine concise historical narrative with objects, archival material, testimonies, official language, literature, sound and interactive elements. Information will be layered so that young and general audiences can engage without sacrificing historical depth. A glossary will help visitors recognize the language and institutions of the period.

The visit will conclude with reflection and dialogue: how is freedom lost, how is the lack of freedom normalized and accepted, and what responsibilities do citizens have in protecting democratic life?

A permanent museum and a travelling museum

The permanent museum will provide an accessible cultural and educational destination in Sofia. A strong candidate building has been identified. Its own history may offer a meaningful connection to the museum's story, although feasibility, terms and due diligence are still in progress and no final site commitment has yet been made.

The mobile museum will be the first public expression of the project. A dedicated bus has already been acquired and will be transformed into a fully equipped travelling exhibition space, designed to bring the museum's core themes, stories and interactive methods to young people and communities beyond Sofia.

Like the permanent museum, it will explore the tension between the regime's promises and lived reality through historically grounded, choice-based experiences. It will also serve as a learning laboratory – testing stories, language and interactive approaches before the permanent museum opens.

The mobile museum is therefore not an additional format, but an integral part of FACADE's national mission and a way to involve communities across Bulgaria.

The permanent and mobile museums, complemented by our educational work at the former Belene labor camp, can anchor a national network linking visitors and educators to archives, testimonies, memorial sites and other initiatives exploring Bulgaria's recent past.



Audiences and impact

FACADE is being designed principally for:

- Young people, particularly Generation Z and Generation Alpha;
- Teachers and school groups;
- Bulgarian visitors seeking a deeper understanding of family and national history;
- International visitors to Sofia;
- Researchers, cultural practitioners and civic organizations.

The permanent museum aims to welcome approximately 30,000 visitors annually. Its educational program will include school visits, teacher resources, public conversations and partnerships with institutions across Bulgaria and internationally.

Success will be measured not only by attendance but by what visitors understand: whether they can recognize the mechanisms through which freedoms are restricted, distinguish evidence from propaganda, engage with perspectives different from their own and connect historical knowledge with democratic responsibility.

Experience and institutional credibility

Since 2014, Sofia Platform Foundation has worked to strengthen historical knowledge, civic education and democratic resilience in Bulgaria.

More than 5,500 students and teachers have participated directly in its teacher-training programs, summer schools and educational visits to the former Belene camp, Communist Bulgaria's largest forced-labor camp. The Foundation has recorded and preserved over 100 hours of survivor testimony, developed resources regularly used by more than 1,000 teachers, and produced exhibitions and educational initiatives with Bulgarian and international partners. Its digital campaigns generate an annual reach of over one million, while its educational websites have recorded more than 230,000 visits.

The museum builds on this experience while creating a new, permanent and professionally governed institution.

An international advisory board will bring together historians, museum professionals and specialists in education and visitor experience. The project will work closely with the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past as a core scholarly partner. Further expert and institutional partnerships will be announced when formal commitments are in place.

The museum's governance will protect scholarly integrity, distinguish clearly between established fact, personal testimony and interpretation, and safeguard curatorial independence from political or donor influence.



Project timetable

Period / Date	Mobile museum	Permanent museum
2026	Bus purchase, design and curatorial work.	Site development, historical concept and fundraising.
2027	Mobile museum launch as proof of concept during Eurovision.	Architectural planning, permissions and launch of the mobile museum.
2028	Operation of the mobile museum across Sofia and its neighborhoods.	Construction, exhibition production, installation and testing.
10 November 2028	Continuation of the mobile museum's program across the country.	Planned opening of the permanent museum in Sofia.

Investment and sustainability

The total capital and launch requirement is currently estimated at **€1.29 million**, comprising:

Phase / Purpose	Estimated Cost
Preparation, planning and design	€150,000
Museum, exhibition and construction	€900,000
Launch and the first year of operation	€240,000
Total Capital & Launch Requirement	€1,290,000



The campaign is now seeking founding and leadership commitments to move from concept and preparation into implementation. The planned annual operating model is approximately €196,000. The long-term model anticipates a combination of earned income – including admissions, programs, retail and partnerships – and continuing philanthropic and institutional support. Detailed attendance and income assumptions will be tested during the mobile-museum phase and refined before opening.

An invitation to build the institution

Sofia Platform Foundation is seeking individuals, foundations, companies and institutional partners who recognize the importance of preserving historical knowledge and strengthening democratic culture.

Leadership contributors will be invited to become Founding Partners of FACADE. At the same time, the museum will welcome support at every level. Every contribution will help build the collection, develop educational programs, bring the mobile museum to new communities and create a permanent public home for this history.

Campaign supporters will be acknowledged as part of the museum's Founding Community through a Founders' Roll in the museum and online. Additional recognition opportunities will be developed for leadership gifts while maintaining the museum's scholarly and curatorial independence.

FACADE is an investment in Bulgaria's capacity to understand its communist past and its continuing relevance to democratic life today. Rooted in the Bulgarian experience, it can also contribute to a wider Eastern European conversation – helping connect national histories, recognize shared patterns and differences, and build a fuller understanding of a past that was experienced across borders but is still too often remembered in isolation.

We invite you to help create Bulgaria's museum of unfreedom – a lasting institution for historical understanding, civic dialogue and democratic responsibility, with relevance far beyond Bulgaria itself.

About us

Sofia Platform Foundation brings more than a decade of experience and trusted partnerships with leading European and international foundations and public institutions, including the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Mercator, the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Körber Foundation and the German Federal Agency for Civic Education. We've worked with hundreds of experts, teachers, students and citizens in more than a hundred locations across the country, becoming one of the leading organizations supporting formal and non-formal history and civic educators in Bulgaria.

