

## The Sofia Final Competition: Why it was important for the project and the participants, and what type of experiences were generated.

The Sofia Final was critical for both the Connect Project partners and the competing participants coming out from the CIP processes of the Academic Institutions from Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia because it formalized, in the best way possible, the outcome of converged efforts from all engaged parties who worked together during the 3-year period of the Erasmus + program. The contestants who were also the Finalists of their National Competitions were given the opportunity to present their project before the expert jury, exposing them to the challenge of receiving criticism in front of an audience and outside their comfort zone for the first time. On the other hand, being able to answer the judges' questions demonstrated the extensive preparation they had done prior to their pitching. Additionally, the total interaction was important for all the professors and mentors who contributed to the contestants' plan and aspirations, by receiving a benchmark as well for startup readiness to be used in future projects.

### Competition Highlights

On Tuesday, 19/12/2023 morning the participants arrived at Campus X, a coworking space/incubator in the southeast suburbs of Sofia city. The first keynote speaker, Eva Vucheva serial entrepreneur, and founder of Contento.Tech, spoke about her experiences sharing personal stories as well as advice. Eva also serves on the advisory board of Endeavor Bulgaria and actively supports digital products and services across the CEE region making her an ideal mentor to provide feedback. The second keynote speaker was Kiril Genov, a technology entrepreneur and consultant in the field of artificial intelligence and data science. Kiril who also serves as the CEO and co-founder of Worddio shared both Worddio story as well as a demo on the Langlevel app. Following the two speakers, a presentation of how to build a Unicorn Factory and a tour of the Campus X premises were conducted by Svetlozar Dimitrov, Community Manager, who provided insights of the Bulgarian startup scene and how the Campus X idea was conceived.

On the second day, Wednesday, 20/12/2023, an overview of the pitching contest was given by Argyrios Spyridis and Adriane Thrash from Anthology Management, explaining the time and overall rules as well as a brief introduction of the jury. The Members of the Jury were Mila Petrova, an Entrepreneur currently serving as CEO of TeamUp Services, a member of Angels Club and mentor with Founders Institute, Yarov Gotchev Investment Manager at Innovation Capital, a pre-seed Venture Capital fund managing EUR 21M that is supporting Bulgarian startups and Leonid Chechurin, Professor of Industrial Management at LUT University (Finland) and outstanding industrial experience as a principal engineer and consultant for engineering design in leading innovative companies such as Samsung Electronics, LG Electronics, General Electric Global Research Center , Wrigley (USA), British American Tobacco (UK-USA), FMC (USA) and also an expert in technology innovation and reengineering.

## The Finalists and their Award

The top 5 projects of the CONNECT Final Competition as designated by the expert jury were:

<b>Virtual Story (Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film University of Georgia)</b>	<b>MFT (Ilia State University of Georgia)</b>	<b>Pottery on the Wheels (Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts of Moldova)</b>	<b>E Contabil (Technical University of Moldova)</b>	<b>See Free (Brusov State University of Armenia)</b>
Miranda Namcheishvili	Giorgi Khutsidze	Elena Frunze	Cozlovschi Alexandru	Susann Rapyan
Akaki Titberidze	Tsotne Matcharashvili	Andrei Șcaterman	Gutanu Valeriu	Davit Grigoryan
Vazha Kavlelashvili	Tengo Endeladze	Daniela Ezbiceac	Turețchi Gabriel	
Victoria Manukovi				



Anthology Ventures a Venture Studio sponsored the main prize for the winners; a next-phase clinic of a 2000euro value for each of the winning teams. The Anthology Ventures Clinic is a KPI-oriented intensive process that aims at identifying specific project needs and advance startups towards commercialization and investment readiness in a two-step process; The first stage lasts one month and includes weekly meetings that check on the startup’s KPIs. There, the needs of the startup are better identified, and priorities are set and worked on. Additionally, the potential of further cooperation is assessed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage is more customized and is offered to selected teams based on their progress and commitment during the previous stage.

Although the Clinic is offered to more advanced startups the founders of Anthology Ventures who sponsored the startup clinic for the Connect Project top5 teams thought that this could be beneficial for the founders’ advancement and also extended their offer conditionally to the rest of the participating

startups, offering them a second chance to take part in the clinic process upon a consequent evaluation. During the clinic process the teams will be able to gain a complete picture of their project's needs, strengths, and main weaknesses.