

## Call for European Capital of Democracy 2024/25: Eight Cities Compete for the Title, Special Partnership with Kyiv

**Following Barcelona as the first-ever European Capital of Democracy, democracy takes center stage again as eight bold cities from across Europe enter the race for next year. By joining the European Capital of Democracy Initiative, these cities show their commitment to democratic innovation and citizen engagement. The ECoD City Network provides them with a platform for collaboration and best-practice exchange. Kyiv joins the network as a non-competitive member in a special partnership.**

Since its launch in 2020, European Capital of Democracy empowers cities to safeguard and strengthen democratic values, tackling the challenges posed by the multi-dimensional crises of our time. By leveraging their innovative capabilities, proactive actions, and deep connections with their citizens, cities have the potential to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of democracy.

The following cities have stepped forward to compete for the prestigious title of European Capital of Democracy: Bratislava (Slovakia), Cascais (Portugal), Durrës (Albania), Gdańsk (Poland), İzmir (Turkey), Leipzig (Germany), Tirana (Albania), and Vienna (Austria). The new applications increase both the regional scope and diversity of ECoD member cities, thus growing the network to 21 cities in 13 countries, demonstrating Europe's strong dedication to democratic principles.

While it will not be possible for safety reasons for cities in Ukraine to compete for the title of European Capital of Democracy as long as the war is ongoing, Kyiv is starting a special partnership with the European Capital of Democracy initiative. To showcase its outstanding achievements in the field of democracy and participation, the city will join the ECoD City Network as a non-competitive member.

Helfried Carl, Founder of ECoD, emphasised the importance of cities in protecting and enhancing democracy, stating, *"Cities are best placed to safeguard and strengthen democracy and human rights as they are closest to the needs of their citizens. With this impressive and motivated second group of contenders, we double the number of active ECoD City Network members. Moreover, we are very proud and grateful to the City of Kyiv to have reached out to us to join our initiative and will enter a special partnership with Kyiv this year already. We stand in full solidarity with Ukraine against the Russian war of aggression and want to highlight the fact that Ukraine is defending Europe's freedom and values - and that democracy must never be the first victim of war."*

European Capitals of Democracy are selected in a two-stage process. First, an Experts' Jury composed of five pre-eminent professionals in the field of democracy will diligently evaluate each city's application based on transparent criteria outlined in the yearly Call for Submissions. The Experts' Jury will then create a shortlist of outstanding contenders, selecting up to five nominee cities.

Subsequently, the Citizens' Jury, consisting of several thousand engaged citizens from all member states of the Council of Europe, have the final say in determining the European Capital of Democracy. In the first such call in 2022, Barcelona was chosen to be the first Capital of Democracy with a program lasting from October 2023 to October 2024. The chosen city for 2024-2025 will be officially announced in December 2023.

The title-holding city collaborates closely with civil society and its citizens to organise an array of engaging activities and events. These initiatives will attract visitors from across Europe, fostering collaborative efforts to strengthen democracy, education, and innovation. Moreover, the title enhances the international reputation of the city as a hub of democratic excellence, stimulating civic pride and furthering its position as a center of progress. The title-holding city also hosts ECoD City Network meetings, where representatives of all member cities come together regularly to share their expertise and best practices in democracy promotion at the municipal level.

**About European Capital of Democracy:**

The European Capital of Democracy initiative was launched by ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH together with The Innovation in Politics Institute, with offices in Vienna and Berlin and partners in 16 European countries.

For more information about the European Capital of Democracy, please visit <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu>.

Citizens who want to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of democracy can apply to join the Citizens' Jury by visiting <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/join-the-citizens-jury/>.

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