

# European Capital of Democracy 2026

## Compliance Guidelines

The terms used in this document shall have the meaning as defined in the Glossary in the section “Glossary” of the Call.

### Issued by:

ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH

Ungargasse 59-61, 1030 Vienna, Austria (hereinafter referred to as “ECoD NPO”)

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### 1. Scope of Application

This Compliance Guide sets out the main rules, practices and values of the ECoD Initiative. The Compliance Guide came into force in August 2021 and its content is binding for all persons and legal entities operating under the banner of the ECoD Initiative. In particular, it applies to the employees of ECoD NPO and The Innovation in Politics Institute GmbH, including freelancers working for the project. Furthermore, it is particularly binding for the members of the Experts’ Jury, the Advisory Board and the Steering Board, volunteers and unpaid supporters of the project.

The Compliance Guide serves as a benchmark on how to implement democratic standards into our day-to-day work within the ECoD Initiative. Please read these guidelines carefully and take the content seriously. If you are unsure about how to implement them in specific cases, we are available to answer any questions you may have.

A specific Code of Conduct for protecting children, young adults, marginalised groups, minorities and other vulnerable persons is defined in our Safeguarding Policy.

## **2. Adherence to these Guidelines**

### **2.1. Compliance Officer**

The mission-driven ECoD NPO will appoint a Compliance Officer who will make sure that all people engaged in the project comply with these Guidelines. For this purpose, he/she is entitled to conduct unannounced reviews and interviews periodically and schedule individual or group training if need be.

Name of ECoD NPO Compliance Officer: Dunja Ganser

Date and period of appointment: 15.09.2023-14.09.2024

Contact details: [ganser@overtones.eu](mailto:ganser@overtones.eu)

### **2.2. References and consequences**

Misbehaviour or non-compliant behaviour regarding the principles as stated in the section “Principles” will have consequences. Depending on the severity of the misconduct, the Compliance Officer may order an individual interview and issue up to three written warnings. After the third warning, the engagement in the project may be terminated or suspended. Therefore, it is the duty of all people mentioned in the section “Scope of Application” to be committed to all the values and standards outlined.

This Compliance Guide will be subject to ongoing development. Defined standards must be met at all times. If there are updates or changes, the Compliance Officer will provide the latest version to everyone concerned.

### **2.3. Contact**

If you have any questions or doubts concerning matters of compliance as laid out in these Guidelines, please contact the Compliance Officer or ECoD NPO under:  
[compliance@capitalofdemocracy.eu](mailto:compliance@capitalofdemocracy.eu)

For reasons of professional conduct, please refrain from using any other point of contact for such matters.

All comments or remarks will be treated strictly confidentially and can also be submitted anonymously.

## **3. Principles**

### **3.1. Basic requirements**

Inspired by the principles of primary European Union law, we are adopting a transparent, fair and non-discriminatory procedure for the selection of the European Capital of Democracy. The main principles as outlined below shall serve as guidance for our approach.

### 3.1.1. Fair competition

Similar to free and fair elections, the ECoD Initiative seeks to find the best democratic ideas and the best possible ways to implement them. It is therefore essential to apply the highest standards of fairness when it comes to selecting the winning cities.

Improper advantages must not be offered, accepted or granted by anyone within the scope of our activities. Improper benefits are benefits that are likely to influence your decisions or the decisions of the recipient.

Any form of gift acceptance, bribery or unfair behaviour that might influence an unbiased, unaltered and fair competition is prohibited and will not only be sanctioned by us; intentionally accepting a gift or being promised an advantage in order to perform or refrain from performing an act in breach of duty can be punishable under Austrian criminal law.

Accepting or giving a gift without giving or getting anything in return is of course not illegal. Gifts can take many forms whether they be tangible objects or intangible in nature, e.g. an invitation to dinner or drinks or an exhibition. You may give and receive gifts, if you strictly refrain from asking, accepting, promising or giving anything in return and stick to the outlined approval process.

For reasons of fairness and transparency, the following process applies, if a gift exceeds a certain value limit:

- You can accept gifts of up to 50 euro without approval.
- You can accept gifts of 51 to EUR 100 euro only with approval of the CEO of ECoD NPO.
- You must not accept any gifts of over 100 euro

Every incident concerning a gift exceeding a value of 50 euro regardless of the intention or status of the gift giver or recipient, must be reported to the Compliance Officer immediately.

### 3.1.2. Non-discrimination

No one shall be disadvantaged or discriminated against, indirectly or directly, based on gender, nationality, disability, skin colour, religious affiliation, ideology, origin, political views, sexual orientation, or marital status.

In our internal and external dealings, we act respectfully and objectively, sincerely, kindly and fairly. Every person has the right to be treated with dignity. We comply with this requirement by treating each other with trust and appreciation. Any form of discrimination is prohibited and each of us is required to refrain from bullying, harassment or intimidation. Our conduct towards everyone is based on respecting the personal integrity of each individual and on acting ethically.

### 3.1.3. Transparency

The ECoD Initiative applies the highest standards in order to provide an independent and unbiased selection of the winning city. All activities must therefore be conducted in the most transparent way possible.

By acting with transparency, we can for instance address conflicting interests at an early stage and find ways of resolving them. A conflict of interest can occur if private interests (e.g. family relationships, secondary occupations, or shareholdings) collide with the interests of the ECoD Initiative or if the possibility of this exists. However, a conflict of interest also exists, for example, if the counterpart is a close person (e.g. relative) and is favoured in some way. Conflicts of interest are likely to endanger the professionalism and reputation of the ECoD Initiative as well as the respective counterpart.

With this in mind, private and professional interests must be strictly separated and you are obliged to report/disclose any potential conflicts of interest to ECoD NPO or the Compliance Officer (see the section “Compliance Officer”).

#### 3.1.4. Compliance with the Law

Compliance with the law represents one of the cornerstones of democratically responsible action. Each individual within the ECoD Initiative and everyone acting on behalf of the ECoD Initiative takes personal responsibility for conducting all activities for and with the ECoD Initiative in compliance with the applicable law of the countries in which they operate. Failure to comply may result in indemnifying and holding the ECoD NPO harmless in case of potentially arising damages.

### 3.2. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct lays out the foundations for the involvement of all people and entities mentioned under the section “Scope of Application”. It is essential that everyone knows our values and standards, and will know how to act when faced with challenging situations.

If you are involved in the ECoD Initiative, you are expected to base your activities and engagement on the essential pillars of democracy, as laid out in the European Convention of Human Rights and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. People who are involved in the ECoD Initiative should live up to these democratic standards and must be absolutely committed to these sets of values. It is only possible to create a democratic, transparent and fair competition for the title European Capital of Democracy by adhering to these values.

To remain true to these democratic principles, it is essential that you take personal responsibility. Our personal actions shape the image of the entire ECoD Initiative. It is this personal behaviour that helps to enhance the quality of public discourse about the values of democracy and to establish an innovative competition for the best democratic ideas.

- **Personal integrity**

Strengthening democracy is a complex and challenging task. To ensure the success of our mission, it is essential that each of us act with integrity both in collaborating with others working for the Initiative and in our cooperation with applicants and other stakeholders. This requires treating every individual we interact with, with dignity and respect.

- **Democratic values**

The European Capital of Democracy Initiative seeks to find the best democratic ideas and the best possible ways to implement them. Everyone working for and being involved in the Initiative shall live up to the democratic standards described above, respect human rights and act accordingly.

- **Deliberation**

Democratically organised cities are spaces for discussion and deliberation. Likewise, the ECoD Initiative is a platform for such discussions, which may be intense or controversial. In particular, it is essential in this regard to acknowledge diverging opinions or points of views within the democratic spectrum and enter the democratic debate.

- **Mutual respect**

The project aims at ensuring a fair and democratic competition for the title of European Capital of Democracy. In meetings and discussions, it is therefore essential to act with the utmost mutual respect and to engage in debate democratically. There is no space for disrespectful behaviour, or any form of degrading behaviour.

- **Commitment**

ECoD NPO seeks to encourage discussions about democracy and to showcase best practice examples. The organisation is fully committed to democracy, diversity and transparency. The organisers encourage everyone involved to share and spread this democratic spirit, turn it into actions and represent these values in their day-to-day lives.

- **Transparency**

Similar to free and fair elections, the ECoD Initiative applies the highest standards when it comes to selecting the winning cities. Therefore, any form of misbehaviour or conflicts of interest must be avoided and immediately reported when they arise, as stated in the section "Transparency".

- **Independent Activity**

The ECoD Initiative creates a platform for various people to meet and engage with each other. Any form of fraud, bribery or unfair behaviour is prohibited and will be sanctioned. Likewise, it is unacceptable to receive individual benefits, as stated in the section "Fair competition".

With this in mind, I declare: *[please tick as applicable]*

- With regard to myself, there is no conflict of interest in connection with the above-mentioned guidelines and I am not aware of any circumstances in the past or present that could lead a reasonable person to have any doubts about my independence or impartiality.
- I am declaring a conflict of interest or at least circumstances that could lead a reasonable person to doubt my independence or impartiality. I have described this in more detail in a supplement to this form.

**If I subsequently discover that a conflict of interest or circumstances arise that could lead a reasonable person to doubt my independence or impartiality, I undertake to immediately notify the CEO of ECoD NPO in writing.**

I take note of the fact that I am liable to compensate ECoD NPO for any damages that may arise from a violation of the obligations I am undertaking, which are set out above.

Date, full name and signature:

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