

Three cities shortlisted for European Capital of Democracy 2026

Cascais, Rotterdam, and Sofia have been shortlisted by the Experts' Jury following a comprehensive evaluation process. The three cities compete for the title of European Capital of Democracy 2026, and need to convince over 4,500 Citizen Jurors from 47 countries, which will take the final decision from 3-12 March 2025. Apply now to have your say!

The cities shortlisted for the third European Capital of Democracy 2026, the third title-holding city following Barcelona in 2023/24 and Vienna in 2024/25, demonstrate a strong commitment to democratic values. All contenders are implementing innovative strategies to enhance civic engagement while also planning ambitious future initiatives, tackling common challenges like climate change, affordable living or social services for persons with special needs. Their dynamic programmes and their ability to inspire collaboration across borders are setting a powerful standard for democratic communities.

"Sofia, Cascais and Rotterdam are the well-deserved frontrunners to become the European Capital of Democracy 2026. Each city offers a multitude of best practices in local participatory democracy. In times of global democratic backsliding, their successful projects offer a window of opportunity towards more people power," states Bruno Kaufmann, Chair of the Experts' Jury.

Every year, over 4,500 Citizen Jurors from all Council of Europe member states and Kosovo select a European Capital of Democracy. In 2025, the selection will take place from 3 to 12 March by all Jurors signing up until 28 February. The city that receives the highest overall score will take over the title of European Capital of Democracy 2026 from the current titleholder, Vienna.

"The shortlisted cities represent the forefront of democratic innovation and all of them are deserving candidates to become the European Capital of Democracy 2026. We now invite every citizen in the member states of the Council of Europe and Kosovo to join the Citizen Jury and help us determine the city that best embodies the principles of democracy and inspires us all", says Helfried Carl, Founder of European Capital of Democracy.

European Capital of Democracy serves as a model of democratic excellence and takes the lead within the European City Network (ECN), fostering collaboration and relations across Europe. A city that holds the title gains countless benefits. It improves its reputation globally as a hub for innovation whilst also earning the opportunity to host international events, promoting a sense of pride among its citizens. The current, previous and designated Capital of Democracy have a seat at Consortium, a high-level Advisory Board contributing to decisions about the future course of the ECoD initiative.

For more information about the competition, the shortlisted cities, and updates on the European Capital of Democracy 2026, please visit <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu>.

For questions, please contact:

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