

## Cascais designated as European Capital of Democracy 2026

### Press Release

**In a two-stage selection process involving Experts' Jury and over 4,500 citizens from over 47 countries, the City of Cascais (Portugal) was selected as "European Capital of Democracy 2026". The title is a recognition of and a motivation for outstanding democratic efforts.**

Cascais outperformed Rotterdam and Sofia. Early 2026, Cascais will take over the honorary title from the current European Capital of Democracy, Vienna. This will mark the start of the Democracy Year. ECoD's Founder, Helfried Carl, congratulated Mayor Carlos Carreiras and his team today on their achievement.

In total, five cities were competing for the title of **European Capital of Democracy 2026**: Cascais, Izmir, Krakow, Rotterdam, and Sofia. Three of them were nominated for the shortlist after an evaluation by an international Experts' Jury: Cascais, Rotterdam, and Sofia. Finally, a jury of over 4,500 engaged citizens from the 46 Council of Europe Member States and Kosovo chose Cascais through an online selection process.

"This year again, the Citizens' Jury has voted for a city with a strong record and a strong commitment towards democracy and citizen participation. I would like to congratulate the City of Cascais and its inhabitants for this recognition by the European citizenry. At the same time, we are very much looking forward to making the Democracy Year 2026 in Cascais a great success. The world and Europe need to understand that it is democracy that delivers for its citizens," stated **Helfried Carl, Founder, European Capital of Democracy**.

"Democracy is not a given, it is a shared responsibility that we must uphold every day with resilience and determination. In Cascais, we believe in a governance model where citizens are not just spectators but active participants in shaping their future. Being chosen as the European Capital of Democracy 2026 is both an honour and an opportunity, one that we embrace with commitment, innovation, and an unwavering belief in the power of civic engagement. Together, we will demonstrate that democracy delivers," highlighted **Carlos Carreiras, Mayor of Cascais**.

The Experts' Jury comprises internationally recognised experts and practitioners from science, civil society, art, and business. Members evaluate and assess the ambition, innovation, and creativity of democracy projects submitted by all applicant cities. You can find the current members at <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/ecod-experts-jury/>.

"Inclusive citizenship, a truly democratic infrastructure, participatory leadership and a global ambition. It is maybe no surprise that the citizens of Europe have chosen Cascais in Portugal to become the European Capital of Democracy 2026. I want to congratulate Cascais, and I look forward to visiting the European Capital of Democracy 2026, where everyday people govern themselves", emphasized **Bruno Kaufmann, Chair of the Experts' Jury, European Capital of Democracy**.

"We are delighted to welcome the Citizens' Jurors' final choice of Cascais as the new European Capital of Democracy! This renowned and vibrant Portuguese city has much to offer to our community, fostering innovation and citizen engagement at the local level. In these turbulent times, Europe must take action and advocate for democracy. Active participation at the local level is essential for nurturing dialogue, building trust between citizens and public institutions, and addressing the everyday challenges faced by our local representatives. Looking forward to an inspiring and impactful year ahead! Até breve em Cascais!" highlighted **Antonella Valmorbida, Deputy Chair of the Experts' Jury, European Capital of Democracy**.

Cascais is a city where democratic innovation and civic engagement come to life through the active participation of its residents. Guided by the principle that sustainable governance begins with its people, Cascais has developed unique, long-term initiatives that empower citizens to care for their community, making democracy tangible in everyday life. A flagship example is "Tutores de Cascais", a civic network fostering social cohesion and environmental stewardship, uniquely successful in Portugal with a waiting list of citizens eager to contribute to their community's well-being.

Currently, Vienna is hosting the Democracy Year 2024/25 with numerous events and initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and democratic awareness. The City had followed the very first European Capital of Democracy, Barcelona. In 2026, Cascais will take on this role and become the centre of democratic innovation. An official opening ceremony and festival will take place in the first quarter of the year.

Further information on the "**European Capital of Democracy**" initiative can be found at: <https://capitalofdemocracy.eu>

### **About European Capital of Democracy**

The European Capital of Democracy aims to inspire cities across Europe to cultivate democratic environments, promote citizen engagement, and work towards a more inclusive and transparent future. The Programme Year provides a unique opportunity for individuals, communities, and institutions to collaboratively shape the democratic landscape. The initiative was launched by ECoD NPO together with the Innovation in Politics Institute.



**European Capital  
of Democracy**

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