

FAQ's on the Selection Process of European Capital of Democracy 2027

Türkiye is not a member of the European Union. Why are cities from Türkiye on the shortlist?

Turkish cities can participate in the European Capital of Democracy process because the Call for Applications is open to cities in all member states of the Council of Europe and Kosovo. Türkiye is a member of the Council of Europe and therefore eligible to take part in the initiative.

The European Capital of Democracy initiative focuses on democracy at the local level. Cities are evaluated based on their commitment to citizen participation, democratic innovation and inclusive governance within their municipal context.

The shortlisted cities – Ankara, Brussels and Denizli – were selected by the independent Experts' Jury following a detailed evaluation of their applications and city visits. The Experts' Jury assessed the ambition and quality of the cities' democracy projects and their potential to strengthen democratic participation at the city level. The shortlisted cities come from different national contexts, histories and political environments. What connects them is their commitment to strengthening democracy through participation, inclusive governance and democratic innovation at the local level.

Does the shortlist endorse or reward a national government?

No. The European Capital of Democracy initiative does not evaluate or endorse national governments or national political systems. The initiative focuses exclusively on democracy at the municipal level.

Cities are assessed based on their democratic practices, participation initiatives and governance structures within the city administration. The evaluation focuses on how cities involve citizens in decision-making processes and how they develop innovative democratic practices locally.

The selection process is designed to recognise cities that create meaningful opportunities for participation and democratic engagement within their communities.

Can cities from countries experiencing democratic challenges still be considered?

Yes. The European Capital of Democracy initiative recognises that democracy is practiced and developed at multiple levels, including the local level. Cities often play an important role as spaces where democratic participation, civic engagement and innovation can take place in everyday life.

This can also happen in an environment where democratic standards deteriorate elsewhere. Often, Cities even act as a bulwark against illiberal tendencies on the national level.

The initiative is based on the idea that cities are key arenas of democratic life. As stated in the Call document, cities are “incubators for democracy” and are often best placed to safeguard self-government, participation and democratic resilience at the local level. This is why the European Capital of Democracy focuses on democratic practice in cities and on how local institutions and communities create meaningful opportunities for participation.

FAQ about the European Capital of Democracy Initiative

What are the Evaluation Criteria for the Application?

The Experts' Jury evaluate Applications on the following criteria, selecting a maximum of three Nominee Cities (from which the winning City is selected by the Citizens' Jury):

- Collaboration: Active partnerships with other organisations, institutions, and stakeholders
- Exchange: Communication, dissemination, and sharing of local initiatives
- Innovation: Ambition and appeal of the programme and its main activities
- Organisation: Management capacity, project and budget resources
- Output: Planned activities and dissemination measures, and how effectively they will reach the target audiences, media and citizens

The Mission Statement indicates the City's ambition and motivation to participate in the ECoD Initiative and include an awareness of the City's strengths and challenges. The Democracy Projects form the core of the Application, described in an informative way which includes an organisational and financial perspective. Each project should link back to the Mission Statement and one or more of the Dimensions of Democracy. The projects' innovation and impact are important factors, as well as the level of acceptance/use by the target audiences (citizens); economic and environmental sustainability; Civil Society involvement; and, the relevance of the topic/project on a European scale / for other regions. The Project Ideas showcase what's in the pipeline for the next few years. Here, the power of the ideas presented and the ambition behind them are assessed, as well as their political support and chances of realisation. The Local Context is also assessed, in terms of the organisational capacity of the City; active partnerships with other organisations, institutions, and stakeholders; potential reach of citizens (communication and budget resources); and, the level of cooperation with Civil Society Organisations.

Who finances the existing Democracy Projects and Project Ideas?

Current and completed democracy projects as laid out in the City's application have to be financed, organised and implemented by the City. It is possible to apply for co-

funding of project ideas together with other members of the European City Network and/or ECoD NPO and other partner organisations.

Which Cities are covered by the ECoD Call?

This Call is open to Cities with a population of over 100,000 within the member states of the Council of Europe enjoying full rights of representation (currently Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom), and Kosovo.

What is the definition of a City?

A local administrative unit with forms of legal self-determination and budgetary autonomy and an elected or democratically appointed executive leadership, including metropolitan areas and conurbations. Special cases need to be evaluated on an individual basis. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

What are the benefits of competing for the ECoD title and joining the European City Network?

When applying for the ECoD title, Cities become part of the European City Network to strengthen deliberative and participatory democracy in Europe. By applying for the ECoD title, Cities share their most innovative best practice and expertise. Members profit from mutual exchange of knowledge and experience, access to international expertise and cooperation. The aim is to multiply the reach and impact of their innovative projects. Cooperation with universities and think tanks carrying out research into democratic activities and projects is fostered under the umbrella of the initiative. Member cities collaborate on pressing issues and engage with citizens, experts and other relevant stakeholders to find the best solutions and master implementation challenges.

What awaits the designated European Capital of Democracy?

A City holding this title will enjoy a wide range of benefits, such as an enhanced international reputation as a centre of education and innovation, and of course a boost to civic pride. Capitals of Democracy co-host international events like the ACT NOW Mayors' Conference or The Innovation in Politics Awards, attract leading European politicians and meetings of international organisations. Furthermore, Capitals of Democracy join the ECoD Consortium and steer the future of the initiative. They take on a leading role in joint projects, guide and host the European City Network throughout their Democracy Year.

How can the city benefit from existing formats?

ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH will complement the City's Projects with established events like The Innovation in Politics Awards, the ACT NOW Mayors' Conference, and more, which will guarantee international attention, additional visitors and a Europe-wide impact. Formats like the Art of Democracy or Truth, Lies & Democracy are adapted with local partners for the Programme Year of each title-holding city.

What requirements do I have to fulfil to apply?

If your City is eligible to participate in the Call (see 'Which Cities are covered by the ECoD Call?'), you need to complete a Democracy and Prerequisites self-evaluation (see ECoD [Call Document](#)). The ECoD team will assess how well the City's infrastructure can cope with set maximum visitor numbers with respect to transportation and accommodation during the given time frames.

Does my city need to meet a minimum number of residents?

This Call is open to Cities with a population of over 100,000. In individual cases worthy of special consideration, ECoD NPO may also admit cities with a population of just under 100,000 to the Call.

What do I need to apply for the ECoD title?

The Application consists of two steps, starting with online self-evaluations of the technical, organisational and democracy prerequisites. Step 2 of the Application, after the pre-screening by the ECoD NPO, the submission of a mission statement, including an executive summary, current and completed projects and project ideas (in a predefined form and structure) has to be completed by Autumn 2026. Additionally, a City Council resolution (or similar) for participating in the ECoD Call has to be adopted, and a contact person or office as well as a project team established.

(The Timeline for European Capital of Democracy 2028 selection process will be published in May 2026.)

Is it possible for Cities to apply with projects related to emerging crises, e.g. taking care of refugees?

Yes, taking care of people in need and citizens fleeing from wars is without doubt understood as a democracy project, covered by the Dimensions of Democracy. Initiating such support in the short-term shows the high level of the city's resilience, engagement for human rights and social cohesion.

When can I apply for ECoD?

The Timeline for European Capital of Democracy 2028 selection process will be published in May 2026. Stay tuned!

Is there a prize or grant to be awarded with the title?

ECoD NPO and its partners additionally bring well-established event formats, such as The Innovation in Politics Awards and ACT NOW Mayors' Conference, while the costs

associated with application and participation in the ECoD Call are covered by the City. Neither participating in the ECoD Call nor winning the title generates any prize money, but members of the European City Network profit from EU co-financing of meetings and webinars, as well as access to funding instruments and opportunities which can be jointly explored.

Can the title be bought?

No. The title of European Capital of Democracy cannot be purchased.

Cities are selected through a multi-stage and independent process involving both the Experts' Jury and the Citizens' Jury. The Experts' Jury evaluates the applications and identifies up to three shortlisted cities. The final decision is made independently by the Citizens' Jury.

Financial contributions associated with participation in the initiative are clearly outlined in the Call document and are independent of the selection outcome.

How independent is the selection process?

The selection process is structured in several stages and separates formal screening, expert evaluation and the final citizen decision.

First, the ECoD Team reviews all applications to verify whether they are complete and in line with the eligibility criteria. This is a formal step and does not determine the winner. After that, the Experts' Jury evaluates the applications, visits the most promising cities and draws up a shortlist of up to three Nominee Cities. The final decision is then taken by the Citizens' Jury. This multi-staged process is designed to ensure a fair and open selection process.

The [Experts' Jury](#) is composed of five distinguished professionals in democracy, urban planning, and development. It evaluates all call submissions, conducts on-site visits and assesses cities on the basis of clearly defined criteria. The Citizens' Jury, which consists of more than 4,500 citizens from across Europe, then makes the final selection via a secure online platform.

The [Call document](#) also includes further safeguards. Applicant cities must provide formal documentation, including political support for participation, self-evaluations, a city council resolution or equivalent, and clearly structured project information. For reasons of professional conduct and impartiality, participants are explicitly asked not to contact Jury members or members of the Advisory Board/Consortium directly. In addition, the initiative is monitored continuously, including with academic assistance from a partner institution.

Taken together, these elements are intended to ensure that the process is independent, methodologically credible and based on transparent rules and procedures.

Which is the official language to be used for the ECoD Call, for the submission and the related documents?

English is the official language to be used in all documents and correspondence.

Are there contact details for individual enquiries?

For further information or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via office@capitalofdemocracy.eu.

Who is the operating entity of the ECoD initiative?

European Capital of Democracy is a Europe-wide initiative of ECoD gemeinnützige GmbH (ECoD NPO), a non-profit limited liability company established under Austrian Federal Law and registered under FN 568933t in the Commercial Register of the Commercial Court of Vienna, supported by The Innovation in Politics Institute GmbH.

Is there a medium that regularly informs me about the ECoD initiative?

We publish a monthly newsletter to keep you informed about news and updates related to the European Capital of Democracy. You can subscribe to it on our [website](#).

How is ECoD NPO financed?

The necessary financial resources are raised through income from national and European funds, membership fees by Cities, activities (especially events, research and other services), subsidies from public institutions as well as private individuals, income from sponsoring, donations and other contributions.

Who are the Experts' Jury members?

The Experts' Jury Members are:

- Sanja Bojanic – University of Rijeka
- Paulina Fröhlich – Bertelsmann Foundation
- Bruno Kaufmann – Democracy International
- Haris Piplas – Drees & Sommer, Switzerland
- Antonella Valmorbida – ALDA Europe / European Partnership for Democracy

For more information, please refer to our [website](#).

Which resources are required from Cities?

European Capital of Democracy has been designed to provide a level playing field for all Cities over 100,000 inhabitants, asking for a minimum of resources while offering a maximum of benefits. [European City Network](#) members support the ECoD Initiative with a membership fee of EUR 5,000 per year, covering the participation in physical meetings (including all related costs), contributions to monthly webinars and other activities. Special conditions for smaller cities with limited financial capacities or special economic circumstances are possible. Furthermore, ECN members are invited to continuously apply for European and other project funding, and to implement

resulting activities together. All member Cities are expected to join activities of and contribute to the [European City Network](#) with their expertise, for three in-person meetings a year (2-3 days per meeting, hosted in one of our member cities) and monthly webinars for exchange, collaboration and capacity building. The designated European Capital of Democracy will be asked to participate in monthly Steering Board meetings to prepare the Democracy Year. During the Democracy Year in the title-holding City, representatives of all member Cities can present themselves and their democracy projects in various events and formats. The level of involvement is up to each City. The title-holding City is invited and expected to join the ECoD Consortium (EUR 50,000 per year to support the Democracy Year preparation, implementation and communication), to be formalised in the Steering Group meetings). Financial and organisational support for the co-organised events – The Innovation in Politics Awards (<https://awards.innovationinpolitics.eu/>), ACT NOW Mayors Conference (<https://actnow.capitalofdemocracy.eu/>), Truth, Lies and Democracy (<https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/truth-lies-democracy>) and Art of Democracy (<https://artofdemocracy.eu>) – needs to be decided 3-4 months before the launch of the Democracy Year.

Are there any fees associated with participation?

Yes. Cities participating in the European Capital of Democracy initiative contribute financially to the broader programme.

Cities that submit a successful application and join the European City Network contribute a membership fee of €5,000 per year. This contribution supports network activities such as meetings, workshops and exchange formats between member cities. In addition, the city that is selected as European Capital of Democracy is invited and expected to join the ECoD Consortium and contribute €50,000 per year to support the preparation, implementation and communication of the Democracy Year.

These contributions are publicly documented in the Call for Applications and are independent of the selection process.

We're concerned about the confidentiality clause. Does it mean that we can't publicly announce our participation in the ECoD initiative?

The confidentiality clause means that ECoD NPO doesn't announce the names of the Cities which do not forward a complete application, are not eligible or are rejected to join for other reasons as laid out in the [Call document](#) and its [annexes](#). Cities are free to publicly announce their participation in the ECoD initiative.