

# Building the European Capital of Democracy



Launch event under the auspices of the  
Secretary General of the Council of Europe,  
Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, and the Vice-President  
of the European Commission, Ms Dubravka Šuica.



**Building the  
European Capital  
of Democracy**

# Welcome to the European Capital of Democracy initiative!

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Starting in autumn 2021, every year a different European city will be designated the European Capital of Democracy. It will serve as the stage and floor for all of us who engage to innovate and strengthen democracy.

We – individuals, politicians, experts, activists, artists, foundations, administrations, academia and the corporate world – will meet there and work on what needs to be done, together.

**And it starts now.**

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**MARIJA PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ**

*Secretary General of the Council of Europe*

**“It will provide the double benefit of highlighting democratic initiatives and providing the catalyst for more as cities compete to hold the title – and then reap the benefits that come with holding it.”**

Cities have a very special role in the development of our democracies. They act as crucibles of ideas, innovation and civic action – and ever more so in today’s fast-changing world. The European Capital of Democracy is a timely and welcome recognition of that fact. It will provide the double benefit of highlighting democratic initiatives and providing the catalyst for more as cities compete to hold the title – and then reap the benefits that come with holding it. This initiative also shows that at a time when democracies are facing a variety of pressures, there are people and organisations that are steadfast in their determination to ensure our societies remain open, inclusive and forward-looking. The European Capital of Democracy will provide welcome opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate that fact. It is a welcome new feature in the European constellation.



## DUBRAVKA ŠUICA

*Vice-President of the European Commission  
for Democracy and Demography*

I am particularly honoured – in my capacity of Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for democracy and demography – to be the patron

**“At this time of extraordinary difficulty and uncertainty, seeing this initiative taking shape and reaffirming the crucial role of our cities as strongholds and laboratories of democracy is reassuring and promising.”**

of this exciting event for the European Capital of Democracy! At this time of extraordinary difficulty and uncertainty, seeing this initiative taking shape and reaffirming the crucial role of our cities as strongholds and laboratories of democracy is reassuring and promising. My objective from day one was to invest all my energy in citizens' engagement and to contribute to boosting their participation at all levels of decision-making. This is also the reason why I have been conducting multiple citizens' dialogues all over the EU over the last year – because it is only through direct engagement that we can successfully and constructively go through the green and digital transition, as well as the demographic change that is ultimately affecting the very way we live together. And is there any better way to do it but on the level closest to our citizens – our cities? May this initiative be an inspiration for the future of democracy, and for the future of Europe as a whole.



## MICHAEL LUDWIG

*Mayor of Vienna, Austria*

As the Mayor of Vienna, it is a great pleasure and an honour for me that the European Capital of Democracy initiative will be launched in our city. Vienna is

**“To be successful, a city requires participation and cohesion; it must have the objective of enabling its citizens to shape their city together.”**

among the most successful cities in the world in terms of quality of life, public infrastructure and social innovation. But to be successful, a city requires participation and cohesion; it must have the objective of enabling its citizens to shape their city together.

The principle factor in making a city successful is real cooperation and collaboration between political leaders, administration, social sector partners and civil society.

The development of a city is therefore inseparable from its democratic nature. Democratic cities are successful cities because they strive for social balance and enable participation. In a place where people live closely together, the way we live together will be continuously debated and negotiated. A democratic city provides the framework for this and facilitates democratic exchange, participation and codetermination.

The European Capital of Democracy initiative is standing up for a strong Europe with resilient democracies based on our common values of social equity, wellbeing and human rights. As Mayor of the City of Vienna I offer my full support to achieving this objective and I wish the initiative every success.



## PATRICIA KAHANE

Entrepreneur, Co-Founder of The Innovation in Politics Institute, and President of the Kahane Foundation which has funded over 200 philanthropic projects all over the world since 1991

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When I first heard about the European Capital of Democracy, I was immediately convinced by the idea and concept. Democratic processes are changing in to-

**“We must not lose any more time in building, sometimes re-building, the best possible conditions for guaranteeing democratic, fair and open societies.”**

day's world and innovative thinking and actions are needed: exchange of best practice across borders, and encouragement of active participation in the development of our societies by civil society, the corporate world, organisations and as many citizens as possible. My decision to support this initiative is based on the fact that we must not lose any more time in building, sometimes re-building, the best possible conditions for guaranteeing democratic, fair and open societies. It is impressive to see how many leading politicians, political thinkers, institutions and involved citizens have already joined in to bring the European Capital of Democracy to life. Its time has come.



## HELFRIED CARL

Managing Partner, The Innovation in Politics Institute

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Actions speak louder than words. I am fed up with laments about democracies in retreat as uttered in

**“Citizens will be empowered, new forms of participation will be tested, and courageous politicians willing to engage with civil society will be rewarded.”**

panel discussions and at conferences around the world. The European Capital of Democracy is the opposite of empty phrases. Citizens will be empowered, new forms of participation will be tried and tested, and courageous politicians willing to engage with civil society will be rewarded. Building a constructive discourse on democracy, sharing best practice from all over Europe and showcasing achievements annually in the respective Capital of Democracy will not only be more fun than just another conference, it will also have an impact on the real world. And that is what the citizens of Europe deserve.



# Voices

We would like to thank everyone who has met our European Capital of Democracy initiative with enthusiasm and joined us in our efforts to make it reality. They are politicians, political scientists, scholars, representatives of civil society and the business world, artists, engaged youths, and last not least our team. They all share fundamental democratic values and are committed to defending them. Their voices count in shaping this project.



### LÁSZLÓ ANDOR

*Secretary General, Foundation for European Progressive Studies*

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“The democratic experience is about controlling our present and our future – at the workplace, in cities, at the level of nation states and the level of the European Union.”



### KOSTAS BAKOYANNIS

*Mayor of Athens, Greece*

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“Democracy, with its clear reference to its origin in ancient Greece and particularly in Athens, is very often an ideal that requires effort from everyone in order to become reality and to thrive. Because the fruit of democracy only blossoms when measure and moderation appear, when there is respect not only for our own freedom but also for the freedom of others. Therefore, what we are seeking is not only that good people are in the majority. But that we demonstrate, all of us, our best qualities. This is called political culture. Political ethos. And the ethos of politics becomes in a prospective way the ethos of society. As long as moral and social cultivation of the human being continues to develop, democracy will also keep growing, thus approaching its ideal form.”



### DALIA BANKAUSKAITĖ

*Lecturer, Vilnius University Communications Faculty,  
Non-Resident Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA),  
Washington, DC, Lithuania Representative,  
The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Democracy is about listening to the voice of those who do not have a majority. Democracy constantly challenges; it gives itself a shake from time to time too. Democracy cannot exist without science and education, and culture. A meaningful life can be experienced only when actively participating in democracy.”



### ELISABETH BARTOVICS

*Project Manager and Covid-19 Event Lead,  
The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“If we want to change the world for the better, we need active participation and commitment. Because democracy depends on our personal decisions and mindsets, gathered into collective interests and turned into a common vision of society. In these challenging times in particular, we have to foster a paradigm shift from mere co-existence to collaboration, altruism and the spirit of community.”



### ANA RAFAELA BATISTA

*Youth Participant, ACT NOW Mayors' Conference 2020*

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"I am a European citizen from Portugal, and I am passionate about life. I believe in democracy because it gave me a voice and now finally I can be heard. I carry with me the history of a troubled past and I strive to make the future different, by constantly creating a new version of myself and the world I wish to live in."



### MICHAELA BENEDIGOVÁ

*Managing Director and Partner, SEESAME Communication Experts, Slovakia Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"The European Capital of Democracy initiative is an exceptional project that reinforces constructive approaches in politics. It increases public trust in politicians and institutions and thus sets a precedent for fighting populism. By highlighting the cities' real achievements, it proves that even politics can yield real results, benefiting European citizens."



### MAŁGORZATA BONIKOWSKA

*Co-Founder and President, THINKTANK, Scientific Advisor, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"Democracy should mean free society and citizens' participation in governance. It helps countries remain communities. It pushes politicians to take other people into consideration, too. But for democracy to be effective, constant civic education and commitment are needed. The European Capital of Democracy initiative is a platform for getting there."



### STEPHEN BOUCHER

*Founder, Dreamocracy, Benelux Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"Democracy cannot be taken for granted. We have seen it collapse in some countries. It's being attacked everywhere. The European Capital of Democracy will help us to appreciate, understand, celebrate and renew democracy in ways that everyone can relate to."



### ANNE BRASSEUR

*Luxembourg politician and former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*

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"Democracy starts at home."



### EDOARDO CAROLI

*Youth Participant, ACT NOW Mayors' Conference 2020*

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"I see democracy as the space for encountering many ideas, opinions, experiences, and perspectives, brought by a multitude of individuals representing our societies. Everybody has the right to be heard. Everybody has the duty to listen. This is what democracy is about."



### JÜRGEN CZERNOHORSZKY

*Executive City Councillor for Education, Integration, Youth and Personell, Vienna, Austria*

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"Cities have always been centres of democracy. But today they face the challenge of a growing gap between the residential population and the enfranchised population, which leads to problems regarding the democratic legitimacy of political decisions. Cities are therefore particularly called upon to facilitate the participation of all residents, by means of democratic innovations. Democracy is not a point of arrival but a process in which cities need to continually develop. Vienna is a good model in this regard, because it develops formats that enable all of the city's inhabitants to actively participate in shaping the place where they live. Strengthening this will be a key objective of innovative, democratic cities in the future."



### DELADAP

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"Democracy cannot be taken for granted ... and this is especially true in 2020. Wherever we look around the world, we can learn what a precious form of society we should be proud of living in! Our music is dedicated to diversity, tolerance, dialogue, openness and open borders, which every one of us has to defend constantly. So our music is our form of support for what seems to us even more important these days. Take part. Move forward. We are democracy."



### MATHIS DIPPON

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"Democracy paves the way to getting to know international peers at university – and not at war."



### ALEXANDER DOURCHEV

*Founder, All Channels Communication, Bulgaria Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"Democracy is not a gift. 30 years after the changes in Eastern Europe, we are once again facing the challenge of fighting for it. In this struggle, Europe must be united and remember that when politics begins to compromise, compromised politicians come into power. Everywhere."





### TAMARA EHS

*Democracy scholar and independent consultant  
for democratic innovation and political education*

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“Democracy and cities have a common tense: the future. Both democratic negotiation as well as urban cohabitation are based on permanent change. There are no final certainties, everything is subject to the demand to change. With their promise of the future, cities are constantly attracting new ideas and people who are realising the ideal of democracy as foreign friends. The micropolitical experiences of the city have a great impact, often transversely to national structures. From Krutikov’s Flying City to the real utopias of municipalism, it is always about the question: How do we want to live together tomorrow, as strangers, next door to one another?”



### YORDANKA FANDAKOVA

*Mayor of Sofia, Bulgaria*

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“In our Europe, democracy is not a concept, but participation and policies that improve quality of life. The key to achieving this goal is to highlight best practice and efforts in the fields of policy, education, culture, social inclusion and innovation.”



### PETER FELDMANN

*Lord Mayor of Frankfurt am Main, Germany*

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“Here in Frankfurt we know that democracy is not a fair-weather event, not a straight line to heaven. Democracy must be fought for and defended anew every day, in a civil discourse between citizens with equal rights. This is exhausting, can be a pain in the neck – but it will always be worth it. The Paulskirche in Frankfurt is the cradle of German democracy. Here, in the heart of Europe, it has its beginning. And it is from here that we will discuss the present and future of democracy.”



### HEINZ FISCHER

*Former Federal President of the Republic of Austria*

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“I support the European Capital of Democracy initiative because it is time to protect our democracies in Europe, by making them more resilient.”





### ULRICH FUCHS

*Programme Director for European Capitals of Culture Linz 2009 and Marseille-Provence 2013*

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“Cities play a major role as incubators of democracy, and of participation by citizens in courageous and innovative ways.”



### DUNJA GANSER

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“The European Capital of Democracy initiative highlights innovative and impressive efforts for democracy. I am proud to be a part of it. A democratic society is never guaranteed, it has to be re-shaped and re-developed by us all, as time goes on. To enable this, we need a focused vantage point from which we move forward and secure our future – the annual European Capital of Democracy.”



### LAURA GIESEN

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“We have to get rid of the much too comfortable idea that so-called ‘stable democracies’ can stay as they are. They need constant work and must change as societies change.”



### NICOLA GOLD

*Community Engagement and Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Living in a functioning democracy should be the norm, not a luxury. We need a culture of active participation and a common understanding that ‘We are in this together’. The European Capital of Democracy will enable us to strengthen democratic values and show that everyone can make a difference.”



### LUKAS GRAF

*Senior Developer, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“I think the importance of real democracy becomes most apparent in comparison with countries without it, where governments work against their people and not with them, leading to inequalities and oppression.”



### ULRIKE GUÉROT

*Founder and Director, European Democracy Lab,  
Professor of European Policy and the Study of Democracy,  
Danube University Krems*

“Participation and new, tangible forms of democracy and structuring society are important in societies that are losing their substance. Therein lies the strength of the planned democracy prize for European cities. But participation is only the form, not the function of democracy. The goal of democracy is the preservation of the common good. A mechanism is needed in order to create it.”



### MICHAEL HÄUPL

*Former Mayor of Vienna, Honorary President  
of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)*

“European cities are the cornerstones of democracy, both historically and in the present. Their provision of basic public services to citizens is an important element of municipal self-government and thus an important element of democracy itself.”



### ANDRÉ HELLER

*Multimedia artist*

“Democracy is the most effective safeguard of the opportunity to build and preserve a dignified and blessed life. We must protect it as our most precious treasure.”



### DANIEL HELLER

*Vice Chairman, Farner Consulting,  
Switzerland Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

“Swiss citizens know the system of direct democracy, with direct rights in respect of the constitution and legislation. Voters can request an amendment to the constitution or a popular vote on laws at federal, cantonal and communal level. This enables correction of the sins of omission – and commission – of government and of parliament.”



### AMADEA HORVATH

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

“Growing up with older brothers, I learned three important rules: If you want something, go and get it. United we are stronger. And: the majority decides. This applies just as well to democracy: if you want to see change you need to be on the forefront of it, cooperation is better than confrontation and, of course, the voice of every single person, including young people, counts.”



### ZDENĚK HŘIB

*Lord Mayor of Prague, Czech Republic*

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“Democracy was born in ancient Greek cities. The cities of today are still places where the real problems of real people are actually solved, regardless of the high-level ideology of national politics. I truly believe that this approach can bring about desirable change in our society.”



### MICHAL HVORECKÝ

*Author*

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“Extreme polarisation is slowly killing democracies. Corrupt leaders subvert institutions. We should learn from each other. Be aware. Listen. Discuss. Draw lessons from history.”



### EKREM İMAMOĞLU

*Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey*

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“I made a promise to the voters to become the most democratic Mayor not only in Turkey, but in the whole world. From the day I took over this position, I have reminded my colleagues of this promise at every opportunity. As Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, we gather around the table and find solutions to problems together. I define it as ‘brave democracy’. We act on the principle of providing equal services for everyone, regardless of anyone’s beliefs, ethnicity, political views or personal preferences.”



### JOSEF JANNING

*Former Head of the European Council on Foreign Relations, Berlin, Germany*

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“Democracy originated in urban society and that is where we need to revive it. Nowhere can good governance be more participative than in cities, nowhere else can people create so much positive change within a reasonable time.”



### GERGELY KARÁCSÓNY

*Lord Mayor of Budapest, Hungary*

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"I hope that cities are not only strongholds but also reformers of democracy. Both rural and urban populations have gone through a disillusionment process with neoliberalism and the old forms of representational democracy. This is largely the result of the financial crisis in 2008. To find a way out of the current crisis of democracy, we need to invest in citizens' engagement. It is much easier to engage citizens in the political process at the local level, so cities can play a major role here. And, as we know, urban populations are more diverse, have more information available to them and have direct, more personal experiences regarding globalisation."



### BRUNO KAUFMANN

*Global democracy correspondent*

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"The world is changing quickly. Simultaneous transnational crises are challenging our established thinking and the practices of modern representative democracy. People power at the national level has been weakened by polarised and populist politicians. But there is one democratic arena which displays fascinating resilience – and is producing innovative solutions with regard to the pandemic, the climate crisis and the fight against discrimination. Local and regional democracies point to a better future, in which all votes are counted on election day and all voices are heard every day. The European Capital of Democracy process is a critical contribution to strengthening this development and making it clear to everyone: we need more active citizenship, responsible leadership and good governance now."



### MORITZ KITTER

*Senior Developer, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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"If you could vote for the best political system, which one would you choose?"



### NADINE KORN

*Project and Event Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“For me, democracy consists of mutual respect, even if you consider your counterpart a rival. Democratic politicians establish trust in institutions and in checks and balances, and a set of shared beliefs, especially with regard to civil rights. Democracy also comes with responsibility for each of us: citizens have to stay informed, engaged and exercise their rights.”



### JULIA KOZAK

*Partner, C.point, Poland Representative,  
The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“For me the essence of democracy means openness in connection with attentiveness. This leads to innovative and meaningful solutions for improving our lives. Democracy is about balance and inclusion, the ability to listen to others respectfully while being aware of your own needs. I strongly believe in the European Capital of Democracy initiative. We want to promote learning about and working on democracy, so it may spread its silver lining around the world. Now more than ever.”



### IVAN KRASTEV

*Chairman, Centre for Liberal Strategies*

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“We need to manage change in democracy if we do not want the enemies of democracy to do it for us.”



### MANUELA KRÄUTER

*Programme Director, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Democracy requires a profound belief in equity and solidarity, embracing all people regardless of faith, origin, gender, and (dis)abilities. Demonising each other is one of the biggest threats to democracy. We need to listen to diverse perspectives and fight for human rights. No one should be left behind.”



### SIR MICHAEL LEIGH

*Senior Adjunct Professor of European and Eurasian Studies,  
Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies,  
Senior Adviser, German Marshall Fund of the United States*

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“The initiative to launch a European Capital of Democracy programme is particularly timely. Cities, being closer than central governments to citizens and their daily concerns, are often better placed to push back against detrimental tendencies and help safeguard democracy, the rule of law and human rights.”



### AXELLE LEMAIRE

*Partner and Global Head of Terra Numerata, Roland Berger,  
former French Minister of Innovation and Digital Affairs*

“Today, improving politics is essential for democracy in the changed environment. In daily work, it might often seem that there are good reasons not to change. So we need to provide encouragement and rewards – like the European Capital of Democracy initiative does – for offering new and real democracy to all.”



### JOSEF LENTSCH

*Managing Partner, The Innovation in Politics Institute, Germany,  
Co-founder and founding Board Member of NEOS, the liberal party  
in Austria*

“The political scientist Robert Dahl once said: ‘The democracy of our successors will not and cannot be the democracy of our predecessors. Nor should it be.’ This means that democracy requires constant innovation. Cities play a central role in this process, as cradles of democracy and hotbeds of innovation.”



### MARKUS LEWE

*Mayor of Münster, Germany,  
Vice-President, Association of German Cities*

“I support the European Capital of Democracy initiative because democracy guarantees justice, freedom and peace in Europe. In times of terror and populism the joint endorsement of these values is more important than ever.”



### MAGDALENA LINDORFER

*Organisation Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

“Our goal should be to create a society in which everyone has the same opportunities. Democracy is the best instrument for reaching this goal.”



### GIA PHU LIU

*First Level Support, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

“Hearing stories from my family about the Indochina wars and the Cambodian civil war, I gained a lot of insights into and impressions of their experiences of life, as I also have from other incidents which have happened and are still happening in Asia. So for me democracy has had a major impact on my birthplace and my current life, on how my parents chose their future.”



### SULAIMAN AL MAHMOUD

Office Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute

“Democracy means that people have the right and the power to choose who they want to be governed and represented by. Therefore, those of us lucky enough to live in a democracy hold the pens with which we can draw the future.”



### PROSCHAT MADANI

Actress

“We may exhaust ourselves in outrage over a lot of things these days. Forgetting that we always have the chance to act instead. The European City of Democracy initiative is putting the spotlight on those who are taking action already – for human rights, for democracy, for us. That is why I want to be part of it. Still outraged, but in a focused way for a change.”



### LENA MOROZOVA-FRIHA

Member of the Board and former Delegate-General of EuropaNova, France Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute

“The renewal of our democracies is a collective endeavour. Listening and empathy, benevolence and solidarity are necessary. Listening to citizens and representing them engenders trust in their elected representatives, in institutions, and in their future. Local and national elected officials are at the forefront of re-engaging citizens in public life: it is necessary to rebuild ties, highlight successes, promote bold approaches, and reinvent political thinking and decision-making processes so that they give a voice to citizens while moving away from binary methods. It is not enough to raise awareness of the right to vote. First, the role of the voter must be re-appropriated. When people feel part of a value-based community, they are more likely to feel responsible for their actions as well as their inaction.”



### PHILIPPE NARVAL

Secretary General, European Forum Alpbach

“Our democratic societies in Europe are under assault. To win this fight we need to reduce fear of the future, foster a broad understanding of facts, lead by example and create constructive change. All of this, and more, requires efficient dialogue, cooperation and communication as well as space and structure – across borders and party lines. The European Capital of Democracy initiative will provide all of that, through – and for – all of us.”





### DEIRIC O'BROIN

*Professor of Public Policy Practice, School of Law and Government,  
Dublin City University, Ireland*

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“‘Democracy’, literally ‘rule by the people’, implies that all citizens should play a role in the governing process. Yet varying definitions of ‘the people’ and ‘rule’ have resulted in vastly different interpretations of the purpose and nature of democratic participation. As a result, consideration of the nature of citizen involvement in political decision-making has been a major concern of attempts to clarify the meaning of democracy. I see the European Capital of Democracy initiative in this broader context. It highlights new citizen-led forms of democracy in action and showcases models of democratic practice that will inspire us to build on our existing efforts, and to challenge the various and numerous anti-democratic dynamics our democracies face. In short it will help remind us why vibrant and resilient democratic cities are essential to Europe.”



### JOAN O'FLYNN

*Social Policy Researcher and Facilitator,  
Ireland Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Healthy and true democratic engagement involves respecting people’s human dignity and equality. This includes actively empowering people, particularly those who may be excluded or distant from civic and political processes, to be involved in decisions that affect them and their communities.”



### DORINA OFRIM

*Former diplomatic advisor for GCC countries, Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français, Head of Fundraising & Partnerships France, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Being innovative and real laboratories for the future of democracy, cities are the level of government at which citizens can participate most completely. Thereby, local governments become an increasingly positive force and unique drivers of bold new political ideals and practices, perfectly fitting the challenges of the 21st century.”



### LEFTERIS PAPAGIANNAKIS

*Former Deputy Mayor for Migrant and Refugee Affairs,  
Municipality of Athens, Greece*

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“Democracy in Europe should be developed further to meet today’s challenges, and this can best be achieved in a cohesive society – working together, across borders and party lines. Only a joint effort by all democrats in Europe will succeed against anti-democratic and anti-European movements.”



### EMIN PECANIN

*Youth Participant, ACT NOW Mayors’ Conference 2020*

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“I became an active democratic person because I was willing to sacrifice my time and energy to motivate other young people to start changing their environment so they can live in a way that suits them.”





### LISA PELLING

*Political scientist, Chief Analyst, Arena Idé think tank,  
Sweden Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“The European Capital of Democracy will be a beacon of hope in dark times – an indispensable source of inspiration in the fight for stronger democratic institutions to protect the rights and freedoms of all Europeans.”



### WOLFGANG PETRITSCH

*President, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation*

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“As a citizen I have always been a staunch believer in democratic practice. As a diplomat I know from empirical evidence that war between democracies is extremely unlikely.”



### ETIENNE PFLIMLIN

*Chairman, Fondation du Crédit Mutuel*

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“This is the moment to reinvent and revive European democracy. So that Europe remains that unique space of freedom with great quality of life. And where today’s challenges – which are on an unparalleled scale – must and can be taken up together, in a living community such as the Renaissance city of Strasbourg.”



### ROSEN PLEVNELIEV

*Former President of Bulgaria*

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“If we want our children to inherit a world of lasting peace and human dignity, the time has come for all of us to defend, strengthen and build up democracy and European values.”



### ALPO RÄINÄ

*Managing Director and Partner, Mailand Communications,  
Finland Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“For me, democracy is an essential part of the European tradition that emphasises the individual’s freedom. The European Capital of Democracy initiative crosses national borders and unites the thoughts of citizens.”



### DIMITRIS ROULIAS

*Managing Partner, Out of the Box PR,  
Greece Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“We were born and raised in countries of the democratic West, where democracy was considered a given. Along the way we relaxed, underestimating the signs and the dangers, allowing democratic institutions to be undermined and worn down. The time has come to react, to demonstrate strength and daring, and to actively support creative, ambitious concepts such as the European Capital of Democracy.”



### JOHANNA SEPPÄLÄ

Head of the Unit Participation and Information,  
Helsinki City Executive Office, Finland

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“For me, democracy is based on openness, making use of the skills of residents and communities, non-discrimination and equality. I strongly believe in human rights, as well as equal and non-discriminatory participation opportunities for everyone. On the European, national and city level, people have well-established networks and democracy is a basic necessity of a functional society. Good practice has to be co-ordinated and disseminated, and the European Capital of Democracy initiative is a powerful way to do that.”



### ROBERT SCHAFLEITNER

Head of Communications, The Innovation in Politics Institute

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“Democracy is not a natural given. Democracy has been created by people and can be destroyed again by people. Therefore, it is crucial that we work constantly for the preservation of democratic values.”



### PAUL M. SILLS

Founder, The Skills Group, Senior Strategist,  
The Innovation in Politics Institute

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“Europe and its societies need new content and new models of politics so that we can overcome the big challenges together and in a democratic way.”



### MARTIN SLATER

Founder of PR company Noesis,  
Italy Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute

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“Cities are so often the focus of conflict which can sometimes turn violent. But the survival of cities is linked to the resolution of such conflict. In cities, people have to live side by side and need to acquire the values of tolerance and understanding. Democracy and the various forms it takes are crucial in the resolution of conflict. What happens in cities provides rich lessons for wider society.”



### ROMAN SNEHOTTA

Head of Awards, The Innovation in Politics Institute

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“Democracy means that your voice is just as important as your ears.”



### DIRK STERMANN

*Author and comedian*

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“Democracy is exchange of views. It is talking and listening.”



### EDWARD STRASSER

*Founder and CEO, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“It does not happen often in life that you learn about an idea and instantly know: ‘That’s it! A silver bullet!’ This was the case when my partner Josef Lentsch first mentioned the European Capital of Democracy idea to me while we were waiting at a gate at Berlin Tegel. After landing in Vienna, I called Helfried Carl to tell him about it – he was the Austrian ambassador to Slovakia back then. Helfried not only shared my enthusiasm but joined us immediately after leaving his post at the foreign ministry, to become the head of this initiative. Similar experiences followed with Patricia Kahane and many others. So it quickly became clear to all of us: The European Capital of Democracy is a great and necessary concept which has huge potential. The only thing we need to do is to build it! Today, many mayors, citizens, institutions and organisations have joined us to make it happen. As we have now reached the stage of officially announcing the start of this programme, we invite you to join and use the European Capital of Democracy as a platform to boost your own initiatives. We think cooperatively, and together we will find a way to meet your needs.”



### NICOLAS STÜHLINGER

*Senior Advisor, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“We should not rely on politicians to protect democratic values. We owe it to future generations that we stand up today and stand our ground.”



### SARA SUŠANJ

*Youth Participant, ACT NOW Mayors’ Conference 2020*

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“I see democracy as a long-term learning process about trust, the needs and realities of other people, giving a voice to all members of society, and a commitment to making the world a little bit better than it was before. It implies active participation and contribution to something larger than ourselves.”

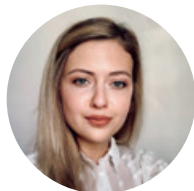


### RILEY THOROLD

*Global Programme Manager, Royal Society  
for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce,  
UK Representative, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Democracy is more than just a vote. At its best it’s an ongoing process of deliberation, learning and empowerment; a project built on equality and fairness. By identifying and showcasing democratic accomplishments around Europe, the European Capital of Democracy initiative provides valuable inspiration to those around the world galvanised by this ideal.”



### GALYNA TKACHENKO

*Project Assistant, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“For me democracy means that no one, be it an individual or an organisation, has the right to dictate our future. As citizens, we can actively participate in politics through voting and elections. Democracy protects our basic human rights and guarantees such principles as political equality, absence of privilege and free expression.”



### FRANZISKA TOMETSCHKEK

*Social Media Specialist, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Democracy is like a concert where different voices, instruments and rhythms play a melody.”



### ANDREAS TREICHL

*President of the Supervisory Board, ERSTE Foundation, Vienna*

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“Values like truth, democracy and independent thinking are heavily under attack. And all of them are important pillars of prosperity – let us protect them!”



### MATÚŠ VALLO

*Architect, city activist, Mayor of Bratislava, Slovakia*

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“I am a big believer in engaging people in the development of cities and the places where they live. Authentic and transparent local politics may help to restore trust in democracy.”



### DAVID VAN REYBROUK

*Author and cultural historian*

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“We have democratised education, we have democratised information and communication. Now, let us democratise democracy itself. Let’s make citizens part of the decision-making process. Refusing to do so is refusing to bring democracy into the 21st century.”



### ERION VELIAJ

*Mayor of Tirana, Albania*

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“As a true advocate of cities becoming more inclusive, more responsive to people’s needs, more open and more transparent, I welcome and support the European Capital of Democracy initiative, a much-needed one for young democracies such as Albania’s, but not only for them.”



### GERDI A. VERBEET

*Former President of the Netherlands House of Representatives*

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“Europe can only stay strong if it provides the will, the wisdom and the expertise of all its citizens with a strong voice when it comes to decision making – in villages and cities, in their own country and in the European Union as a whole. Therefore, I support this initiative.”



### LECH WAŁĘSA

*Former Chairman of the ‘Solidarity’ movement,  
former President of Poland, Nobel Peace Prize winner 1983*

.....

“While we reflect on the historic victory of the Polish Solidarity movement on its fortieth anniversary, we need to address the fact that our freedom and openness are in crisis. To defend the free and open world we need to firmly stand up to challengers that see our values and way of life as a threat. We need to make people feel once again that institutions represent them and are accountable to their voices.”



### THOMAS WENINGER

*Secretary General of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns*

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“Cities are the cradle of democracy. Therefore, they are the best place to start improving it.”



### MARIE WUTZLER

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute, Germany*

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“My parents grew up under the dictatorship of East Germany. Their stories taught me the values of a liberal democracy and how quickly they can slip away. We will have to work together to protect the freedoms we enjoy and that we so easily take for granted.”



### KATHARINA ZANGERL

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Democracy is no coincidence, it's a constant debate on the integration of our diverse interests into common visions for society. And the best part is that we can all contribute to it!”



### EVA ZEGLOVITS

*Political Scientist, Managing Director,  
Institute for Empirical Social Studies (IFES), Vienna*

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“Democracy in its best form is the rule of the many for the benefit of all. It ensures that people have a say in politics, that each single voice counts. People are enabled to deliberate, to voice their opinions, to decide, to take part in defining and amending the rules under which they live. Moreover, democracy ensures that governments can be made accountable for their decisions. The European Capital of Democracy will highlight best practice and thus motivate cities to strengthen democratic processes.”



### JOSEF ZEHETNER

*Project Manager, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“As the largest common economic area, Europe can set the rules of the game for data protection, taxation or labour law worldwide. We have to make sure that this is done in a way that meets the highest democratic standards.”



### UTA ZEUGE-BUBERL

*Chief Editor, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“We have to understand that democracy is not a rigid construct handed down since the time it was practised in Ancient Greece. In my view, it is an ever-changing and evolving political mindset, moving with the challenges of the times. You and me, and all of us, have the right and the means to help develop democracy for the present and for the future.”



### ELKE ZUCKERMANN

*Founder, The Innovation in Politics Institute, communications professional, advisor to corporations, Founder of the NGO Act.Now*

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“Young people especially deserve to be able to continue living their lives in a free and democratic society. And to be invited to contribute their ideas and efforts to building it. The European Capital of Democracy will provide ample opportunities for exactly that.”



### RONNY ZUCKERMANN

*Founder and Senior Strategist, The Innovation in Politics Institute*

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“Talking about myself, I am a European. I am a democrat. I want to live in a free and open society. And I want my children to live in one, too. Therefore, I have no choice. I must work for a functioning and desirable democracy and so I must also work for the European Capital of Democracy. It is as simple as that. But that’s enough about me.”



# About the European Capital of Democracy

Cities play an essential role in finding a path forward for democracy. Every European Capital of Democracy will serve as a catalyst for democratic development, provide space for democratic innovation and exchange, and showcase groundbreaking work to improve politics in Europe.



# In a Nutshell

We invite you to join us in creating a Europe-wide initiative for strengthening democracy: the European Capital of Democracy.

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A European Capital of Democracy will be designated for every year, starting in 2021. In cooperation with civil society and citizens, the designated city will, throughout the course of the year, curate, organise, and implement a wide range of activities and events designed to improve and strengthen democracy. Visitors from all over Europe – politicians, experts, artists, citizens, and members of the media – will be invited to observe and to participate in these efforts.

Furthermore, the city will host events such as international conferences, exhibitions on societal change, fairs dedicated to the latest participation technologies, and music and film festivals. This gives organisations, foundations, and institutions plenty of opportunities to come together, discuss and exchange best practices, and implement their initiatives.

**What we aim to accomplish:** We aim to establish a highly visible space where the citizens of Europe come together, get involved, experience new forms of real democracy in action and draw inspiration from a comprehensive programme designed to bring democracy forward and rebuild trust. Best democratic practice will shine under the media spotlight.

**How cities will be selected:** Each city's application must include a self-evaluation of their democratic track record and an outline for a year-long programme aimed at strengthening and broadening democratic practice. Based on transparent criteria, our group of experts will create a shortlist from all applicants. Finally, a jury of 10,000 citizens, representative of the European population, will select the winner.

**What cities will get:** A city carrying this title will enjoy a wide range of benefits, such as an enhanced international reputation as a centre of education and innovation, the chance to host international events and meetings of leading European politicians, and of course heightened civic pride.

For the cities which are not selected, the competitive application process in itself will have an impact on politicians, administration staff and citizens alike.

**The first two cities:** In 2021 and 2022, while we are developing the envisaged selection process, two cities will lead the way in bringing this initiative to life and serve as showcases of what to expect in the future.

**Who we are:** Based in Vienna and Berlin, with offices and partners in 15 countries, The Innovation in Politics Institute constitutes a Europe-wide organisation dedicated to improving democracy across borders and beyond party lines. We also present The Innovation in Politics Awards: from 2017 to 2020, more than 2,000 courageous and creative political projects were submitted by politicians and presented to a jury of over 4,000 citizens.

## HOW CITIES CAN DESIGN THEIR EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME

Cities are invited to create a multi-faceted programme and to implement democratic lighthouse projects. Additionally, the European Capital of Democracy hosts high-profile international events in collaboration with the organisers, institutions, foundations, and other partners.

### ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

A democracy-themed youth summer camp and music festival or the European Youth Parliament attract young people from all over Europe.

### INNOVATIVE FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Cities bring their best participation projects to light, such as citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, or the crowdsourcing of ideas.

### FOSTERING A EUROPE-WIDE DISCOURSE

Politicians, experts, and citizens are invited to come together at events such as the exchange conference and democracy fair titled It's our European Union or the ACT NOW Mayors' Conference.

### TACKLING CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACY

Tracks about climate, education, participation, and technology showcase possible solutions for pressing issues.

### CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Exhibitions, performances, literature, and more as artistic expressions of democracy

# What We Achieve

Democracy is changing and we have to address this change. Many people are already creating ways of reshaping how we live together and they need our support. By presenting such efforts on the stage of a European Capital of Democracy, we achieve ...

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## ... incubation

Promising new initiatives aimed at improving our democracies receive the space and attention of a Europe-wide audience so they can sharpen their focus and grow in size.

## ... acceleration

New concepts for democratic political processes are ultimately expedited by virtue of the active exchange of ideas and best practices by stakeholders and innovators who come together and participate in European Capital of Democracy activities.

## ... hands-on designing

of working solutions. The European Capital of Democracy functions as a lab for political prototyping in the fields of citizen participation, strengthening individual freedom, and creating social balance.

## ... trust in democracy

Seeing is believing. Citizens of the European Capitals of Democracy experience innovation and best practice which they can trust. A Europe-wide audience – visitors, media, and professionals – becomes engaged and invested in positive change.

## ... impact across borders

At all levels of society and across borders, the initiative is aimed at creating a peer network of individuals who are devoted to improving and developing democracy.



# Impact

Since the European Capital of Democracy aims to strengthen democracy long-term, impact is at the heart of the initiative. Research and evaluation at all levels will therefore be among its constitutive elements.

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A 2004 study on the European Capital of Culture for the European Commission demonstrated that the designation alone serves as a catalyst for the cultural development and transformation of participating cities. This means that not only winning the title of European Capital of Democracy but also the application process itself will stimulate democratic development and even elicit transformation of participating cities.

## Moreover, we intend to focus on the following questions:

- Does participation in the European Capital of Democracy initiative lead to more mutual trust between citizens as well as citizens and governments?
- Does participation in the European Capital of Democracy initiative lead to better decisions?
- Does participation in the European Capital of Democracy initiative empower citizens?
- Does the European Capital of Democracy initiative have an impact on non-participating cities?

In cooperation with foundations, international organisations, as well as universities and think tanks, the questions listed above will be addressed in cities before and after their time as European Capital of Democracy, or during and after the application process. Additionally, specific sub-projects may be researched in depth.

The European Capital of Democracy initiative will serve as a rich “living laboratory” for political science and democratic practice, providing plenty of opportunity for medium and long-term partnerships with Europe-wide institutions.

By presenting democracy and its innovative development as a positive contribution to problem-solving in our societies, we will create new communicative spaces for proponents of democracy – which will hopefully be reflected in the media.





# How We Can All Benefit

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**European Capitals of Democracy** will attract leading thinkers, highly motivated visitors, state-of-the-art technology developers, pre-eminent artists, and renowned journalists. Cities, after all, are the historic cradle of democracy. The process of bidding for the title and the curation of a democratic programme as a part of this process will in and of itself serve to enhance democratic practice in participating cities.

**The citizens of Europe** enjoy hands-on involvement in developing new forms of democratic politics: as jury members, as participants in exchange conferences, and as visitors.

**Politicians in Europe** are inspired by best practice. They participate in an open, personal network of political innovators beyond party lines, across borders, and at all levels of policy-making.

**The partners of the European Capital of Democracy initiative** participate in launching a sustainable, Europe-wide institution built to last for decades. The European Capital of Democracy initiative makes a substantial contribution to ensuring our quality of life.

**The Innovation in Politics Institute** accomplishes its mission: building a stronger Europe based on our common values of social balance, prosperity, human rights, and democracy.

# Why Cities?

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Cities are incubators of democracy.

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Cities are often best placed to help safeguard and develop democracy, protect the rule of law, and uphold human rights. Why? Cities are closest to the needs, talents, and dynamics of their populations, and their scale makes them agile and flexible. They can tailor programmes, policies, infrastructure, and spatial development to fit their goals and budgets effectively.

Cities can create opportunity and innovation for improving quality of life. Many cities have shown the way by organising citizens' consultations on issues such as the process of immigrant integration, traffic-free zones, the preservation of cultural heritage, and improving public transport. Meanwhile, consultative processes at the city level are expanding into additional areas such as "the smart city" and the use of renewable energy.

Our rules and regulations allow for a wider interpretation of the term "city": smaller cities which are geographically close might join forces to apply for the European Capital of Democracy title. A city might also include activities in its surrounding region or rural areas in its application.

# What European Capitals of Democracy Do

European Capitals of Democracy establish themselves as a stage for innovation in democracy.

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Cities act on two levels. Firstly, they implement their own programmes. Each city develops, curates, organises and realises a wide range of activities and events, all designed to help innovate and strengthen democracy – together with civil society, citizens, and local partners. Citizens, politicians, experts, artists, and media representatives from other European countries are then invited to witness these efforts first-hand and to participate in them.

Secondly, they host various initiatives, projects, and events from all over Europe. The European Capitals of Democracy attract people and organisations from many countries who subsequently present their initiatives to visitors, discuss and exchange their best practice concepts, and come together to work toward and celebrate a democratic Europe.

These are the areas which the cities are supposed to address in their programmes for the respective year. Programmes should focus on innovation and proof of concept – and involve civil society.

## 1. Participation

The city provides inspiring solutions on how to involve citizens in setting the goals and priorities of the city administration, and in deciding how these goals should be achieved.

## 2. Bridge-building

The city brings together various groups in society, provides effective methods of building intercultural and community engagement, motivates citizens to collaborate in pursuit of achieving common goals, and exhibits due respect for minority rights.

## 3. Entrepreneurship

The city provides for an equal and open playing field for founders of new initiatives, reduces bureaucratic restrictions for all citizens, and enables citizens to realise their dreams – whether social or commercial.

## 4. Human Rights

The city fosters the implementation of the European human rights and equality standards.

## 5. Basic Needs

The city takes action to provide for the changing needs of all citizens in a way that builds sustainable communities and neighbourhoods – from housing to jobs, from education to services for older people, from transport to telecommunication, and from environmental protection to access to the arts.

# What European Capitals of Democracy Get

Cities carrying this title enjoy a range of benefits beyond improving democracy for their inhabitants.

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## Strengthening the city's reputation

- The city will benefit by enhancing its importance as a centre of education, innovation, and business thanks to a stable and open environment.
- A more hands-on and accessible approach to the sometimes “dry” topic of democracy reaches a broader public.
- Leading European politicians meet in the Capital of Democracy.
- Partnerships with universities and think tanks who carry out research into democratic activities and projects are fostered under the umbrella of the European Capital of Democracy initiative.
- The city will receive support for planning and organising all activities related to the title.
- Significant networking events bring together leading politicians, experts, members of the art world, and media representatives from all of Europe and beyond.

- In addition to hosting its own programme, high-profile international events will take place in the European Capital of Democracy, such as the European Youth Parliament supported by the Schwarzkopf Foundation, and major events organised by The Innovation in Politics Institute such as the Act.Now International Mayors' Conference.



# Tracks

The European Capital of Democracy initiative invites institutions, corporations and foundations to participate in a series of tracks on topics vital to improving democracy.

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## Climate Track

Participatory climate action taken at the city level can help entire regions in reaching their climate targets and can serve as an inspiration for towns and villages in scaling up their climate-related practices and ambitions.

The Climate Track will feature inspiring examples, programmes, and events on addressing climate change whilst enhancing democratic capacity within the chosen city or region.

## Education Track

A good education enables citizens to make informed choices. The Education Track showcases best practice in civic education from all over the world. It fosters the learning of democracy for different demographics.

By tailoring learning experiences according to the specific preferences and needs of all citizens, a diverse population can be reached. Each European Capital of Democracy can produce its specific framework reflecting its unique identity and areas of interest.

## Participation Track

A European Capital of Democracy implements measures and programmes to foster participation. The Participation Track highlights innovative mechanisms for all citizens to take part in decision-making at all levels of government, such as citizens assemblies or participatory and gender budgeting.

## Technology Track

Technology is critical for securing and improving liberal democracy. The Technology Track will explore challenges and opportunities for our democracies generated by the digital revolution, including AI and disinformation.

The Technology Track includes the design of each year's topics, online information and participation campaigns, the use of specific technological solutions on-site, as well as events for experts, the political field and the broader public throughout the year.





# How Cities Become European Capitals of Democracy

Cities across the 47 member states of the Council of Europe are invited to take part in a competitive three-stage selection process.

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In 2021 and 2022, while we are developing the envisaged selection process, two cities will lead the way in bringing this initiative to life and serve as showcases of what to expect in the future. Other cities will be then be invited to participate as well.

## **Stage 1: Application by the city**

Becoming a European Capital of Democracy is a joint effort between the city administration, civil society, and citizens. Co-creation and co-governance designs will also be welcomed. Meanwhile, all application procedures are designed to ensure that a European Capital of Democracy has its citizens at heart.

In their application, cities provide information on two levels: firstly, how their track record in improving democracy in recent years qualifies them to become a European Capital of Democracy, and secondly, how their planned programme meets the criteria.

While the track record is important for credibility, proposed actions by the city as a European Capital of Democracy will carry more weight in the selection process.

Cities may include activities in their surrounding region in their application: in rural areas, voluntary work, mobile education or counselling as well as regional networking often play a significant role in helping generate participation in democratic processes – especially among young people.

## **Stage 2: Assessment by experts**

The international Group of Experts assesses all applications. If all formal criteria are met, experts will visit the city to conduct formal interviews and on-site assessment. From all entries, the Group of Experts then assemble a shortlist of the five cities which best meet all criteria and which propose the most comprehensive programme for the whole year.

## **Stage 3: Selection by the citizens' jury**

A jury of 10,000 European citizens across the 47 member states of the Council of Europe has the final vote on the shortlisted cities. Voting takes place online and in English, using a secure database. The jury will consist of a cross-section of society so that their decisions will be comparable, objective, and fair.

# Selection Criteria

A transparent set of objective criteria applicable to all contender cities will be developed and published.

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At the heart of a European Capital of Democracy are the citizens – meaning all inhabitants of a local political community regardless of age, gender, and legal status – and the public sphere where dialogue and governance happen.

The activities of a European Capital of Democracy are based on the European Convention of Human Rights and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## **What does it take to become the European Capital of Democracy?**

The commitment to Human Rights, a clean track record regarding democratic processes, the capacity to be a platform for Europe's discourse on democracy, and an innovative programme aimed at strengthening and broadening democratic practice.

Along with a self-evaluation based on the 12 Principles of Good Governance and Democracy as endorsed by the Council of Europe, an applicant city is expected to submit a mission statement outlining its ambitions as well as a draft programme along a set of 12 Dimensions for a Curated Programme.

A prospective European Capital of Democracy must be able to show that both the local government, its administration and its civil society stand behind the strategies and ambitions set out in its application.

## **External audit**

An external and certified auditor will ensure that the selection process is conducted according to the official criteria as well as the terms and conditions of the initiative at all stages.



# The Group of Experts

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The Group of Experts assembles some of the most recognized experts and practitioners in the field of political and social science and oversees jury processes in Europe.

It is responsible for the methodological credibility as well as the development of the rules and procedures of the European Capital of Democracy.

The evaluation process and criteria will be developed and implemented by the Group of Experts.

The Group of Experts acts as a pre-selection panel in the selection process. Its members audit all submissions by cities, conduct on-site interviews, and draw up a shortlist of the best candidates to the citizens' jury.

The Group meets twice a year and advises on all issues related to the selection process.



# Timeline

## 18 September 2020

Official launch

## Spring 2021

Call for submissions for first elected European Capital of Democracy 2023-2024

## March 2022

The first contender cities have completed their registration.

## August 2022

A jury of 10,000 citizens selects the next European Capital of Democracy.

## 15 September 2022

Public announcement of the jury-selected third European Capital of Democracy on the International Day of Democracy

## 15 September 2023

Opening ceremony for the third European Capital of Democracy on the International Day of Democracy

2020

2021

2022

2023

## Autumn 2020

Public announcement of the first pre-selected European Capital of Democracy

## From autumn 2020

Europe-wide communication campaign to generate awareness and promote future submissions

## Autumn 2021 – Autumn 2022

First pre-selected city holds the title of European Capital of Democracy

## Autumn 2021

Public announcement of the second pre-selected European Capital of Democracy

## Autumn 2022 – Autumn 2023

The second pre-selected city holds the title of European Capital of Democracy.

## September 2022 - September 2023

The third European Capital of Democracy prepares its year-long programme. Pre-events with jurors, civil society, politicians, and other citizens

## April – July 2022

The international Group of Experts assesses all applications, visits cities for interviews, and selects a shortlist of five cities.



# Best Practices

It is our privilege to have access to an abundance of proven innovative political projects from all over Europe. The following selection shows how much can be achieved at city level. It may serve as inspiration for what a European Capital of Democracy can contribute to strengthening democracy and improving the wellbeing of its citizens.

# Athboy Walkability and Inclusive Town Developments



**DAVID GILROY**

*Councillor in Meath County Council, Ireland*

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## **Accessibility and inclusivity for all citizens regardless of age or physical, cognitive, or sensory impairment.**

Councillor David Gilroy promotes Athboy as an inclusive and progressive town. He recently led an Age-Friendly Walkability Audit in the town to address accessibility. Uniquely, this audit considered cognitive and sensory impairment, as well as physical access issues. Cllr Gilroy works closely with the business community and Athboy has been nominated as 'Meath's Friendliest Town' in the Retail Excellence Awards. Athboy has a community centre that features a 'Changing Places' toilet facility which has a height-adjustable bench and hoists to enable people with more profound disabilities to use it.



Cllr Gilroy is Chairman of Boyne Valley Tourism, instrumental in the 'Spirits of Meath' festival which is being supported to develop as an international festival centred on the original site of Samhain/Halloween. Athboy is close to one of Meath's two Gaeltacht areas, where the Irish language is spoken daily, and hosted the 'Leinster Fleadh' 2019 – a prestigious traditional Irish music competition. There are also many other inclusive and progressive developments, including biodiversity zones and a sensory garden, which are developed in consultation with the community.

# The Grand Walk of Athens



**KOSTAS BAKOYANNIS**

*Mayor of Athens, Greece*

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## **A comprehensive plan for the revival and integration of the historic city centre.**

The Grand Walk of Athens will connect Athens' historic neighbourhoods to its world-class archaeological treasures for the first time, and invites Athenians and visitors to join in the conversation about this plan.

We are starting to realise our new vision for promoting democracy with the Grand Walk of Athens, a multi-year project which encourages citizens to reimagine public space and change the way we determine our priorities as a city government.



The project calls for more than 6 kilometres of cycling and walking paths, creating corridors that will no longer be designated exclusively for car traffic, but which should be safe for a mix of uses and ready for sustainable mobility. The project also creates space for expanding the green canopy, giving our city more shade and cool places to help us face the challenges posed by an increasing number of extreme heatwaves. The project began with a pilot phase that encourages citizens' participation in the realization of the project, allowing them to see their ideas implemented with much greater speed than a typical city project and before the changes become permanent. We hope these new procedures will lead us toward a future that is more accessible, inclusive, and resilient.



# Bonn Participates



**ASHOK SRIDHARAN**

*Lord Mayor of Bonn, Germany*

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**Online participation: an online platform designed to encourage civic participation.**

The city of Bonn is taking civic participation to the next level – citizens' involvement in decision-making processes is encouraged and initiated by politicians, administrators and citizens alike. The city provides an online platform which helps citizens to take part in the organisation of their city and influence municipal decisions. A dedicated Advisory Panel on Citizen Participation prepares, implements and reviews participation processes, such as the citizens' dialogue on the city budget (2019/2020); the Bonn bike dialogue to improve cycling; and a platform for citizens to report concerns, problems and deficiencies in their immediate environment.

## MITMACHEN. PARTICIPATE. PARTICIPER. **BONN.**

By providing transparent information to all citizens about planning and projects in the city, this project facilitates direct citizen participation and takes an inclusive approach to tackling urban issues. Inclusiveness is the focus of the strategy, especially with regards to young people and marginalised groups.

# Közösségi Gyűlés Budapest – Community Assembly Budapest



**GERGELY KARÁCSONY**

*Lord Mayor of Budapest*

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## **Citizens select priorities for Budapest's new climate policy.**

Climate change affects everyone, so cities have to make sure they facilitate a just transition. The Metropolitan Municipality of Budapest will develop a new climate strategy based on the goals set by the city and the areas it wants to focus on.



A community assembly will discuss these issues and then make proposals to the municipality. The city invited 10,000 randomly-selected citizens to a Climate Assembly with the theme 'There is a climate emergency – What should Budapest do?' A civic lottery will select 50 participants from among all registered residents who will – with the help of experts and civil society organisations – identify the city's priorities for its new climate policy. These priorities will then be part of the climate strategy which the General Assembly (the Budapest municipal council) will adopt in October 2020.

# Ferla Agorà – Ideas Square



**MICHELANGELO GIAN SIRACUSA**

*Mayor of Ferla, Italy*

**Citizens take part in the democratic process and governance of their town by meeting on the main square.**

In 2014, the Municipality of Ferla, a town in South-East Sicily, experimented with an initiative titled 'Ferla Agorà – Ideas Square' at the suggestion of various citizens. This fun, new form of democratic participation brings together the governance of the territory with the local community. Meetings are scheduled in the main square of the town where citizens are free to discuss issues relevant to the community – from the urban street network to the organisation of the calendar of events. When decisions need to be made, participants vote using coloured cards.



The aim of the project is to encourage the development of community dialogue and democratic participation by involving citizens directly in local governance through voting and sharing ideas. In addition to community assemblies, smart communication methods have been added to reach the younger population. This led to the birth of 'Filo' – a direct Whatsapp information service to facilitate communication between the Municipality of Ferla and its citizens, and monthly live streaming on Facebook with the Mayor.



# Girastorie



**ELENA BUCCOLIERO**

*Comune Ferrara*

## **Digital workshops to enable virtual social contact between children and young people through storytelling**

Lockdown measures during the Covid-19 pandemic posed great challenges for everybody. Especially vulnerable groups, such as children living in foster care or mother-child facilities, suffered the psychological effects of isolation. To support these young people and children and to ease their loneliness and boredom, the community of Ferrara in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy initiated a project to help girls and boys to continue maintaining relationships with their friends despite physical distancing measures.

The Girastorie (Digital Stories) project combines storytelling with communication and connects children and young people from different cities in the region. Creating stories together on a digital platform helps them to travel in their imaginations and feel part of a bigger reality without leaving their homes.



# Frankfurt Democracy Convention 2019



**PETER FELDMANN**

*Mayor of Frankfurt am Main, Germany*

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## **Bringing citizens together to discuss how to increase active participation in local democracy.**

The aim of the Frankfurt Democracy Convention is to make political participation tangible with a focus on mutual exchange. The purpose is to create a culture of constructive local debate and reduce feelings of alienation from the political system. Democracy is to be reconceived as practice – a creative process of active co-shaping through the consultation of many different people. In February 2019, fifty randomly selected Frankfurt citizens met for three days to discuss how citizens' participation could be improved in Frankfurt. Many different perspectives and ideas were represented, resulting in concrete recommendations for action.



The first Democracy Convention showed that it is possible to actively involve people in local political decision-making – citizens advise politicians and are central to the democratic process. Men and women from all districts of Frankfurt were invited in equal numbers, and one-third of the 50 participants in the Democracy Convention were randomly selected from groups of underrepresented citizens, such as young, low-income, migrant and homeless people. This type of selection is intended to bring together people with different perspectives, in contrast to other political events where participants are personally invited.

# Open Gdansk



**PAWEŁ ADAMOWICZ (1965-2019)**

*Former Mayor of Gdansk, Poland*

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## **Open data: fostering trust between a city government and its people.**

When the city of Gdansk needed to increase trust between the citizens and the local government, it opted for more transparency and implemented an open data programme. The development of the policy initially encountered a lot of challenges, but it has in the meantime become a fine-tuned mechanism.

On [otwartygdansk.pl](http://otwartygdansk.pl) various relevant data sets are available regarding city finances, demographics, public transport, investment and the environment. Mission accomplished: the citizens' confidence in the city government has demonstrably improved.





# Wymiennikownia – Youth Centre for Design and Social Innovation



**WOJCIECH SZCZUREK**

*Mayor of Gdynia, Poland*

**Empowering local youth: a centre designed for young people to share ideas, hobbies and work on projects together.**

The primary goal of the Wymiennikownia (WM) youth centre is to support bottom-up initiatives undertaken by local young people, to help them implement their ideas, share hobbies, and collaborate on projects. It provides the space and conditions for spending free time in interesting ways. Responsibilities are delegated to young people, breaking usual conventions as well expanding the district or city's offers through various events. In cooperation with professionals, the young people were free to design the interior of the centre based on their own ideas and their planned activities.

Having taken over the operational management, young people have adjusted the centre's opening hours to match their needs. The programme of workshops



and events in WM is prepared based on the projects submitted by young and active citizens of Gdynia, and is adapted continuously. Independent decision-making on what events to organise or take part in is the essence of the place. By running the centre themselves, they acquire and exchange skills and share knowledge.



# Cooperative Council Groningen



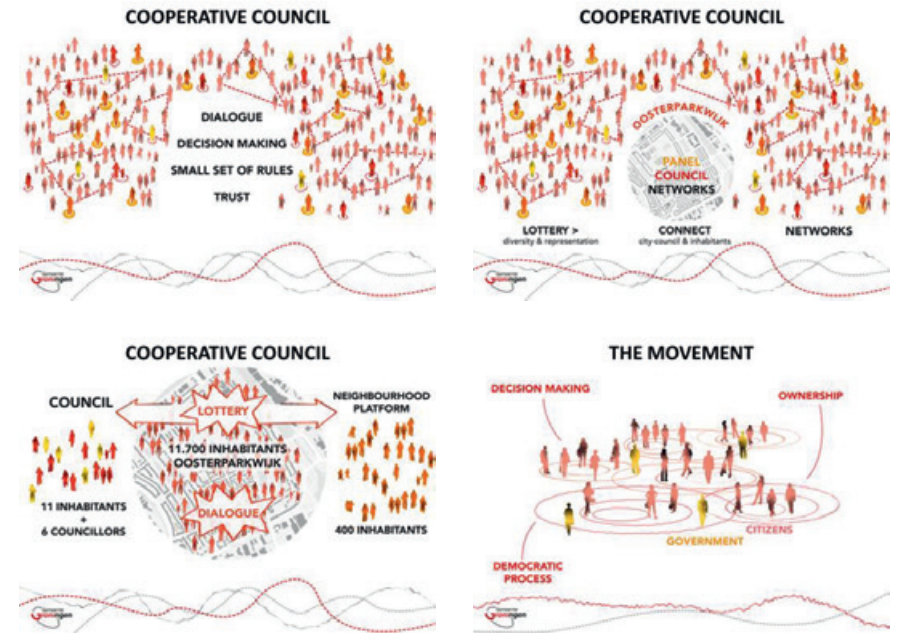
**WIEKE PAULUSMA**

*City Councillor Groningen, Netherlands*

## Building trust between people and politics by connecting participatory and representative democracy.

Trust is one of the most essential values in life. It is impossible to connect, create, love or grow without trust. As a politician, one meets many people who neither trust politics, nor politicians, or even other people. This is why the Cooperative Council in Oosterpark, Groningen, was conceived and realised. The primary goal was to rebuild trust between politicians and citizens.

This project has already made a difference at various levels: by letting residents and city councillors sit shoulder-to-shoulder on the Cooperative Council, conversations have taken a positive turn; sharing responsibility is colouring the dialogue in a way that would not be possible without connecting participatory democracy (active citizens) with representative democracy (elected representatives).



To encourage a variety of people to join, citizens were randomly selected. The Cooperative Council is monitored by the University of Groningen which has found a collective rise in levels of trust, increased voter turnout and indicators of a tighter-knit community.

# Local Solutions to Global Challenges



**LEENA VUOTOVESI**

*Managing Director, Micropolis Ltd (based in Ii)*



**ARI ALATOSSAVA**

*Mayor of the City Ii*

## **Creating a culture of responsibility regarding climate change in a small town.**

Ii is a small town in the north of Finland. Back in 2012 the community realised that the climate crisis was really changing the world and that they had to take action. The Arctic is the area most affected by global warming, but Ii did not have the resources or expertise to make a difference. Equipped with a shared vision, they began.



The municipality welcomed everyone to participate and it turned out that it was the children who were most enthusiastic. Every child in the town is now participating. One example: Schools and day-care centres measure their consumption of water, heat and electricity and receive 50% of the savings they make. They learn that it makes sense to be climate-friendly, that their actions have an impact and that it is possible to make a difference. So far, the town of Ii has cut emissions by 60%.

# Söz Senin – Your Say



**EKREM İMAMOĞLU**

Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey



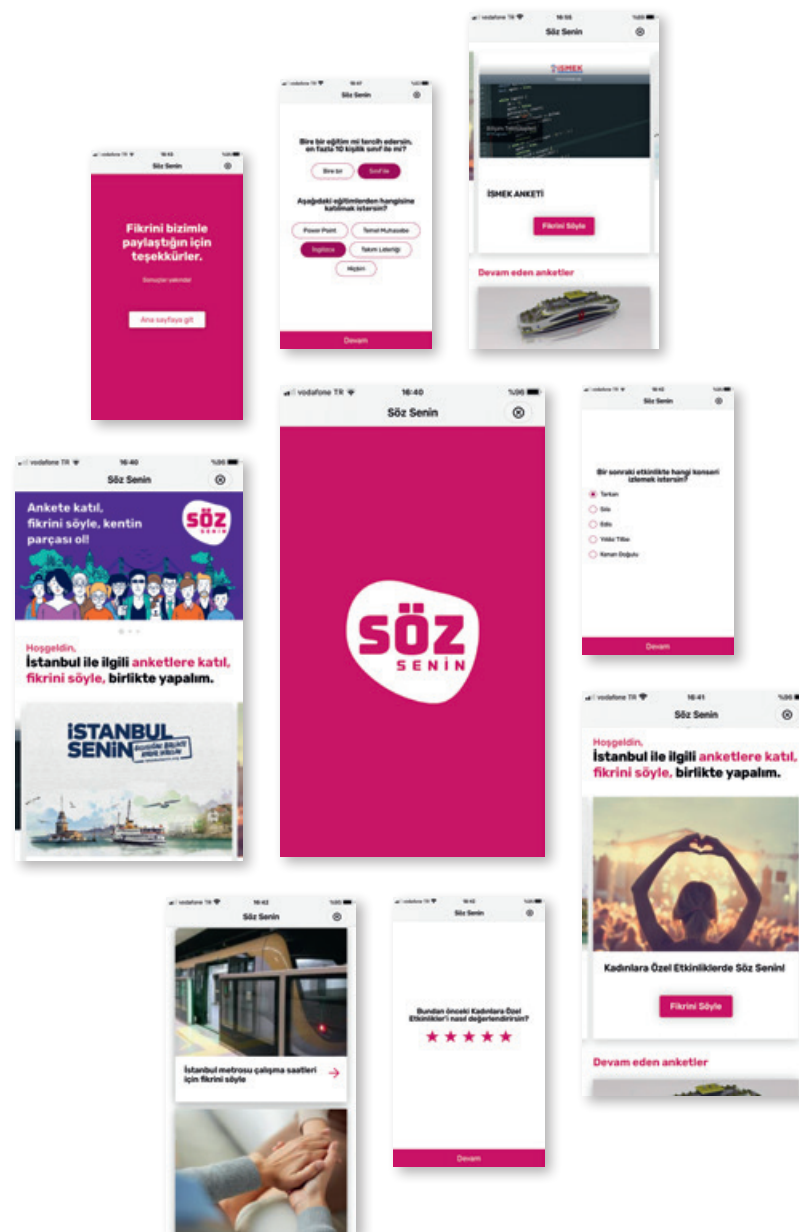
**BURCU ÖZDEMİR**

Smart City Director, Istanbul

## Mobile citizen-engagement platform

Söz Senin is an AI supported mobile digital tool for citizen participation, which will be embedded in the Municipality of Istanbul's comprehensive all-in-one Istanbul Senin (Istanbul is Yours) super app. The initiative will bring Istanbul's citizens into the policy and decision making process, and enable open, transparent and democratic governance via personalised and user-friendly surveys on a wide range of topics.

In line with technological developments, the way citizens interact with their municipality is changing. More outspoken than ever, they wish to be heard whenever and wherever they choose.



# Green Budget



**KRZYSZTOF ZUK**

*Mayor of Lublin, Poland*

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## **Civic participation: participatory budgeting in Lublin designed for the allocation of new green spaces throughout the city.**

In 2016, the first edition of the Green Budget was announced in Lublin, Poland. The idea was that every resident could participate directly in the creation of new green areas or the revitalisation of existing ones. PLN 2 million were allocated for the implementation of the first Green Budget. Residents' applications could take the form of full construction documentation, a land development concept or just a description of the idea with an indication of the place and nature of the proposed green area. The only requirement was that it had to be in a public space.



As a result of the first edition of the Green Budget, the residents, district councils, non-governmental organisations and housing cooperatives submitted 107 applications for a total of PLN 16 million, which were then subjected to a two-stage evaluation: formal and thematic. Apart from meeting pre-defined selection criteria, projects had to significantly improve the quality of the city's green spaces. 24 projects were put forward for implementation.



# Civic Crowdfunding



## CRISTINA TAJANI

*Councillor for Labour Policies, Economic Development, Commerce and Human Resources, Milan Municipality, Italy*

### **Co-funding projects organised by citizens: crowdfunding initiative to make Milan more inclusive and sustainable.**

In 2016 the city of Milan supported a bottom-up crowdfunding initiative by allocating EUR 400,000 as co-funding for projects of public interest with a social impact. In the first phase, a crowdfunding platform was chosen through a public procurement tender. In the second phase, innovative projects were gathered through a public call and then assessed by an evaluation committee.

Eighteen projects featured on the crowdfunding platform in four rounds, each lasting 50 days, to gather the donations from the community. The projects that collected 50% of their budget from donations were awarded the remaining 50% by the City of Milan in co-funding.



This civic crowdfunding initiative in Milan represents the first case in Italy of a local government using a crowdfunding platform for such match-funding. It has been an opportunity to experiment with innovative ways of financing projects of public interest by encouraging the pooling of public and private resources and by promoting the direct involvement of citizens.

# Your Vote your Voice



**SEAMUS COYLE**

*Councillor and Cathaoirleach in Monaghan County Council, Ireland*

**Monaghan County Council has developed an easy-to-read guide to the voting process, with a focus on the needs of disabled voters.**

Your Vote Your Voice is an easy-to-read guide to voting in Ireland. The guide is written in plain English and uses a clear layout. It explains the voting process in Ireland and how any person over 18 can exercise their right to vote. Your Vote Your Voice was identified as a priority by Monaghan County Council in 2019, following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability in 2018. With local and European elections in 2019, it was time to focus on the rights of people with a disability, particularly their right to vote.



This initiative has collated all information relating to voting in Ireland into one easy-to-read information booklet. The guide includes information on: government structures; types of elections and votes that take place; the Constitution; who can vote and why they should; registering to vote; polling cards and polling day; accessibility of polling stations; the voting process and filling out a ballot paper; getting help to fill out ballot papers; support for voters with visual impairments; the ballot box and the secret ballot; rules inside the polling station.

# CityBox Otwock – Safe Office. Dealing with the Epidemic.



**JAROSŁAW MARGIELSKI**

*Mayor of Otwock, Poland*

## **Digitally equipped cabins provide government services to citizens.**

During the coronavirus crisis, with social distancing measures in place, local governments had to find innovative ways to continue their services.



The Polish city of Otwock launched an initiative called CityBox Otwock to continue the city office's operation during the pandemic in safe conditions. The city created cabins equipped with a computer, microphone, camera and multifunction device so residents can attend to urgent official matters such as issuing a birth certificate, death certificate or an ID card. The box allows users to securely transfer the necessary documents to the city officers. Additionally, the city installed multimedia equipment to enable video conferencing with the relevant clerk. After the resident leaves the cabin, it is disinfected by irradiation with UV-C rays.



# Paris' Participatory Budget



**ANNE HIDALGO**

*Mayor of Paris, France*

**Have your say: citizens vote for projects proposed by other citizens.**

A few months after she was elected, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo set out to make the city more collaborative, with residents providing ideas and making decisions for its future. Since 2014, Paris' Participatory Budget has allowed citizens to vote for projects designed and submitted by other citizens. Every year, 100 million euros are allocated to this initiative. In 2016 more than 150,000 inhabitants took part, selecting 219 projects to be implemented by the City of Paris.



In the second year, after the launch of a new website, the residents of Paris proposed over 5,000 ideas, and more than 67,000 people voted on them. Apart from the city-wide budget, there is additional budget allocated to participatory budgeting at the borough level. In 2016 the city decided to allocate fixed parts of the budget for the most deprived areas as well as for youth and education projects, with schools encouraged to participate and children's votes determining how that money is spent.



# Collaborative and Transparent Drafting of the Digital Republic Bill



**AXELLE LEMAIRE**

*Former French Government Minister in charge of Innovation and Digital Affairs*

## **New ways of lawmaking: citizens take part in drafting a bill.**

The national government of France was the first in Europe to initiate a bill that was co-drafted by citizens in an open, transparent and interactive three-week online consultation. 21,330 contributors commented on the text, suggested amendments and proposed new articles. 90 of the proposals made their way into the Digital Republic Bill before the legislation was even presented to Parliament. The bill was eventually adopted unanimously both by the National Assembly and the Senate.



The participants reported great satisfaction with their experience, especially young people, who were able to learn about the process of drafting a bill in real-time. The bill has now been implemented; it widens access to and the dissemination of data and knowledge, ensures equal rights for consumers and fair competition for companies, protects online privacy, and promotes internet access as a universal right. Following this experiment, an incubator for democratic innovations was launched as a private initiative to support tech-based civic projects.

# Změňte.to



**ZDENĚK HŘIB**

*Lord Mayor of Prague*

## **Mobile applications and website enabling citizens of Prague to participate in the decision-making procedures of their city.**

The Změňte.to project allows citizens to actively participate in the process of making their city a better place. Anyone who notices a problem to do with public transport, roads and sidewalks, cleaning and greenery, or lights in the city can easily let the local authorities know about it. Whether it is vandalised bench, a faulty street light or plants that need watering, municipal staff can make sure the problem gets fixed quickly. People also have the opportunity to give positive feedback and evaluate local services.





# Werkstadt Junges Wien



## JÜRGEN CZERNOHORSZKY

*Executive City Councillor for Education,  
Integration, Youth and Personnel*  
Project lead: Bettina Schwarzmayr

### Co-Creating Vienna's Children and Youth Strategy

The city of Vienna places great importance on safeguarding social freedom for all citizens of Vienna and investing for future generations. Werkstadt Junges Wien aimed to create a cross-sectoral children and youth strategy for Vienna based on the expertise of children and young people. All 4 to 19-year-olds living in Vienna were invited to participate and – in contrast to other similar projects – they were truly free to set the agenda.

Based on this input, the resulting Children and Youth Strategy for Vienna set one fundamental goal for each of the nine topics. All of the city's municipal departments contributed to achieving these goals. In June 2020, the Strategy with 193 specific measures was adopted by the Vienna City Council.



# Learn Before You Vote



**VIRGINIJUS  
SINKEVICIUS**  
*Union of Lithuanian  
Farmers and Greens*



**JUDITA  
AKROMIENE**  
*Initiator*



**AUSRINE  
DIRZINSKAITE**  
*Coordinator*



**GOUDA  
VAITIEKUTE**  
*Coordinator*

## Increasing the political engagement and knowledge of young people in Lithuania.

This project aims to foster the interest of young people in local, national and European politics and encourage their active and informed participation. The idea is that more youth participation will increase the accountability of politicians to this group of voters. During the local elections in February-March 2019, 84 debates were organised in 57 municipalities (out of 60) with mayoral candidates. In total, over 12,000 people participated in the events and 260,000 people watched the debates on social media.

Network volunteers developed, maintained and updated a public online platform for direct communication between citizens and politicians, allowing anyone to put a question to the candidates.



There were 1,400 questions put to politicians on the platform which attracted 20,000 unique visitors. The young volunteers also conducted around 60 interactive educational activities to raise awareness amongst their peers regarding the importance of youth participation, as well as how to make an informed and well-founded decision. Launched in 2014, the initiative has evolved into a social movement, involving young people in political life who are now 'ambassadors' in their local communities.

# Who We Are

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## Organisation

The European Capital of Democracy initiative was established and is operated by The Innovation in Politics Institute in Vienna, and The Innovation in Politics Institute Germany. These two organisations ensure professional management of the preliminary stage and a long-term commitment to implementing the initiative.

The Innovation in Politics Institute is a non-partisan, non-governmental organisation founded in 2016 by a group of private entrepreneurs. The Institute currently has representations in 15 European countries:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

It is the institute's mission to improve democracy across borders and party lines by identifying, developing and implementing tomorrow's politics, today.

## The Innovation in Politics Institute

Dalia Bankauskaitė, Elisabeth Bartovics, Michaela Benedigová, Małgorzata Bonikowska, Stephen Boucher, Helfried Carl, Mathis Dippon, Alexander Dourchev, Jürgen H. Gangoly, Dunja Ganser, Laura Giesen, Nicola Gold, Lukas Graf, André Heller, Daniel Heller, Amadea Horvath, Patricia Kahane, Moritz Kitter, Nadine Korn, Julia Kozak, Manuela Kräuter, Josef Lentsch, Magdalena Lindorfer, Gia Phu Liu, Sulaiman Al Mahmoud, Lena Morozova-Friha, James Morisson, Joan O'Flynn, Dorina Ofrim, Lisa Pelling, Alpo Räinen, Dimitris Roulias, Robert Schafleitner, Paul M. Sills, Martin Slater, Roman Snehotta, Nicolas Stühlinger, Riley Thorold, Galyna Tkachenko, Franziska Tometschek, Marie Wutzler, Katharina Zangerl, Josef Zehetner, Uta Zeuge-Buberl, Elke Zuckermann, Ronny Zuckermann

## Our Europe-wide Network

Our Europe-wide Network has grown quickly over the past four years and is continuing to grow. Currently, the Institute has offices and partner organisations in 15 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.



**OUR  
OFFICE  
NETWORK**

AUSTRIA  
BELGIUM  
BULGARIA  
FINLAND  
FRANCE  
GERMANY  
GREECE  
IRELAND  
ITALY  
LITHUANIA  
POLAND  
SLOVAKIA  
SWEDEN  
SWITZERLAND  
UK





## Imprint

### The Innovation in Politics Institute

Ungargasse 59-61, 1030 Vienna, Austria

Phone: +43 660 654 30 27

Mail: [office@innovationinpolitics.eu](mailto:office@innovationinpolitics.eu)

Web: [innovationinpolitics.eu](http://innovationinpolitics.eu)

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Edward Strasser

Editorial Team

Nicola Gold, Dunja Ganser, Laura Giesen, Robert Schafleitner, Paul M. Sills,

Katharina Zangerl, Uta Zeuge-Buberl

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Capital of  
Democracy**