



**European  
Capital of  
Democracy**

## **Who will become the first European Capital of Democracy?**

**A week after launch: several cities have declared to apply**

**The presentation of the European Capital of Democracy initiative in Vienna in mid-September by the mayors of Athens, Bratislava, Budapest, Frankfurt, Gdansk, Istanbul, Prague, Sofia, Tirana, Warsaw and Vienna was well received throughout Europe. Several governments of major cities have already indicated that they will be applying for this honorary title. But who will decide who gets it, and what will happen in this city? And who is behind the organisation of the European Capital of Democracy?**

Several cities have already expressed interest in becoming a European Capital of Democracy. After the presentation in Vienna a few days ago, civil society organisations and city administrations who are planning to nominate their city for this honorary title contacted the organisers in Vienna.

But a city can only become a European Capital of Democracy if it also presents a comprehensive programme to strengthen democracy. It must then convince a jury of 10,000 citizens of this plan, and a group of experts will decide which city will be shortlisted for the jury process.

The inventors of the initiative, the Vienna-based Innovation in Politics Institute, are counting on its success as a "grassroots" initiative and want to grow it out of civil society. Several institutions, foundations and companies have already announced that they will support the initiative, offering their resources and project support.

### **Funding without economic interests**

The Innovation in Politics Institute is a politically independent organisation, founded in 2016 to strengthen democratic politics in the long term. Its first initiative was the "Innovation in Politics Awards", which have been presented annually since 2017, and selected by a jury of 1,000 European citizens. The best and most successful political projects are identified and presented to others in politics for inspiration.

"Whenever private individuals want to support politics, the question of vested interests arises. This is why we make sure that economic interests cannot influence our work, and we focus on transparency," says Institute founder Edward Strasser.



## **European Capital of Democracy**

The European Capital of Democracy ensures this with transparency covering all income and expenditure, as well as with an external audit, all of which data will be published. Furthermore, strict guidelines for sponsoring will be applied, to which all cities and the Institute itself must adhere. The costs for the Democracy Capital programme will be distributed as follows:

- The city will cover the costs of its own activities (e.g. new forms of participation for citizens, city events, ...).
- The Innovation in Politics Institute provides the funding for its own projects, which are brought into the city in coordination with the city administration, such as an International Mayors Conference on social cohesion and youth participation.
- Third party organisations (institutions, foundations, companies) can finance further activities as long as they fit in with the programme, enhance it and the city and the Innovation in Politics Institute jointly agree to accept this contribution.

### **The first two cities out of competition**

As it takes time for cities to develop their application, and to set up a jury of 10,000 European citizens, the first European Capital of Democracy, chosen by a Europe-wide jury, will start in autumn 2023.

For the two years until autumn 2023 (i.e. from autumn 2021), two cities will lead the initiative as "torchbearers" and implement a major democracy programme "out of competition". This is intended to provide inspiration to future applicants as to what a successful yearly programme can consist of. The selection of these first two non-competitive cities will depend largely on how extensive and diverse the city's programme and will be made together with experts.

### **Cities are already applying**

Discussions are currently underway with several cities on their potential application for the title. These discussions are also covering which activities the Innovation in Politics Institute and other partners can bring to these cities and how these activities can be financed.

"In the past few days, several cities have contacted us, both for the first two years and for an application from 2023. There will be a good selection, that much is already certain," says Helfried Carl, head of the initiative and co-founder of the Innovation in Politics Institute.



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"We have also held talks with Strasbourg to this end. But then the current city government informed us of their decision not to continue these talks on the grounds that the timeframe set was too tight for them and that they would prefer to deal with a nomination at a later date. Of course we take note of this and continue our discussions with the other cities. The decision for the first city from autumn 2021 will be made this year," said Carl.

**Please contact us for further information:**

Robert Schafleitner  
The Innovation in Politics Institute  
[media@innovationinpolitics.eu](mailto:media@innovationinpolitics.eu)  
+43 660 628 30 77

<https://innovationinpolitics.eu/en/>  
<https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/>



The Innovation in Politics Institute GmbH | Ungargasse 59-61, 1030 Vienna, Austria  
+43 660 6543027 | [institute@innovationinpolitics.eu](mailto:institute@innovationinpolitics.eu), [innovationinpolitics.eu](http://innovationinpolitics.eu)  
IBAN: AT282011182928522000 | BIC: GIBAATWWXXX | FN: 461215h | UID: ATU 71809689