European Commission

Creative Europe
Culture Compass

A New Generation of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC)

Legal Framework for the years 2034 to 2047

September 2026

What is the European Capitals of Culture?

The European Capitals of Culture was launched in 1985 at the initiative of Melina Mercouri, then Greece's Minister of Culture. Since then, it has become one of Europe's most prominent EU cultural initiative.

Each year, selected cities are given the title of European Capital of Culture and host a year-long programme of cultural events and activities. The initiative celebrates the diversity of cultures across Europe, highlights their shared heritage and connections, and uses culture as a catalyst for the long-term development of cities and communities.

New Legal Framework

On 10 September 2026, the European Commission adopted its proposal for the new legal framework of the European Capitals of Culture Action from 2034 to 2047. The action will be negotiated with both the European Parliament and the Council.

What is the Commission proposing to change?

MAKE THE PROCESS SIMPLER & CLEARER

Fewer, more focused criteria, clearer expectations and stronger monitoring

REACH BEYOND ONE CITY

Groups of cities, including those across national borders, will be able to apply together

PLAN FOR WHAT LASTS

Legacy will be planned from the start and monitored throughout the process

MAKE THE COMMITMENT COUNT

The Melina Mercouri Prize will be more closely linked to delivery and long-term impact

BRING MORE PEOPLE & EUROPE IN

Citizens, young people and civil society will play a stronger role in the action

BUILD MORE INCLUSIVE & RESILIENT CITIES

Greater emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, social cohesion and European values

STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE & SUPPORT

Clearer rules, stronger accountability and potentially a dedicated European Capitals of Culture Secretariat/Bureau

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