

European Capitals of Culture broaden their reach

In June 2016, the European Commission adopted a proposal to allow more European countries to join the European Capitals of Culture. An agreement was reached in interinstitutional trilogue negotiations, and the agreed text is due to be voted by the Parliament during the June plenary.

Background

The [interest](#) in cities celebrating culture has been constant since the launch of 'the European Cities of Culture' in 1985. A May 1999 Parliament and Council [decision](#) changed the title into 'European Capitals of Culture' (ECOC) from 2005. An October 2006 [decision](#) established a list of ECOC for the years 2007 to 2019, with a city from both an 'old' and 'new' Member State each year. [Decision 445/2014/EU](#) broadened its geographical reach, so that a candidate or potential candidate country will get the title every three years, starting in 2021.

From the very beginning, the action has aimed at promoting rich and diverse European cultures, contributing to mutual understanding among Europeans. It should cover shared European cultural heritage as well as contemporary creations involving artists and creators from different Member States, resulting in lasting cooperation and dialogue between European cultures. It is meant to involve wide participation of various social groups, have lasting social impact, and contribute to social cohesion thanks to urban regeneration projects. Its Europe-wide promotion should enhance its European dimension.

Aims, procedures and means of a new proposal

On 17 June 2016, the Commission put forward a [proposal](#) for a decision amending the 2014 decision to allow cities from European Free Trade Association countries party to the European Economic Area (EFTA/EEA: Iceland, Norway, and Lichtenstein) to compete for the title on the same grounds as candidate and potential candidate countries every three years. The rules are the same: applying for the action requires the country's participation in the [Creative Europe Programme](#) (or its successors), an EU support programme for culture.

The preparation and selection procedure can take up to six years, which is reflected in the application calendar in annex. Two years are needed to prepare a proposal which meets the criteria of a high quality cultural programme with a European dimension, and careful planning is essential for success. An international panel of experts chooses one city from an EFTA/EEA country, a candidate or potential candidate country according to the calendar. ECOCs can be granted the Melina Mercouri Prize, €1.5 million from Creative Europe programme funding. Local, regional or national budgets, as well as EU funds available for cultural projects and infrastructure aimed at the action's sustainability complete the prize financing.

European Parliament

The European Parliament supported European Capitals of Culture in its [April 2004](#) resolution highlighting the need for a strong European dimension, which was confirmed in its [2013 resolution](#). The latter also stressed the genuine engagement of local artists, cultural organisations and public in the event and in European and international cooperation as factors for ECOC sustainability. A 2013 [study](#) for the European Parliament pointed out that success was dependent on a clear cultural vision, and local and citizens' engagement. It also concluded that ECOC attracted mostly local, regional or national participants, failing to engage with European visitors since geographical distance remains a hindering factor. The EP position on the current proposal highlights the role of a network of cities that held the ECOC title, in enhancing the exchange of experience. Council and Parliament reached an agreement in interinstitutional negotiations, which is to be voted in the June plenary.

First reading: ([2016/0186\(COD\)](#)); Committee responsible: Committee on Culture and Education (CULT); Rapporteur: Santiago Fisas Ayxelà (EPP, Spain).

