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PROPOSAL

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	10 September 2026
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	COM(2026) 455 final
Subject:	Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL renewing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2034 to 2047 and repealing Decision No 445/2014/EU

Delegations will find attached document COM(2026) 455 final.

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2026/0259 (COD)

Proposal for a

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

**renewing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2034 to 2047
and repealing Decision No 445/2014/EU**

(Text with EEA relevance)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

• Reasons for and objectives of the proposal

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) were created in 1985 as an intergovernmental initiative. They were transformed officially into a European Union action in 1999 to make the initiative more effective. New criteria and selection procedures were established, a chronological list of Member States was drawn up indicating the order in which they were entitled to host ‘the title’, and a European panel of independent experts was created to assess the applications (Decision No 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 establishing a Community action for the ECoC for the years 2005 to 2019¹).

The rules were first renewed in 2006 to develop the effectiveness of the initiative further by stimulating competition between the cities and fostering the quality of the bids. These new rules also introduced various measures to accompany the cities in their preparation, including a monitoring process (Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the ECoC for the years 2007 to 2019²). The current legal base (Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council³) was adopted in 2014.

Decision No 445/2014/EU will end in 2033. The competition for the title is currently launched six years in advance to give the cities sufficient time for their preparation before the beginning of the year of the title. Therefore, the new legal base for the continuation of the ECoC should be adopted in 2027 to ensure a smooth transition in 2034. This new legal framework aims to guarantee the continued relevance of the initiative, while considering the need for simplification measures.

• Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area

The initiative is consistent with the shared political commitment to protecting, promoting and supporting culture in Europe, set out in the Joint Declaration “Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe” of the European Parliament, Council and Commission, and with the **Culture Compass for Europe**⁴,

It aligns with European initiatives such as the **New European Bauhaus**⁵ and it is in line with the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, to which the Union and its Member States are parties and the Rome Declaration of March 2017, where the Member States and EU institutions envisioned a Union ‘where citizens have new opportunities for cultural and social development and economic growth [...]; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity’. It aligns with the Council Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, committing to promote EU cultural diversity and cultural heritage⁶.

• Consistency with other Union policies

The initiative is aligned with the overarching European Commission’s 2024-2029 policy priorities, including 1) supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model; 2) protecting our democracy, upholding our values; 3) Europe’s sustainable prosperity and competitiveness; and 4) a global Europe.

¹ OJ L 166, 1.7.1999, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/1999/1419/oj>.

² OJ L 304, 3.11.2006, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2006/1622/oj>.

³ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC (OJ L 132, 3.5.2014, p. 1, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2014/445\(1\)/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2014/445(1)/oj)).

⁴ [A Culture Compass for Europe - COM\(2025\) 785](#).

⁵ [New European Bauhaus - from vision to implementation - COM\(2025\) 1026](#).

⁶ [Council Strategic Agenda 2024-2029](#).

2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

- **Legal basis**

The ECoC are based on Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Article 167(1) gives the EU the mandate to ‘contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore’. The Union is also to encourage ‘cooperation between Member States’ in the field of culture ‘if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action’ in accordance with Article 167(2).

- **Subsidiarity / Proportionality**

The proposal is in keeping with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The main level of action for the implementation of the ECoC remains at local and national level. However, the evaluation and the public consultation have shown that the Union plays a crucial role in coordinating between Member States to ensure the application of common, clear and transparent criteria, especially regarding the selection and monitoring procedures for the ECoC. The Union also supports the preparation of the selected cities through the recommendations of the European panel of experts, the exchange of best practices between cities, and a financial contribution in the form of the Melina Mercouri Prize.

3. RESULTS OF EX POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- **Interim evaluation of existing legislation**

The Commission’s work on the proposal for the ECoC after 2033 has been based on broad range of input.

Between 2024 and 2025, the first interim evaluation of the ECoC Action 2020-2033⁷ was carried out. Covering cities that held the ECoC title between 2013 and 2023, and bidding cities for the 2020-2028 period, it identified the successes achieved and lessons learned during the implementation of the initiative.

It is important to note that, on all key issues, there was a broad convergence between the evidence and data collected through the evaluations and the views expressed during the consultation process. This enabled the Commission to draw several important lessons for the future of the ECoC.

There is consensus that the ECoC are a resoundingly successful action, and there is very strong support for their continuation beyond 2033. It is clear that they have become one of the most ambitious cultural initiatives in Europe, both in scope and scale. They have also become one of the most visible and prestigious initiatives of the Union and probably one of the most appreciated by European citizens.

The ECoC can bring many benefits to cities when they are planned with care. They remain first and foremost a cultural event, but they can also have significant social and economic benefits. This is particularly the case when the event is embedded in a long-term culture-led development strategy in the city and its surrounding region. It should also be noted that, although only one city in each Member State can host the event in any given year, the competition has an important leverage effect on the development of new or more effective policies and strategies even in cities which do not win the title.

⁷ [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033 – COM\(2025\) 587.](#)

However, the ECoC are also challenging. Staging a year-long programme of cultural activities is demanding and some ECoC have been more successful than others in capitalising on the potential of the title. The main challenge for the future will therefore be to build on the strengths of the current scheme, while at the same time helping each Capital to fully exploit the potential of the title and to optimise the cultural, economic and social benefits.

Based on the results of the evaluation and consultations, the Commission identified the main problems requiring the adaptation and modernisation of the initiative, while considering the need for simplification measures.

First, the European dimension, while being one of the initiative's key component and current selection criteria, is often misunderstood and thus overlooked by applicant cities.

Second, even though the assessment of city applications involves a 'contribution to the long-term strategy' criterion, some cities did not experience the long-term impact as fully as expected. A stronger focus on such a criterion could be beneficial to both cities and the action's relevance.

Third, as there is no current institutional network related to the ECoC, there is a risk of knowledge-loss between past, current and future applicant and title-holding cities.

Fourth, the European Commission currently communicates about the official designation of the ECoC through its standard channels, including press releases, website items and social media posts. However, there are currently no joint EU-level communication campaigns to promote the title-holding cities. The action's visibility and impact, and public awareness of it, would benefit from coordinated efforts between EU institutions, Member States and title-holding cities.

Fifth, measurement mechanisms have not yet been put in place by the cities themselves and thus there is no primary data on the impact of the title. This makes a comparison between the different ECoCs difficult and weakens the transfer of experience.

Sixth, a recurring difficulty has been the effect of national and local politics on the budgets, which need to be as stable as possible between the bidding and final stages. Politics has also affected other aspects of the organisation of the event. Political support is fundamental as most of the funds are public and, without it, a city cannot make a credible bid. At the same time, the implementing team needs its artistic independence to be respected in order to protect the credibility of the event.

Finally, several Member States have already hosted the title many times and some of them only have a limited number of realistic candidates for a large-scale event like the ECoC. Hosting the title could have strong negative effects on a city with limited resources, and selecting weaker ECoC would risk damaging the prestige and brand value of the ECoC in the long term.

Therefore, it was decided to continue the action with a new legal base which addresses the problems encountered with implementing the current Decision. A new chronological list of Member States can be found in the Annex.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

Within the framework of the first interim evaluation of the ECoC Action 2020-2033, a public consultation was carried out in the summer of 2024⁸, including several questions on the legal basis after 2033.

A call for evidence on the ECoC action was published and ran from 3 December 2025 to 16 January 2026 to collect input from a wide range of stakeholders on the revision of the ECoC's legal basis. It especially targeted (former, present and future) ECoC managers; the ECoC managing authorities in

⁸ Consultation: [ECoC - interim evaluation for 2024](#).

Member States (i.e. the respective Ministry of Culture); academic experts in the cultural development of cities and the ECoC Expert Panel; the general public; cultural networks, Non-Government Organisations, and civil society organisations. Twenty-six replies were received by the deadline. They were taken into consideration in the subsequent brainstorming about the renewal of this legal framework.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

Input into the reflections on the future of the ECoC was also provided by own initiative reports and studies carried out by stakeholders, including Culture Next⁹ (financed under the Creative Europe's *European Networks of Cultural Organisations* scheme from 2022 to 2028) and Eurocities¹⁰.

Additionally, on the 40th anniversary of the ECoC initiative in April/May 2024, the future of the action was discussed at length and led to the publication of the White Paper '40 recommendations from 40 years of ECoC'¹¹ produced by Chemnitz 2025 and Nova Gorica 2025.

- **Impact assessment**

No impact assessment was carried out for the following reasons:

1) The scale of the impact of the ECoC is limited.

2) The ECoC is not a multiannual financial framework (MFF) Programme, as its costs are integrated within the Creative Europe programme (or its successors). It has limited impact on the EU budget, as currently only EUR 1.5 million are allocated to each ECoC, plus the expenditure costs for the expert panels. There is no financial envelope attached to the ECoC legal base; it is included in Creative Europe legal base.

3) No impact assessment was carried out for the previous legal base.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

The renewal of the legal basis for the ECoC will provide an opportunity to further advance simplification efforts and deliver a more accessible, user-friendly and citizen-centred action. The new ECoC framework paves the way towards:

- further targeted support for applicant and designated cities;
- more centralised communication activities, ensuring stronger citizens' awareness of the initiative;
- more transparent guidelines for the assessment of cities' applications (especially as regards the "European dimension");
- the revision and clarification of selection questionnaire concepts, and language;
- stronger collaboration and knowledge-sharing between cities, especially through the possibility to apply as (cross-border) groups of cities, for which one city would coordinate and lead the bid would be introduced.

- **Fundamental rights**

The proposal is fully in line with the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**¹², and with all relevant EU policy and legislative frameworks in the field of equality and non-discrimination.

⁹ [Culture Next](#).

¹⁰ [Eurocities](#).

¹¹ [40 recommendations from 40 years of ECoC](#).

Cities are expected to fulfil the commitments they made during the bidding process and to ensure continued compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

As for this decision renewing the Decision No 445/2014/EU, this new Commission's proposal has no direct immediate budgetary implications.

The period covered by the proposal coincides with several multiannual financial frameworks.

For the years after 2033, the legal and financial aspects of the ECoC will be directly linked to the provisions included in the future multiannual financial frameworks. On this basis, they will also be dealt with in the framework of the respective Union programmes supporting culture, the new 'AgoraEU' programme and its successors.

See details in the Legislative Financial and Digital Statement (LFDS).

¹² Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, p. 389, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/char_2016/oj

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DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

**renewing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2034 to 2047
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(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 167(5) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions²,

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure,

Whereas:

- (1) The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) aims at an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe and confers on the Union the task, inter alia, of contributing to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore. In this respect, the Union, where necessary, supports and supplements Member States' action to improve the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples.
- (2) The Commission Communication 'A Culture Compass for Europe'³ ('Culture Compass') sets out the Union's strategic vision for cultural policy, promoting access to and participation in culture, cultural and linguistic diversity, cohesion and intercultural dialogue, while reinforcing culture's role in creativity, innovation, competitiveness and international relations.
- (3) The Joint Declaration 'Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe'⁴ transforms the vision of the Culture Compass into a shared political commitment between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, providing a strategic framework that places culture at the heart of Europe's identity and stresses its importance for individuals, communities, and the European Union.

¹ OJ C , , p. .

² OJ C , , p. .

³ [A Culture Compass for Europe - COM\(2025\) 785](#).

⁴ OJ C, C/2026/3440, 25.6.2026, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/3440/oj>

- (4) The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions⁵, which entered into force on 18 March 2007 and to which the Union is a party, aims at protecting and promoting cultural diversity, fostering interculturality and raising awareness of the value of cultural diversity at local, national and international levels.
- (5) Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014⁶ established a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033. This Decision should be repealed. However, its provisions should continue to apply in relation to all cities which have already been, or are in the process of being, designated for the years up to 2033.
- (6) The Culture Compass recognises the revitalising role of culture, beyond 2033, in urban contexts and acknowledges the role of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in contributing to the culture-led, inclusive, urban and regional transformation and regeneration of cities and regions across Europe. It acts as a driver for social cohesion, economic growth, innovation, territorial attractiveness and sustainable development.
- (7) Action at Union level in the field of culture should build on existing initiatives such as the Council's EU Work Plans for Culture, the Joint Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations'⁷, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage⁸, and Rome Declaration of March 2017⁹, and closely align with the objectives of the Culture Compass for Europe and the Joint Declaration 'Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe'.
- (8) The ECoC should align with relevant European initiatives, such as the New European Bauhaus (NEB)¹⁰, the European Heritage Label, the EU Agenda for Cities¹¹, the European Democracy Shield¹² and the strategy on intergenerational fairness¹³. Council Recommendation to Member States on the New European Bauhaus adopted on 11 May 2026 calls on the Council and the European Parliament to strengthen the ECoC in a way that synergises with the values and principles of the NEB, which supports the sustainable, inclusive and quality-driven development, transformation or regeneration of neighbourhoods in cities throughout Europe.
- (9) The first interim evaluation¹⁴, as well as the public consultation in the summer of 2024¹⁵, demonstrated that the ECoC is an ambitious cultural initiative in Europe, and well appreciated by its people. After 40 years, the ECoC remains a successful flagship action, boosting the cultural and creative sectors, raising the international profile of

⁵ [UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#).

⁶ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC (OJ L 132, 3.5.2014, p. 1, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2014/445\(1\)/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2014/445(1)/oj)).

⁷ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations', JOIN/2016/029 final. [EUR-Lex - 52016JC0029 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

⁸ European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage - SWD(2018) 491 final.

⁹ [Rome Declaration](#).

¹⁰ [Commission Communication New European Bauhaus - from vision to implementation - COM\(2025\) 1026](#) and [Council Recommendation on the New European Bauhaus](#).

¹¹ [An EU Agenda for Cities: Driving Growth and Prosperity - COM\(2025\)739](#).

¹² [European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies - JOIN\(2025\) 791](#).

¹³ [Strategy on intergenerational fairness](#).

¹⁴ [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033 – COM\(2025\) 587](#).

¹⁵ ECoC - [interim evaluation for 2024](#).

host cities and supporting rural and urban development through culture. It is a cost-effective action leveraging public and private funding, and acting as a catalyst for social and economic development, especially when embedded in long-term local and regional strategies. In this context, the ECoC should be continued and updated to take into account emerging trends. A renewed action should therefore be established for the period after 2033.

- (10) In addition to showcasing Europe's cultural diversity and shared heritage, ECoC title ('the title') helps cities enrich cultural life, strengthen cultural and creative sectors, improve access to and visibility of cultural assets, support long-term urban development, and foster a shared sense of belonging and intercultural dialogue.
- (11) The objective of the action established by this Decision should be fully in line with the objectives of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme¹⁶ and the specific objectives of the programme's 'Creative Europe – Culture' strand¹⁷.
- (12) To achieve the objectives of the action, cities holding the title should strengthen the innovation and digital capacity of the cultural sectors, build strong links between culture and other relevant sectors such as education, research, environment, urban development, sport and sustainable cultural tourism in line with the European Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, and use the ECoC as a catalyst for sustainable local development, healthy and green urban environments¹⁸, and enhance the international profile of cities through culture. They should also promote social inclusion and equal opportunities, improve access to and participation in culture, ensure the broadest possible involvement of people in preparing and implementing the cultural programme, particularly children, young people, people with disabilities and people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, while fully respecting artistic freedom, diversity of cultural expressions and the improvement of working conditions for artists and cultural and creative professionals.
- (13) The ECoC action requires significant efforts from applicant and title-holding cities, including the preparation and delivery of a high-level, year-long cultural programme and long-term planning aimed at leaving a lasting legacy. Cities therefore need appropriate support, tools, guidance and advice. The Commission should coordinate relevant activities to help maximise the action's lasting impact.
- (14) The competitions for the title should take place every year in two different Member States following the chronological calendar set out in the Annex ('the calendar'), thus ensuring a fair distribution of ECoC across all Member States. In the relevant years, the competition should also be open to cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership and third countries linked to the 'Creative Europe – Culture' strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, on the condition that each eligible country may win the title only once during the 2034-2047 period. This is a way to bring them closer to the Union by highlighting the common aspects of European cultures as confirmed

¹⁶ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'AgoraEU' programme for the period 2028-2034, and repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/692 and (EU) 2021/818 - COM(2025) 550 (subject to ongoing MFF negotiations).

¹⁷ Name subject to ongoing MFF negotiations.

¹⁸ In that context, synergies should also be encouraged with other Union initiatives recognising urban sustainability, such as the European Green Capital Award and the European Green Leaf Award.

by previous experiences. In cases of force majeure or enlargement of the Union, it should be possible for the Commission to amend the Annex.

- (15) In order to ensure efficient and timely reaction to cases of force majeure or enlargement of the Union, the power to adopt acts in accordance with Article 290 of the TFEU should be delegated to the Commission in order to amend the Annex. It is particularly important that the Commission carry out any necessary consultations during its preparatory work, including at expert level, and that those consultations be conducted in accordance with the principles laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making¹⁹. In particular, to ensure their equal participation in the preparation of delegated acts, the European Parliament and the Council receive all documents at the same time as Member State experts, and their experts systematically have access to meetings of Commission expert groups dealing with the preparation of delegated acts.
- (16) The title should be reserved to cities or cross-border groups of cities, irrespective of their size. In order to reach a wider public and amplify the title's impact, cities might involve their surrounding area.
- (17) The award of the title should be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension. Such a cultural programme should be designed specifically for the title year and be part of a long-term strategy.
- (18) The selection process should be organised in two stages (pre-selection and selection) and carried out by a panel of independent experts. This fair and transparent organisation has enabled cities to improve their applications between the pre-selection and the selection phases based on the expert advice received from the panel. Furthermore, to safeguard the continuity of the ECoC action and the transfer of experience and know-how, the replacement of experts should be staggered.
- (19) The participation of national appointed experts should continue to be ensured by enabling Member States to appoint up to two experts to the panel carrying out the selection and monitoring procedures.
- (20) The selection criteria should guide candidate cities on the objectives and requirements with which they need to comply to be awarded the title. While a stronger focus should be placed on sustainability, long-term planning and digital accessibility, the European dimension should become an overarching criterion as recommended by the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033.
- (21) Candidate cities should explore the possibility, if applicable, of seeking financial support from other relevant Union programmes and funds, especially the AgoraEU programme and the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security, channelled through the National and Regional Partnership Plans, as well as subsequent programmes.
- (22) The preparation phase between the designation of a city and the year of the title is crucial for the success of an ECoC. Evaluations and stakeholder consultations demonstrated that the support measures under previous legal frameworks were highly valuable and should be further developed and coordinated among past, present and

¹⁹ [Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on Better Law-Making](http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinst/2016/512/oj) (OJ L123.12.5.2016, p. 1, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinst/2016/512/oj).

future cities holding the title as well as candidate cities, with the European Commission, supporting a network of cities to exchange experiences and knowledge.

- (23) The ECoC title and the Melina Mercouri prize, which should be paid in two payments, have a strong symbolic value. Title-holding cities are expected to fulfil the commitments they made during the bidding process and to ensure continued compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union²⁰. Therefore, the awarding of the title and prize should be subject to stringent and clear conditions, and a framework should also be introduced for their removal, if necessary when a titleholder no longer meets the criteria or no longer complies with the project and work plan submitted in its application.
- (24) The title-holding cities should ensure, from the moment of their designation to the end of the title year, that all events, activities and communication materials clearly display the EU logo together with the common ECoC logo and, if applicable, the EU flag. They should always acknowledge that the ECoC is an action funded by the European Union, with clear participation from the European Commission.
- (25) The cities themselves should continue to be the key players in the evaluation process, to ensure relevant primary data collection at local level, especially in relation to the impact of the title.
- (26) The objectives of this Decision, namely to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, to highlight the common shared features and to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States given the need, in particular, for common, clear and transparent criteria and procedures for selection and monitoring, as well as for a strong coordination between the Member States, but can rather, by reason of the scale and the expected effects of the action, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

Renewal of the action

A Union action entitled ‘European Capitals of Culture’ (‘ECoC’) is hereby renewed for the years 2034 to 2047 (‘the action’).

Article 2

Objectives

1. The general objectives of the action are:

²⁰ [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#).

(a) to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share, as well as to increase a European sense of belonging to a common cultural area and to promote the values on which the Union is founded;

(b) to foster the contribution of culture to the sustainable and inclusive development of cities, in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities while enriching their cultural life, strengthening their cultural and creative ecosystems, and enhancing the visibility, accessibility and diversity of their cultural assets, heritage and expressions.

2. The specific objectives of the action shall be the following:

(a) to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation, thereby raising the international profile of cities.

(b) to improve access to and participation in culture, the arts and cultural heritage for all, notably for young people, and to strengthen social cohesion, intergenerational fairness, equality and diversity, through cultural engagement.

(c) to strengthen the innovation and digital capacity of the local cultural sector, and its cooperation with other sectors.

Article 3

Access to the action

1. The competition for the title shall be open to cities or (cross-border) groups of cities (both understood hereinafter as ‘city/cities’) which may involve their surrounding areas.

2. The number of cities holding the title each year (‘the year of the title’) shall not exceed three.

The title shall be awarded each year to a maximum of one city in each of the two Member States appearing in the calendar set out in the Annex (‘the calendar’). In the relevant years, it shall also be awarded to one city from a European Free Trade Association country which is party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area (‘EFTA/EEA country’), a candidate country or a potential candidate for EU membership, or a third country associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, or one city from a country that accedes to the Union in the circumstances set out in paragraph 5. In cases of force majeure or enlargement of the Union, the Annex may be amended by the Commission by way of a delegated act.

3. Cities in Member States shall be entitled to hold the title for one year in accordance with the order of the Member States appearing in the calendar. In cases of force majeure impacting a designated city and delaying the start of activities of its title year, the city in question shall be allowed to postpone the year following a written request from the country impacted to the Commission which shall amend the Annex by way of a delegated act.

4. Cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership or third countries associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, as at the date of publication of the call for submission of applications referred to in Article 10(2), may apply for the title for one year in the framework of an open competition organised in accordance with the calendar.

Each EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate for EU membership or third country associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme

or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture shall only be allowed to host the title once during the period from 2034 to 2047.

5. Where a country accedes to the Union after [*One day after publication in the OJ*] but before 1 January 2041, it may be entitled to host the title seven years after its accession in accordance with the rules and procedures applicable to Member States, depending on the number of countries acceding to the Union at the same time. The calendar shall be updated accordingly by way of a delegated act of the Commission. Where a country accedes to the Union on or after 1 January 2041, it shall not be entitled to participate in the action as a Member State.

However, in years where there are already three cities holding the title in accordance with the calendar, cities in countries referred to in the first subparagraph shall only be entitled to hold the title in the next available year in the calendar, in the order of accession of those countries.

If a city from a country referred to in the first subparagraph has previously participated in a competition for candidate countries and potential candidates, it may not participate in any subsequent competition for Member States. If, during the period from 2034 to 2047, a city from such a country has been designated to hold the title in accordance with paragraph 4, that country shall not be entitled, after its accession, to organise a competition as a Member State during that period.

If more than one country accedes to the Union on the same date and if there is no agreement on the order of participation in the action between those countries, the Council shall organise a draw.

6. The Commission shall adopt delegated acts in accordance with Article 18 concerning amendments to the Annex.

Article 4

Application

1. A common application form based on the criteria laid down in Article 5 shall be provided by the Commission and used by all candidate cities.

Where a candidate city involves its surrounding area, the application shall be made under the name of that city. Where a group of cities apply, the application shall be made under the name of the leading city in the Member State concerned.

2. Every application shall be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension, respect artistic freedom and diversity of cultural expression, and contribute to the improvement of working conditions for artists and cultural and creative professionals.

The cultural programme shall cover the year of the title and shall be created specifically for the title, in accordance with the criteria laid down in Article 5.

Article 5

Criteria

Applications shall be assessed based on the following criteria, and all criteria shall include a strong European dimension. The Commission shall provide guidelines on the definition and understanding of those criteria, in particular of the European dimension, taking into account

synergies with relevant initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. The criteria for the assessment of application are as follows:

- (a) long-term strategy and legacy;
- (b) cultural and artistic content;
- (c) outreach, communication and citizens' participation;
- (d) management and capacity to deliver.

(1) as regards the 'long-term strategy and legacy' category, the following factors shall be taken into account:

- (a) the existence of a cultural strategy, which covers, at the time of the application, the action and includes plans for the legacy beyond the title year;
- (b) the plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including developing long-term cooperation between the cultural, socio-economic and social sectors, with a particular emphasis on the working conditions of artists;
- (c) the envisaged long-term cultural, social and economic impact, including in terms of sustainable, urban and if applicable rural development, that the title would have;
- (d) the plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title, and for disseminating the results of the evaluation at a European level.

(2) as regards the 'cultural and artistic content' category, the following factors shall be assessed:

- (a) a clear and coherent artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme: promoting the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe and artistic freedom;
- (b) the involvement of local and European artists, cultural organisations and residents, including young people, in the design and implementation of the cultural programme,
- (c) the cooperation with cities of different European countries, and cities holding the title in the same year;
- (d) the range and overall artistic quality of the activities, highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes;
- (e) the capacity to combine cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental digital cultural expressions, fostering new modes of physical and digital engagement.

(3) as regards the 'outreach, communication and citizens' participation' category, the following factors shall be assessed:

- (a) the meaningful involvement of diverse local communities and civil society in the preparation of the application and the implementation of the action;
- (b) the creation of new and inclusive opportunities, including digital, for a wide range of inhabitants, including those from peripheral areas and visitors, to attend, access or participate in cultural activities – in particular children and young people - with special attention being given to persons with disabilities and older people as regards the accessibility of those activities;

(c) the overall strategy for audience development, emphasising the link with education and the participation of schools and higher education institutions;

(d) a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy, attracting the interest of a wide local, European, and international public and highlighting that the action is a Union action using the common ECoC logo and tagline.

(4) as regards the ‘management and capacity to deliver’ category, the following factors shall be assessed:

(a) the feasibility of the fund-raising strategy and proposed budget, which includes, if applicable, plans to seek financial support from Union programmes and funds, and covers the preparation phase, the year of the title, the evaluation and legacy activities, and contingency planning;

(b) the envisaged governance and delivery structure with staff who have the necessary skills for the sustainable implementation of the action, allowing for efficient cooperation between the local authorities and the delivery structure, including the artistic team;

(c) the procedures for the appointment of the general and artistic directors and their fields of action;

(d) a wide support for the application and a sustainable financial commitment from the local, regional and national authorities;

(e) the candidate city has or will have an adequate and viable infrastructure to hold the title.

Article 6

Expert panel

1. A panel of independent experts (‘the panel’) shall be established to carry out the selection and monitoring procedures.

2. The panel shall consist of 12 experts appointed by Union institutions and bodies (‘the European experts’) in accordance with paragraph 3.

3. The Commission shall propose a pool of potential European experts based on an open call for expressions of interest.

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall appoint three experts each, in accordance with their respective procedures, and nominate another three experts each as reserves.

The European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee shall appoint one expert each, in accordance with their respective procedures, and nominate one each as reserve.

Additionally, the Commission shall select one expert from the Youth Cultural Ambassador Network²¹ and nominate one expert as reserve, in accordance with its procedure.

When selecting European experts, each of those Union institutions and bodies shall seek to ensure complementary skills, a balanced geographical distribution, gender balance and a diversity of backgrounds to reflect the concerns of various European societies in the overall composition of the panel.

²¹ This is an initiative from the Culture Compass for Europe that is currently being developed.

4. In addition to the European experts for the selection and monitoring of a city from a Member State, the Member State concerned shall be entitled to appoint up to two experts to the panel in accordance with its own procedures and in consultation with the Commission. The Member State concerned shall be responsible for contracting those two experts. This does not apply to competitions for third countries.

5. All experts shall:

- (a) be citizens and residents of the Union;
- (b) be independent;
- (c) have substantial experience and expertise in:
 - (i) at least one of the cultural and creative sectors;
 - (ii) the cultural development of cities; or
 - (iii) the organisation of an ECoC event or an international cultural event of similar scope and scale; or
 - (iv) the promotion and management of cultural tourism.
- (d) be in a position to devote several working days per year to the panel including trips (approximately 30 to 40 days).

6. The members of the panel shall be entitled to remuneration for their services, as well as to the payment of all expenses directly related to the performance of their duties under this mandate.

Such remuneration and expenses shall be payable for the full duration of their appointment.

All members of the panel shall receive equal remuneration, regardless of the institution by which they were appointed.

7. The panel shall designate its chairperson.

8. The European experts shall be appointed for a period of three years.

Nonetheless, as regards the initial establishment of the panel under this Decision, the European Parliament shall appoint its experts for three years, the Commission for two years and the Council, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee for one year so that the expertise is maintained notwithstanding the regular rotation of the expert panel.

9. If an expert resigns or is unable to carry out their tasks before the end of their mandate, or if the European Commission terminates their contract, that expert shall be replaced by an expert in reserve for the remainder of the mandate.

10. All experts shall declare any actual or potential conflict of interest in respect of a specific candidate city. In the event of such a declaration, or if such a conflict of interest comes to light, the expert concerned shall resign and the relevant Union institution or body or Member State shall replace that expert for the remainder of the mandate, in accordance with paragraph 9.

Article 7

Submission of applications in the Member States

1. In accordance with the calendar set out in the Annex, each Member State shall be responsible for the organisation of the competition between its cities.

2. The Member States concerned shall publish a call for submission of applications at least six years before the year of the title.

Each call for submission of applications shall contain the application form referred to in Article 4(1).

The deadline for submitting applications by candidate cities under each call for submission of applications shall be scheduled at the earliest 10 months after its publication.

3. The Member States concerned shall notify the applications to the Commission.

Article 8

Pre-selection in the Member States

1. Each Member State concerned shall convene the panel for a pre-selection meeting with the candidate cities no later than five years before the year of the title.

2. The panel, after assessing the applications in accordance with the criteria, shall agree on a shortlist of candidate cities and shall issue a pre-selection report on all the applications, providing, inter alia, recommendations to the shortlisted candidate cities.

3. The panel shall submit the pre-selection report to the Member States concerned and to the Commission.

4. Each Member State concerned shall formally approve the shortlist based on the report of the panel.

Article 9

Selection in the Member States

1. On the basis of the recommendations laid down in the pre-selection report, the shortlisted candidate cities shall complete and revise their applications with a view to complying with the criteria. They shall submit them to the Member State concerned, which shall in turn transmit them to the Commission.

2. Each Member State concerned shall convene the panel for a selection meeting with the shortlisted candidate cities no later than nine months after the pre-selection meeting.

Where necessary, the Member State concerned, in consultation with the Commission, may extend that nine-month deadline for a reasonable period.

3. The panel shall assess the completed and revised applications.

4. The panel shall issue a selection report on the applications of the shortlisted candidate cities with a recommendation for the designation of a maximum of one city in the Member State concerned.

The selection report shall also contain recommendations to the winning city regarding the progress to be made by the year of the title.

The panel shall submit the selection report to the Member State concerned and to the Commission.

5. Notwithstanding paragraph 4, if none of the candidate cities fulfils all the criteria, the panel may recommend that the title not be awarded for the year in question.

Article 10

Provision concerning EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership and third countries associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture

1. The Commission shall be responsible for the organisation of the competition between cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership, and third countries associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture (referred to as competitions for third countries).

2. The Commission shall publish in the *Official Journal of the European Union* a call for submission of applications at least six years before the year of the title. Each call for submission of applications shall contain the application form referred to in Article 4(1). The deadline for submitting applications under each call for submission of applications shall be scheduled at the earliest 10 months after its publication.

3. The pre-selection of the cities shall be carried out by the panel at least five years before the year of the title, on the basis of their respective applications. No meeting shall be organised with the candidate cities.

The panel, after assessing the applications in accordance with the criteria, shall agree on a shortlist of candidate cities and shall issue a pre-selection report on all the applications, providing, inter alia, recommendations to the shortlisted candidate cities. The panel shall submit the pre-selection report to the Commission.

4. The shortlisted candidate cities shall complete and revise their applications with a view to complying with the criteria, taking into account the recommendations contained in the pre-selection report, and submit them to the Commission.

The Commission shall convene the panel for a selection meeting with the shortlisted candidate cities no later than nine months after the pre-selection meeting.

Where necessary, the Commission may extend that nine-month deadline for a reasonable period.

5. The panel shall assess the completed and revised applications.

6. The panel shall issue a selection report on the applications of the shortlisted candidate cities together with a recommendation for the designation of a maximum of one city in one EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate for EU membership, or third country associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture.

The selection report shall also contain recommendations to the city concerned regarding the progress to be made by the year of the title.

The panel shall submit the selection report to the Commission.

7. Notwithstanding paragraph 6, if none of the candidate cities fulfils all the criteria, the panel may recommend that the title not be awarded for the year in question.

Article 11

Designation

1. Each Member State concerned shall designate one city to hold the title, on the basis of the recommendations contained in the selection report of the panel, and shall notify, no later than four years before the year of the title, the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions of that designation

2. In the case of EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership, or third countries associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, the Commission shall designate one city to hold the title in the relevant years, on the basis of the recommendations contained in the selection report of the panel. The Commission shall notify, no later than four years before the year of the title, the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions of that designation.

3. The designations referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 shall be accompanied by a justification based on the reports of the panel.

4. Where a city involves its surrounding area, the designation shall apply to the city.

5. Within two months of notification of designations, the Commission shall publish the list of the cities designated as ECoC in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Article 12

Cooperation between the designated cities

Cities designated for the same year, the year before and the year after shall seek to develop links between their cultural programmes and such cooperation may be considered in the framework of the monitoring procedure laid down in Article 13.

Article 13

Monitoring

1. The panel shall monitor the preparation of the designated cities for the year of the title and provide them with support and guidance from the time of their designation to the end of the year of the title.

2. To that end, the Commission shall convene four monitoring meetings which shall be attended by the panel and the designated cities, ideally:

(a) six to nine months after the designation of the city;

(b) 18 months before the year of the title;

(c) six months before the year of the title;

(d) one year after the year of the title.

The respective Member State or EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate, or third country associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, may nominate an observer to attend those meetings.

The designated cities shall submit progress reports to the Commission two weeks before each monitoring meeting.

During the monitoring meetings, the panel shall take stock of the preparations and legacy-planning and give advice with a view to helping the designated cities develop a high-quality cultural programme with a strong European dimension and an effective strategy to reach this goal. The panel shall pay special attention to the recommendations laid down in the selection report and in any preceding monitoring reports referred to in paragraph 3.

3. After each monitoring meeting, the panel shall issue a monitoring report on the state of preparations, legacy-planning and any steps to be taken.

The panel shall transmit its monitoring reports to the Commission. For competitions in the Member States, the Commission shall send them to the respective Member State, responsible for sending those reports to the designated cities. For competitions for third countries, the Commission shall send these monitoring reports directly to the designated cities.

4. In addition to the monitoring meetings, the Commission may organise visits by the panel to the designated cities whenever necessary. It may be possible to do those visits virtually if necessary.

Article 14

Withdrawal of the title

1. If, after a monitoring meeting or any additional visit as laid down in Article 13(4), the panel establishes that a titleholder has substantially failed to either: i) meet the criteria on the basis of which it was designated or ii) comply with the project and work plan submitted in its application, it shall initiate a dialogue with the Member State concerned via the Commission, with a view to facilitating the necessary adjustments.

2. If the necessary adjustments have not been timely carried out, the panel shall notify the Commission of that fact. The notification shall be accompanied by a statement of reasons and shall include practical recommendations on how to improve the situation.

3. If the practical recommendations have not been timely implemented, the panel shall issue an opinion to the Commission for the withdrawal of the title from the relevant city.

4. In the case of a city from a Member State, the Commission shall ask the Member State to withdraw the title having due regard to the opinion referred to in paragraph 3. The Member State shall notify the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions of the reasons for the withdrawal.

5. In the case of a city in an EFTA/EEA, candidate country or potential candidate for EU membership, or third country associated to the ‘Creative Europe – Culture’ strand of the AgoraEU programme or to the subsequent Union programmes supporting culture, the Commission shall adopt the decision to withdraw the title having due regard to the opinion referred to in paragraph 3. The Commission shall inform the European Parliament, the

Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions of the reasons for the withdrawal.

Article 15

Prize

1. The Commission may award a pecuniary prize in honour of Melina Mercouri ('the prize') to designated cities, subject to the availability of funding under the applicable financial framework.

The prize shall be implemented in accordance with the rules of the applicable Union programmes supporting culture.

2. Two thirds of the prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city if no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular if:

- (a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;
- (b) the independence of the artistic team has been respected;
- (c) the European dimension has remained a substantial part of the final version of the cultural programme;
- (d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly show that the action is a Union action;
- (e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place.

3. The remainder of the prize money shall be paid at the latest 24 months after the first payment, provided that the designated city concerned has solid plans for the legacy of the title year, in particular:

- (a) a dedicated budget for the legacy;
- (b) a follow-up artistic programme with a European dimension;
- (c) marketing and communication strategies highlighting that the action is a Union action.

4. If the withdrawal of the title defined in Article 14 happens during the title year, the part of the prize already paid shall be recovered by the Commission.

Article 16

Practical arrangements

1. The Commission shall in particular:

- (a) ensure the overall coherence of the action and provide the necessary support to the designated ECoC;

- (b) ensure the coordination between the Member States and the panel;
- (c) in the light of the objectives referred to in Article 2 and of the criteria referred to in Article 5, establish guidelines to assist with the selection and monitoring procedures - including the European dimension - in close cooperation with the panel;
- (d) provide technical support to the panel;
- (e) publish, on its website, all reports of the panel.

2. The Commission shall coordinate the implementation of activities to support the ECoC action, in particular it shall:

- (a) make public all relevant information and contribute to the visibility of the action at European and international level;
- (b) foster the exchange of experience and good practices between past, present and future cities holding the title, as well as candidate cities, and promote a wider dissemination of the cities' evaluation reports and lessons learned;
- (c) coordinate and support an ECoC network of cities and provide cities with support for preparing applications, implementing their programmes, and building on their ECoC experience, including integrating it into long-term urban and policy planning, whether or not they have been awarded the title;
- (d) develop targeted communication activities to enhance the visibility and reach of the ECoC action within and beyond Europe;
- (e) provide information about existing European funds to the development of projects by cities including mentoring and training.

Article 17

Evaluation

1. Each city concerned shall be responsible for the evaluation of the results of its year as an ECoC.

The Commission shall establish common guidelines and indicators for the cities concerned, based on the objectives referred to in Article 2 and on the criteria referred to in Article 5, in order to ensure a coherent approach to the evaluation procedure.

The cities concerned shall draw up their evaluation reports and submit them to the Commission by 31 December of the year following the year of the title. The Commission shall publish the evaluation reports on its website.

2. In addition to the cities' evaluations, the Commission shall ensure that external and independent evaluations of the results of the action are produced on a regular basis.

The external and independent evaluations shall focus on placing all past ECoC into a European context, allowing comparisons to be drawn and useful lessons to be learned for future ECoC, as well as for all European cities. Those evaluations shall include an assessment of the action as a whole, including the efficiency of the processes involved in running it, its impact and ways in which it could be improved.

The Commission shall present to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions the following reports based on those evaluations, accompanied by any relevant proposals:

- (a) an initial interim report by 31 December 2038;
- (b) a second interim report by 31 December 2043;
- (c) an *ex post* report by 31 December 2048.

Article 18

Exercise of the delegation

1. The power to adopt delegated acts is conferred on the Commission subject to the conditions laid down in this Article.
2. The power to adopt delegated acts referred to in Article 3 shall be conferred on the Commission for an indeterminate period of time from [*date of entry into force of the basic legislative act or any other date set by the co-legislators*].
3. The delegation of power referred to in Article 3 may be revoked at any time by the European Parliament or by the Council. A decision to revoke shall put an end to the delegation of the power specified in that decision. It shall take effect the day following the publication of the decision in the *Official Journal of the European Union* or at a later date specified therein. It shall not affect the validity of any delegated acts already in force.
4. Before adopting a delegated act, the Commission shall consult experts designated by each Member State in accordance with the principles laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making.
5. As soon as it adopts a delegated act, the Commission shall notify it simultaneously to the European Parliament and to the Council.
6. A delegated act adopted pursuant to Article 3 shall enter into force only if no objection has been expressed either by the European Parliament or the Council within a period of two months of notification of that act to the European Parliament and the Council or if, before the expiry of that period, the European Parliament and the Council have both informed the Commission that they will not object. That period shall be extended by two months at the initiative of the European Parliament or of the Council.

Article 19

Repeal and transitional provisions

Decision No 445/2014/EU is hereby repealed. It shall however continue to apply in the case of cities which have been designated or are in the process of being designated as ECoC for the years from 2020 to 2033.

Article 20

Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament
The President

For the Council
The President

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1. FRAMEWORK OF THE PROPOSAL/INITIATIVE

1.1. Title of the proposal/initiative

Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council renewing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2034 to 2047 and repealing Decision No 445/2014/EU.

1.2. Policy area(s) concerned

Culture, cities.

1.3. Objective(s)

1.3.1. General objective(s)

The first general objective of the action is to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share, as well as to increase a European sense of belonging to a common cultural area. The second is to foster the contribution of culture to the sustainable and inclusive development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.

1.3.2. Specific objective(s)

The action will underpin the following specific objectives:

a) to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation, thereby raising the international profile of cities.

b) to improve access to and participation in culture, the arts and cultural heritage for all, notably for young people, and to strengthen social cohesion, intergenerational fairness, equality and diversity, through cultural engagement.

c) to strengthen the innovation capacity of the local cultural sector, including its digital one, and its cooperation with other sectors.

1.3.3. Expected result(s) and impact

Specify the effects which the proposal/initiative should have on the beneficiaries/groups targeted.

The proposed revision of the ECoC's legal basis is expected to have a positive social, economic, environmental and international impact.

Social impact: The revised ECoC action is expected to strengthen the sense of European identity and belonging, broadening access to and participation in culture. In particular, it will benefit people in rural and less-visible regions and encourage more young people to get involved. It will also support initiatives aimed at involving children and young people. It will support social cohesion, intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and democratic engagement in the EU and beyond.

Economic impact: By improving the visibility and reach of the ECoC, the initiative is likely to boost local cultural tourism, stimulate innovation and regional development, and create jobs, especially in small and medium-sized cultural businesses.

Environmental impact: The revised framework will integrate sustainability more explicitly into the selection and monitoring processes, encouraging cities to adopt green practices in management, visitor engagement and operations. This will

contribute to raising awareness of climate issues through cultural narratives and boosting the role of culture in advancing the green transition.

International impact: The revised framework will primarily focus on Member States, as is currently the case, in line with the instrument providing direct financial support to the ECoC at EU level (the Creative Europe programme until 2027 and then its successor). However, EU external action priorities will also be taken into account to ensure that the revised framework plays a role in EU enlargement policy, cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The initiative will contribute positively to several SDGs, in particular: SDG 4 (Quality education); SDG 5 (Gender equality); SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth); SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities); SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities); SDG 13 (Climate action); SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions); SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals).

1.3.4. *Indicators of performance*

Specify the indicators for monitoring progress and achievements.

N/A. The ECoC action does not have its own funds. Its budget will stem from the successor to the Creative Europe programme. Each designated city carries out its own performance evaluation, based on Commission guidelines which will be reviewed once the legal basis is adopted.

1.4. **The proposal/initiative relates to:**

- ☐ a new action
- ☐ a new action following a pilot project / preparatory action³⁴
- ☒ the extension of an existing action
- ☐ a merger or redirection of one or more actions towards another/a new action

1.5. **Grounds for the proposal/initiative**

1.5.1. *Requirement(s) to be met in the short or long term including a detailed timeline for roll-out of the implementation of the initiative*

The ECoC action will continue to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, promote greater mutual understanding between people and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities.

1.5.2. *Added value of EU involvement (it may result from different factors, e.g. coordination gains, legal certainty, greater effectiveness or complementarities). For the purposes of this section 'added value of EU involvement' is the value resulting from EU action, that is additional to the value that would have been otherwise created by Member States alone.*

Reasons for action at EU level (*ex ante*)

National governments play a central role in protecting and promoting their national cultures and heritage. However, the first interim evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture Action 2020-2033 found that the ECoC adds significant value by offering a European-level framework that highlights the international significance of the

³⁴

As referred to in Article 58(2), point (a) or (b) of the Financial Regulation.

selected cities. It also strengthens the role of those cities in promoting the diversity of cultures in Europe and their common traits, and in promoting shared European values, history and identity.

Expected generated EU added value (*ex post*)

The action will improve voluntary cooperation, knowledge transfer and visibility between cities across the EU and beyond. The ECoC title has been awarded three times to cities outside the EU and will be given again in 2030 and 2033 to a city in an EFTA/EEA country, a candidate country or a potential candidate participating in the EU's Creative Europe programme. The ECoC action supports national efforts by integrating them into a coherent EU strategy, helping to align cultural initiatives with broader EU priorities, such as youth engagement, sustainability and digital innovation. This initiative also promotes a more balanced geographic representation. The external aspect of the ECoC action aligns with broader EU efforts to strengthen enlargement policies, promote cultural diplomacy and foster international cultural relations.

Renewing the legal basis will strengthen the initiative's capacity to support cities more effectively, increase flexibility in its design and improve its long-term coherence and impact. This will ensure that the EU continues to play a constructive and complementary role in the cultural and heritage landscape.

1.5.3. *Lessons learned from similar experiences in the past*

The first interim evaluation of the 2020-2033 ECoC action shows that it is a successful flagship action with substantial cost-effectiveness for the EU due to its very limited impact on the EU budget. Moreover, the initiative can transform the candidate cities and selected cities. This is because the cities must engage in long-term planning and incorporate culture into local city policies to be considered for the title. The action is also consistent with other EU initiatives (e.g. the Creative Europe programme), facilitates sharing EU values, and supports the movement of European cultural professionals and artists and the circulation of their works across the EU and beyond.

After 40 years, the action is still sought after by cities and wider areas looking to develop themselves through culture. However, to ensure its continued relevance in the future, it is necessary to update the action, taking into account emerging trends, such as the increasing number of smaller cities competing for the title.

European dimension: It is a key aspect of the ECoC action (and one of the criteria for selecting title holders), but it is not often fully understood by many stakeholders. The evaluation recommends that the Commission explore ways to better explain this aspect to stakeholders.

Long-term knowledge: There is a candidate cities' network called Culture Next, set up in 2017, that includes current and former cities, regardless of whether they were awarded the title. However, there is no formal ECoC network, so there is risk of knowledge not being shared between newly appointed and previous title holders. The Commission could investigate how to promote knowledge-sharing in the ECoC community to maximise the initiative's full potential, particularly its European dimension.

Communication: There are currently no EU-level communication campaigns led by the Commission or other EU institutions to promote the ECoC cities. This hampers

the initiative's visibility and impact, and public awareness of it. The ECoC could benefit from EU communication efforts to support and complement the work of the title-holding cities, with input from Member States. Appointing ECoC ambassadors, such as Commissioners or MEPs could also strengthen the initiative.

1.5.4. Compatibility with the multiannual financial framework and possible synergies with other appropriate instruments

The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) action will stem from the successor to the Creative Europe programme (currently the proposal for the AgoraEU programme), which is part of the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework proposal.

The ECoC action is aligned with the objectives of the Culture Compass for Europe and builds on several key policy initiatives, including the Commission's New European Agenda for Culture, the Council's EU work plans for culture, the Joint Communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations', and the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage.

The Union action also aligns with European initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus, the European Heritage Label and the EU Agenda for Cities. It is also in line with the Rome Declaration of March 2017, where the Member States and EU institutions envisioned a Union 'where citizens have new opportunities for cultural and social development and economic growth [...]; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity'. In addition, it aligns with the European Democracy Shield and the strategy on intergenerational fairness. The ECoC action will also be in line with the European strategy for sustainable tourism.

Candidate cities are encouraged to explore the possibility, if applicable, of seeking financial support from Union programmes and funds, especially the AgoraEU programme and the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security, channelled through the National and Regional Partnership Plans, as well as subsequent programmes.

1.5.5. Assessment of the different available financing options, including scope for redeployment

N/A

1.6. Duration of the proposal/initiative and of its financial impact

☒ limited duration

- ☒ in effect from 01.01.2034 to 31.12.2047
- ☒ financial impact from 2034 to 2047 for commitment appropriations and from 2034 to 2047 for payment appropriations.

☐ unlimited duration

- Implementation with a start-up period from YYYY to YYYY,
- followed by full-scale operation.

1.7. Method(s) of budget implementation planned

☒ Direct management by the Commission

- ☒ by its departments, including by its staff in the Union delegations;
- ☒ by the executive agencies

☐ Shared management with the Member States

☐ Indirect management by entrusting budget implementation tasks to:

- ☐ third countries or the bodies they have designated
- ☐ international organisations and their agencies (to be specified)
- ☐ the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund
- ☐ bodies referred to in Articles 70 and 71 of the Financial Regulation
- ☐ public law bodies
- ☐ bodies governed by private law with a public service mission to the extent that they are provided with adequate financial guarantees
- ☐ bodies governed by the private law of a Member State that are entrusted with the implementation of a public-private partnership and that are provided with adequate financial guarantees
- ☐ bodies or persons entrusted with the implementation of specific actions in the common foreign and security policy pursuant to Title V of the Treaty on European Union, and identified in the relevant basic act
- ☐ bodies established in a Member State, governed by the private law of a Member State or Union law and eligible to be entrusted, in accordance with sector-specific rules, with the implementation of Union funds or budgetary guarantees, to the extent that such bodies are controlled by public law bodies or by bodies governed by private law with a public service mission, and are provided with adequate financial guarantees in the form of joint and several liability by the controlling bodies or equivalent financial guarantees and which may be, for each action, limited to the maximum amount of the Union support.

Comments

The action will be implemented under direct management by the Commission, with parts potentially delegated to a programme implementing body.

2. MANAGEMENT MEASURES

2.1. Monitoring and reporting rules

N/A. Each designated city carries out its own performance evaluation, based on Commission guidelines which will be reviewed once the legal basis has been adopted.

The Commission will submit to the European Parliament, the Council, European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions the following reports, based on those evaluations and accompanied, if appropriate, by relevant proposals:

(a) an initial interim report;

(b) a second interim report;

(c) an *ex post* report.

2.2. Management and control system(s)

2.2.1. *Justification of the budget implementation method(s), the funding implementation mechanism(s), the payment modalities and the control strategy proposed*

N/A. The budget of the ECoC action will stem from the successor to the Creative Europe programme.

2.2.2. *Information concerning the risks identified and the internal control system(s) set up to mitigate them*

The Commission awards and pays a symbolic prize to each designated city that has fulfilled the commitments they made during the bidding process and has a legacy plan with a European dimension. The prize is a fixed amount paid in two instalments after several monitoring meetings carried out by an independent expert panel.

2.2.3. *Estimation and justification of the cost-effectiveness of the controls (ratio between the control costs and the value of the related funds managed), and assessment of the expected levels of risk of error (at payment & at closure)*

N/A. Each designated city carries out its own performance evaluation, based on Commission guidelines which will be reviewed once the legal basis is adopted.

2.3. Measures to prevent fraud and irregularities

The respective services will continue to apply their anti-fraud strategy – in line with the Commission's Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS) – to ensure, inter alia, that their internal anti-fraud related controls are fully aligned with the CAFS, and that their fraud risk management approach is geared to identify fraud risk cases and provide adequate responses. The anti-fraud strategies currently in place enable fraud risk to be addressed, mainly via measures to prevent irregularities which are then escalated in the event of fraud detection.

3. ESTIMATED FINANCIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL/INITIATIVE

3.1. Heading(s) of the multiannual financial framework and expenditure budget line(s) affected

- Existing budget lines

In order of multiannual financial framework headings and budget lines.

Comment: N/A. The ECoC action does not have its own funds. Its budget will stem from the successor to the Creative Europe programme.

Heading of multiannual financial framework	Budget line	Type of expenditure	Contribution			
	Number	Diff./Non-diff. ³⁵	from EFTA countries ³⁶	from candidate countries and potential candidates ³⁷	From other third countries	other assigned revenue
2	06 01 02 Support expenditure for 'AgoraEU'	Non-diff.	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
2	06 03 01 Creative Europe – Culture	Diff.	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO

³⁵ Diff. = Differentiated appropriations / Non-diff. = Non-differentiated appropriations.

³⁶ EFTA: European Free Trade Association.

³⁷ Candidate countries and, where applicable, potential candidates from the Western Balkans.

3.2. Estimated financial impact of the proposal on appropriations

3.2.1. Summary of estimated impact on operational appropriations

The estimated impact on expenditure and staffing for 2028 and beyond is added for illustrative purposes only and does not pre-judge the next multiannual financial framework. The source of financing and scope of Union financial commitments in the post-2027 period remain subject to the outcome of interinstitutional negotiations on future MFFs and shall subsequently be determined through the annual budgetary procedure. All appropriations and staffing allocations as of 2028 are indicative.

3.2.1.1. Appropriations from voted budget

N/A.

EUR million (to three decimal places)

Heading of multiannual financial framework		Number	2							
DG: EAC				Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	TOTAL
				2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039-2047	2034-2047
				Operational appropriations						
Budget line 06 03 01 Creative Europe - Culture		Commitments	(1a)	6.45	9.45	6.45	9.7	6.45	64.55	103.05
		Payments	(2a)	4.45	4.45	8.45	6.45	9.7	65.30	98.8
				Appropriations of an administrative nature financed from the envelope of specific programmes						
Budget line			(3)							0.000
TOTAL appropriations for DG EAC		Commitments	=1a+1b+3	6.45	9.45	6.45	9.7	6.45	64.55	103.05
		Payments	=2a+2b+3	4.45	4.45	8.45	6.45	9.7	65.30	98.8

3.2.1.2. Appropriations from external assigned revenues

N/A.

3.2.2. Estimated output funded from operational appropriations (not to be completed for decentralised agencies)

N/A.

3.2.3. Summary of estimated impact on administrative appropriations

The estimated impact on expenditure and staffing for 2028 and beyond is added for illustrative purposes only and does not pre-judge the next multiannual financial framework. The source of financing and scope of Union financial commitments in the post-2027 period remain subject to the outcome of interinstitutional negotiations on future MFFs and shall subsequently be determined through the annual budgetary procedure. All appropriations and staffing allocations as of 2028 are indicative.

3.2.3.1. Appropriations from voted budget (in EUR million)

VOTED APPROPRIATIONS		Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	TOTAL 2034 - 2047
		2034	2035	2036	2037	2038-2047	
	HEADING 4						
Human resources		1.005	1.005	1.005	1.005	10.050	14.070
Other administrative expenditure		0.015	0.215	0.015	0.215	1.150	1.610
Subtotal HEADING 4		1.020	1.220	1.020	1.220	11.200	15.680
	Outside HEADING 4						
Human resources		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Other expenditure of an administrative nature		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Subtotal outside HEADING 4		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
TOTAL		1.020	1.220	1.020	1.220	11.200	15.680

3.2.3.3. Total appropriations (in EUR million)

TOTAL VOTED APPROPRIATIONS + EXTERNAL ASSIGNED REVENUES		Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	TOTAL 2034 - 2047
		2034	2035	2036	2037	2038-2047	
	HEADING 4						
Human resources		1.005	1.005	1.005	1.005	10.050	14.070
Other administrative expenditure		0.015	0.215	0.015	0.215	1.150	1.610
Subtotal HEADING 4		1.020	1.220	1.020	1.220	11.200	15.680
	Outside HEADING 4						
Human resources		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Other expenditure of an administrative nature		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Subtotal outside HEADING 4		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
TOTAL		1.020	1.220	1.020	1.220	11.200	15.680

3.2.4. Estimated requirements of human resources

The estimated impact on expenditure and staffing for 2028 and beyond is added for illustrative purposes only and does not prejudice the next multiannual financial framework. The source of financing and scope of Union financial commitments in the post-2027 period remain subject to the outcome of interinstitutional negotiations on the 2028-2034 MFF and

shall subsequently be determined through the annual budgetary procedure. All appropriations and staffing allocations as of 2028 are indicative.

3.2.4.1. Financed from voted budget

Estimate to be expressed in full-time equivalent units (FTEs)

VOTED APPROPRIATIONS		Year 2034	Year 2035	Year 2036	Year 2037	Year 2038	Year 2039-2047
• Establishment plan posts (officials and temporary staff)							
20 01 02 01 (Headquarters and Commission's Representation Offices)		3	3	3	3	3	3
20 01 02 03 (EU Delegations)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 01 (Indirect research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 11 (Direct research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
Other budget lines (specify)		0	0	0	0	0	0
• External staff (inFTEs)							
20 02 01 (AC, END from the 'global envelope')		4	4	4	4	4	4
20 02 03 (AC, AL, END and JPD in the EU Delegations)		0	0	0	0	0	0
Admin. Support line [XX.01.YY.YY]	- at Headquarters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	- in EU Delegations	0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 02 (AC, END - Indirect research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 12 (AC, END - Direct research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
Other budget lines (specify) - Heading 4		0	0	0	0	0	0
Other budget lines (specify) - Outside Heading 4		0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		7	7	7	7	7	7

3.2.4.2. Financed from external assigned revenues

N/A.

3.2.4.3. Total requirements of human resources

TOTAL VOTED APPROPRIATIONS + EXTERNAL ASSIGNED REVENUES		Year 2034	Year 2035	Year 2036	Year 2037	Year 2038	Year 2039- 2047
• Establishment plan posts (officials and temporary staff)							
20 01 02 01 (Headquarters and Commission's Representation Offices)		3	3	3	3	3	3
20 01 02 03 (EU Delegations)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 01 (Indirect research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 11 (Direct research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
Other budget lines (specify)		0	0	0	0	0	0
• External staff (inFTEs)							
20 02 01 (AC, END from the 'global envelope')		4	4	4	4	4	4
20 02 03 (AC, AL, END and JPD in the EU Delegations)		0	0	0	0	0	0
Admin. Support line [XX.01.YY.YY]	- at Headquarters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	- in EU Delegations	0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 02 (AC, END - Indirect research)		0	0	0	0	0	0
01 01 01 12 (AC, END - Direct research)		0	0	0	0	0	0

Other budget lines (specify) - Heading 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other budget lines (specify) - Outside Heading 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	7	7	7	7	7	7

Considering the overall strained situation in Heading 4, in terms of both staffing and the level of appropriations, the human resources required will be met by staff from the DG who are already assigned to the management of the action and/or have been redeployed within the DG or other Commission services.

The staff required to implement the proposal (in FTEs):

	To be covered by current staff available in the Commission services	Exceptional additional staff*		
		To be financed under Heading 4 or Research	To be financed from BA line	To be financed from fees
Establishment plan posts	3		N/A	
External staff (CA, SNEs, INT)	4			

Description of tasks to be carried out by:

Officials and temporary staff	Ensure the overall coherence of the action and provide the necessary support to the designated ECoC; Ensure the coordination between the Member States and the panel; Ensure the supervision and coordination of the panel; Ensure the supervision of the competitions in the Member States Coordinate the competitions in third countries.
External staff	Establish guidelines to assist with the selection and monitoring procedures - including the European dimension - in close cooperation with the panel; Provide technical support to the panel; Publish, on its website, all reports of the panel. Make public all relevant information and contribute to the visibility of the action at European and international level; Foster the exchange of experience and good practices between past, present and future cities holding the title, as well as candidate cities, and promote a wider dissemination of the cities' evaluation reports and lessons learned; Provide cities with support for preparing applications, implementing their programmes, and building on their ECoC experience, including integrating it into long-term urban and

	policy planning, whether or not they have been awarded the title; Develop targeted communication activities to enhance the visibility and reach of the ECoC action within and beyond Europe; Provide information about existing European funds to the development of projects by cities including mentoring and training.
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3.2.5. *Overview of estimated impact on digital technology-related investments*

N/A.

3.2.6. *Compatibility with the current multiannual financial framework*

The proposal/initiative is consistent with the proposal for the 2028-2034 MFF.

3.2.7. *Third-party contributions*

The proposal/initiative:

- ☒ does not provide for co-financing by third parties
- ☐ provides for the co-financing by third parties estimated below:

Appropriations in EUR million (to three decimal places)

	Year 2024	Year 2025	Year 2026	Year 2027	Total
Specify the co-financing body					
TOTAL appropriations co-financed					

3.3. *Estimated impact on revenue*

- ☒ The proposal/initiative has no financial impact on revenue.
- ☐ The proposal/initiative has the following financial impact:
- ☐ on own resources
- ☐ on other revenue
- ☐ please indicate, if the revenue is assigned to expenditure lines

EUR million (to three decimal places)

Budget revenue line:	Appropriations available for the current financial year	Impact of the proposal/initiative ³⁸			
		Year 2024	Year 2025	Year 2026	Year 2027
Article					

For assigned revenue, specify the budget expenditure line(s) affected.

N/A.

³⁸ As regards traditional own resources (customs duties, sugar levies), the amounts indicated must be net amounts, i.e. gross amounts after deduction of 20 % for collection costs.

Other remarks (e.g. method/formula used for calculating the impact on revenue or any other information).

N/A.

4. DIGITAL DIMENSIONS

4.1. Requirements of digital relevance

Requirement 1 (R1):

As stated in Article 16(2)(a) of the proposal, [...] *make public all relevant information and contribute to the visibility of the action at European and international levels*. The players affected or concerned by this requirement are the European Commission, national authorities and beneficiaries. The high-level process affected is ‘dissemination’.

4.2. Data

The data provided is related to the ECoC action’s information, news and results and comes from public reports or cities’ application forms.

4.3. Digital solutions

The digital solution envisaged is a dissemination platform, in line with the proposal’s Article 16. The platform’s main mandated functions are the dissemination of the action’s information, news and results. The managing bodies will be the European Commission and a possible programme implementing body.

Accessibility will be catered for and reusability will be considered in accordance with Commission standards. The platform will leverage the use of artificial intelligence, if applicable, adhering to the precautionary principle.

If leveraging AI, the European Commission will ensure compliance with the AI Act.

Without prejudice to Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the European Commission will ensure the security, integrity, authenticity and confidentiality of the data collected and stored for the purpose of this regulation.

4.4. Interoperability assessment

N/A.

4.5. Measures to support digital implementation

N/A.