



**OFFICIAL HANDOVER
2025**

**EUROPEAN CAPITALS
OF CULTURE**

2024 BAD ISCHL SALZKAMMERGUT . BODØ . TARTU
2025 CHEMNITZ . NOVA GORICA / GORIZIA

A Flame for Culture and a Common Future of Europe

The Official Handover of the title of European Capital of Culture took place on 22 November 2024 at the Lehár Theatre in Bad Ischl

Bad Ischl, 22 November 2024

Today, the European Capitals and Regions of Europe of 2024 (short: ECoCs) officially handed over their titles to the European Capitals of Culture of 2025. Bad Ischl Salzkammergut (Austria), Bodø (Norway) and Tartu (Estonia) passed on the title to the ECoCs of 2025 Chemnitz (Germany) and Nova Gorica/Gorizia on the Slovenian-Italian border.

Since 1985, when Athens was designated as the first European Capital of Culture on the initiative of Melina Mercouri and Jack Lang, European Capitals of Culture are being awarded this title for a common European future. Since then, more than 60 cities across the European Union and beyond have been awarded the title – with the aim of highlighting European cultures and bringing people, cities and countries together through art and culture, thus helping to strengthen Europe. The freedom of art is embedded as a fundamental right and the pillars of the European way of life are celebrated in this way every year.

We live in a time in which democratic and pro-European forces require a concentration of social action. European Capitals of Culture stand for approaching one another and appreciating diversity, both of which are fundamentals that make a society strong and resilient. But they also stand for the achievement of our democratic society: the development from tried and tested traditions into an open society. Art is a fundamental driver for diversity, reflection, visionary action and the guarantee that Remembrance Culture is lived in the present and is building the future.

“The hand-over events between outgoing and incoming European Capitals of Culture are becoming a regular event in the ECoC calendar. It highlights the bond, collaboration and solidarity between the European Capitals of Culture. I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to Bad Ischl-Salzkammergut, Tartu and Bodø on the excellence of their title-year in 2024 and to wish Chemnitz and Nova Gorica much success in 2025. Next year will mark a special milestone for the European Capitals of Culture, as the initiative will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Through the years, the European Capitals of Culture have provided opportunities for Europeans to meet and discover the cultural diversity of our continent and the shared democratic traditions.” **Georg Häusler, Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport in the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture**

“Passing on the European flame for culture today in Bad Ischl is an important symbolic gesture uniting cities and countries together through vivid production. It is in accordance with our slogan GO! Borderless and symbolizing cross-border cooperation between Nova Gorica and Gorizia being one Ecoc.” **Stojan Pelko, Head of Programme, European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025**

“Many Chemnitz residents are very impressed by the diverse and inspiring programs of the three European Capitals of Culture 2024. This makes European coexistence successful for many people. Can be experienced directly! Capitals of Culture in Europe show connecting and powerful culture. Chemnitz is pleased, together with Nova Gorica, to accept the symbolic baton and continue to enrich Europe with new perspectives and stories and celebrate European diversity in the coming year.” **Stefan Schmidtke, Managing Director Programme, European Capital of Culture Chemnitz 2025**

“It has been an honour to be part of this great European community. The artistic processes, new partnerships and collaborations have opened up for a deeper understanding of who and what we are. I believe this added attention to the arts, and the diverse expressions through a whole year have made a real impact in our city. It’s a privilege to hand the title over to our new friends and colleagues. Lykke til! Best of luck!” **Henrik Sand Dagfinrud, Program Director, European Capital of Culture Bodø 2024**

“23 municipalities dared to be a cultural capital region together and took the opportunity to network, to enter into close exchange, to reflect on themselves and their own history through art, artistic interventions and cultural suggestions, and to allow a different view of themselves to confront ourselves with new thoughts, influences, experiences and visions, to understand each other better and to position ourselves in a more differentiated manner in the European context. The exchange and networking with other cultural capitals was an elementary part of it. Faced with the impending loss of our most basic values, it is our job to strengthen art and culture as perhaps the last remaining corrective. Art opens up poetic spaces for thought, enables knowledge of sensory



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experience, creates culture and cultivates us. It shows us the way to the intellectual freedom that every society needs: because no one is like the other, but the other is just as important as you are. The summary after one year of European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024 can just be: Art is a creative force, it is not a privilege for elites, it cannot be replaced and cannot be compensated for with money.” **Elisabeth Schweeger, Artistic Director, European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024**

“I am pleased to see that the themes of environment, community, and youth are strongly highlighted in the programs of all the current European Capitals of Culture. I'm sure that the upcoming Capitals of Culture will embrace the same approach and I wish them resilience for the journey ahead.” **Kati Torp, Artistic Director, European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024**

The event was supported by the presence of the following Guests of Honour:

Urmias Klaas, Mayor of Tartu, **Kuldar Leis**, Managing Director, European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024, **Dagmar Ruscheinsky**, Mayor for Culture, Sport, Social Affairs, Youth and Health of Chemnitz, **Andrea Pier**, Managing Director, Chemnitz 2025, **Samo Turel**, Mayor of Nova Gorica, **Mija Lorbek**, Managing Director, European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025, **Stojan Pelko**, Head of Programme, European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025, **Sylvain Pasqua**, Team Leader for the Coordination of the European Capital of Culture Action at the European Commission, **H.E. Vito Cecere**, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Vienna, **Gertrud Aichem-Degreif**, Cultural Officer of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Vienna, **H.E. Susan Eckey**, Ambassador of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, **H.E. Merle Pajula**, Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia in Vienna, **Theresia Niedermüller**, Director General for Arts and Culture at the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport of Austria, representing **Werner Kogler**, Federal Minister for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport of Austria, **H.E. Ambassador Christoph Thun-Hohenstein**, Director General for International Cultural Affairs at the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria, representing, **Alexander Schallenberg**, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria, **Christian Buchmann**, Federal Councillor, Federal State of Styria, representing **Christopher Drexler**, Head of the Federal State of Styria, **Margot Nazzal**, Director of Culture and Society, Federal State of Upper Austria, representing **Thomas Stelzer**, Head of the Federal State of Upper Austria, **Hannes Heide**, Member of the European Parliament and initiator of Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024, **Thomas Avbelj**, Mayor of Roitham, **Christof Bammer**, Vice-Mayor of Scharnstein, representing **Rudolf Raffelsberger**, Mayor of Scharnstein, **Leopold Bimminger**, Mayor of Pettenbach, **Ingo Dörflinger**, Mayor of Kirchham, **Nicole Eder**, Mayor of Steinbach am Attersee, **Fritz Feichtinger**, Mayor of Laakirchen, **Peter Hofstödter**, Chairman of the Cultural Committee, representing **Herbert Schönberger**, Mayor of St. Konrad, **Egon Höll**, Mayor of Obertraun, **Stefan Krapf**, Mayor of Gmunden, **Christoph Schragl**, Mayor of Traunkirchen, **Gerald Loitzl**, Mayor of Altausee, **Johannes Mitterlehner**, Mayor of Vorchdorf, **Martin Pelzer**, Mayor of Altmünster, **Alexander Scheutz**, Mayor of Hallstatt, **Leopold Schilcher**, Mayor of Bad Goisern, **Ines Schiller**, Mayor of Bad Ischl, **Franz Steinegger**, Mayor of Grundlsee, **Elisabeth Schweeger**, Artistic Director, European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024, **Manuela Reichert**, Managing Director, European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024, **Kathrin Kneissel**, Funding and International Affairs, Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, **Patrick Schnabl**, Head of the Department of Culture, Europe and Sport, Provincial Government of Styria, **Adam Sifkovits**, Director of the Bad Ischl Town Council, **Jakob E. Reitinger**, Tourism Board of Bad Ischl, **Christian Schirlbauer**, Tourism Board of Dachstein Salzkammergut

Moderation of the event: **Marlene Nowotny**

UNITY – The Flame

The annual official handover and European history are symbolized by the sculpture UNITY – The Flame. The sculpture was created by the Luxembourg designer Pascale Seil (“Made by Seil”). The shape of the flame stands for power and infinity, the material glass for transparency and lightness, the colors for diversity and cohesion: UNITY for Europe. The sculpture was inspired by a story from Greek mythology: the abduction of King Agenor's daughter, Phoenician maiden “Europa”, to whom the continent owes its name. Europa infatuated Zeus with her striking beauty and grace. To escape the wrath of his wife Hera, he transformed into a white bull and abducted Europa to the island of Crete, where he revealed his true identity and impregnated her. Europa gave birth to Minos, who was to become king of Crete. The horns of the “bull” stand for power; the circle bearing the bull's horns represents volenity and infinity. The sculpture consists of 47 layers of coloured glass, each representing a European country. The colors of Europe – blue and yellow (gold) – dominate. The history, shapes and colors of all these different layers symbolize Europe as a unified body composed of individual identities and characteristics.



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Participation in a common project – across borders

Similarly, the European Capital of Culture project embodies this combination of combined forces and yet has so many different facets. Hundreds of artists, institutions, volunteers and citizens help to shape the special title years and lay the foundations for new things that will last through time. They collaborate with each other and bring people and cultures together. Citizens have the opportunity to actively take part in the project and its activities, contributing to the development and cultural expression of their city or region. Each European Capital of Culture brings new energy to the city and naturally boosts its cultural, social and economic development. All past, present and future title holders should exchange ideas, benefit from each other and support each other by driving projects together. The cooperation and networking efforts between ECoCs are expressed through projects and initiatives that aim to achieve a long-term impact for the current title year and beyond. In 2024, the ECoCs have also worked intensively together to launch a variety of projects. This event is an additional building block that strengthens and symbolizes this cross-border cooperation.

European Capitals of Culture of 2025

Chemnitz, Germany

C the Unseen

Saxony's industrial hub of Chemnitz and 38 municipalities across Central Saxony, the Ore Mountains and Zwickau have been named a European Capital of Culture 2025. Chemnitz and its surrounding region are linked by a vibrant shared cultural and industrial heritage. The title is an invitation to all to come and discover the history of this eastern German area at the heart of Europe. Chemnitz 2025 shines a spotlight on people, places and activities that have so far had little attention in terms of tourism, giving them the chance to promote themselves and welcome new visitors.

Nova Gorica/Gorizia, Slovenia/Italy

GO! BORDERLESS

Nova Gorica was chosen as the European Capital of Culture 2025 for its ability to reach across borders—inviting neighbouring Gorizia into the project and overcoming cultural and historical barriers. The goal of **GO! BORDERLESS** is to transcend borders, a theme central to the European Union. This cross-border initiative between two cities and two countries demonstrates the power of collaboration, aiming to break down both tangible and intangible barriers and create precedents for strengthening Europe's peripheries.



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