



PRESS RELEASE

Žilina runs for the European Capital of Culture 2026 title together with cross-border partner cities

Žilina (Slovakia), 25th January 2021 - The city of Žilina is running for the title of European Capital of Culture 2026 together with its partner cities Bielsko-Biala in Poland and Frýdek-Místek in the Czech Republic under the name ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026. Žilina has decided to prioritize in its bid the cross-border cultural cooperation over the sole self-presentation, symbolically opening the city and redefining its regional and European profile, and at the same time strengthening the common Beskids brand.

This week, the project team of Žilina presented details of its candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture, as well as the new visual identity of the project, together with an updated website. At the same time, the representatives of the project presented the reasons and opportunities of a unique co-candidacy with the cross-border cities of Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek and their local cultural institutions.

“The location of Žilina near the borders of two other countries brings with it a unique cultural, economic and innovation potential, and the opening up to international cooperation thus represents an obvious and accessible way to significantly move the development of our city forward. The cities of Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek are in many ways similar to the character of Žilina - they are industrial cities, historical and economic centres of their regions, surrounded by beautiful nature with many opportunities for cultural and sports activities. With the long-term partner cities of Žilina, we can thus join forces for a comprehensive exchange of experience, know-how or innovations and together create a significant cross-border region of the Beskids Mountains,” says the Žilina’s mayor Peter Fiabáne. *“Also, when the planned road infrastructure is completed in the coming years, these cities will be much closer to us than, for example, other Slovak cities. Together with partners from Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek, we see a huge potential for enriching our cities and the lives of their inhabitants.”* In addition to these cities, more than 30 towns and municipalities from the surrounding regions of Kysuce, Rajec, Orava and Považie, in the frame of Euroregion Beskydy, have expressed interest in cooperating, thus the ECoC project gains a critical mass of the involved population and cultural operators.

The main goals of the Žilina Beskids 2026 project are the support of European cultural cooperation, the use of culture as a driving force for the transformation of the entire region, as well as the development of cultural and creative industries. The key cooperation with the cities of Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek aims along with these goals also to form an important region across the borders of the three states, and what unites all these cities are the Beskids mountains. The aim of the project is to



make the "Beskids" brand an attractive tourist destination of European importance capable of competing with similar destinations in Europe.

"Žilina's application for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2026 is an ambitious and promising challenge. The invitation of Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek to cope with the challenge only proves the broad horizons of the project and the strength of the leader who wants to give the project not only a local but also a cross-border, European character. The three cities have been bound by formal partnership agreements for many years. So far, we have cooperated in many areas, but mainly in the field of culture. Therefore, I look with great hope to a future that can bring great benefits to all of us, the whole region and its people: measurable benefits for the economy, culture, tourism, strengthening existing ties, developing existing and creating new projects. Our cities have strong historical and cultural potential. There they draw their strength. And most importantly - the Beskids Mountains do not divide our cities, but rather connect them," said the Mayor of Bielsko-Biała (PL), Jarosław Klimaszewski.

"We were offered the possibility of co-candidacy, which creates space to give a new dimension to our traditional events, as well as culture in the city, including strengthening the city's identity, citizens' relationship with it and other values," responded Mayor Michal Pobucký, Mayor of Frýdek-Mýstek.

The main slogan of the candidacy - *Window of Opportunities* - a term that originated in the scientific environment of spaceflight and indicated the optimal time period for the launch of a space rocket. For the candidacy of Žilina, the *Window of Opportunities* expresses the optimal moment to use the opportunity to redefine its own story and bring positive change and a higher quality of life in the city, but also to find a new centrality for the entire region.

The proposed program of Žilina Beskids 2026 consists of three main program lines, which reflect the unique local context of the city and the region with an overlap on current European topics and challenges. Around these pillars, more than 130 cultural and artistic projects have been created, in which local cultural institutions, as well as more than 70 partner organizations from abroad, will participate.

The first program line called *Flow of Nature* is focused on art in nature - it uses art as a means to highlight current climate and environmental challenges, connects it with sports and other outdoor activities, develops the potential to rethink our relationship with nature and traditions or bring art to non-traditional places, such as mountain huts, cycling or hiking trails, parks, rivers and water areas or forests. In the second program line, called *Future's Factory*, the projects will focus on connecting art with industry and technology, building on the production tradition in Žilina, as well as improving the involvement of artists and citizens in reviving city's public spaces. Close cooperation with the University of Žilina, creative sectors or the start-up scene is planned in order to support the connections between art and science and their innovations. In the last program line called *Borderless Identity*, there is an emphasis on several unique stories connected with Žilina and the Beskids



mountains, whose artistic elaboration will support reflecting about the past, identities and values on which local community is based. The themes of this line will thus revolve around freedom of speech and media, historical processes of nation-building, transport and its intercultural potential, or the promotion of diversity in the city and the region.

On 4th February, 10 representatives of the project will participate in a presentation to the international panel, which will present the city's candidacy in detail and answer individual questions from the panel members. The panel then has the task of selecting from among all the Slovak candidate cities those who, thanks to the quality of their application, advance to the 2nd round of the competition. In addition to Žilina, cities of Banská Bystrica, Hlohovec, Martin, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín and Trnava also announced their candidacies.

You can receive more information on the website <https://zilina2026.eu> or by e-mail at info@zilina2026.eu.