Swiss cities battle to host Eurovision 2025 – or not

AFP- Swiss singer Nemo’s 2024 Eurovision victory means Switzerland gets to host the glitzy TV extravaganza next year – though battles are now raging over footing the bill.

Zurich, Geneva, Basel, plus Bern in conjunction with Nemo’s hometown Biel, are the four declared candidates to stage the 69th Eurovision Song Contest.

The winner should be announced by the end of August, with the kitsch annual spectacle set for mid-May 2025.

But the financial demands of hosting Eurovision – and, in some parts, even fear of the occult – have sparked threats of local referendums to ensure cities don’t get saddled with the event.

The contest puts host cities in the spotlight, with 163 million viewers worldwide watching this year’s event in Malmo, Sweden, where Nemo triumphed with the highly personal song “The Code”.

Hosting also has a knock-on boost for the hotel and tourism industries as Eurovision fanatics, artists and country delegations flock in.

Following a surge of early enthusiasm, four formal bids emerged by the end of June deadline.

However, Swiss voters are used to having a direct say on how their taxes are spent, and some are bristling at the potential costs and hassle of bringing the Eurovision circus to town.

– Satanism concerns –

Under Switzerland’s direct democratic system, popular votes can be triggered on most any issue if enough signatures are

gathered.

The Christian fundamentalist, right-wing Federal Democratic Union (EDU) minor party is pushing for referendums against public financial support in every potential host city.

“What bothers us most is that Satanism and occultism are increasingly being celebrated or at least tolerated,” said EDU executive board member Samuel Kullmann, according to the public broadcaster SRF.

“More and more artists are openly presenting occult messages,” he said, citing Ireland’s witchcraft-inspired 2024 entrant Bambie Thug.

But Switzerland’s next window for popular votes comes after the August host city selection date – potentially throwing a spanner in the works.

In the end, the host broadcaster SRG will make the location decision, supported by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) public service media alliance which owns Eurovision.

“Financial commitments without a referendum requirement are of course less risky and offer us more planning security,” said SRG spokesman Edi Estermann.

“Ultimately, however, this is only one aspect of a comprehensive list of requirements.”

– ‘Bullying, riots’ –

From its earnest 1950s beginnings, Eurovision has ballooned into a colourful giant annual celebration that never takes itself too seriously.

It is a non-profit event, mostly financed by weighted contributions from participating EBU broadcasters.

Eurovision says that “given the benefits that will flow” to

the host city, it must make a contribution to the competition’s hosting.

This can be “either financially or ‘in kind’ (e.g. covering expenses of city branding, side events, security, etc.)”.

The potential host cities are lining up packages of 20-40 million Swiss francs ($22.25-44.5 million).

The hard-right Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the country’s biggest party, is eyeing referendum options in Zurich and Bern.

The 2024 event in Malmo was one of the most politically-charged competitions ever, with Israel’s entry targeted by protests over the war in Gaza.

That hoopla is putting off some in the normally calm and orderly Switzerland.

Eurovision 2024 was “dominated by bullying, riots and political slapstick rather than artistic skills. We don’t need that in Zurich!” the regional SVP branch said.

Meanwhile the SVP’s Bern canton branch branded Eurovision an “expensive media spectacle” set to cost at least 40 million Swiss francs.

SVP Bern cantonal lawmaker Samuel Krahenbuhl said Zurich, Geneva and Basel had greater financial leeway. “The high expenses and the other problems that such a major event brings with it – let’s leave it to them,” he said.

Basel has seen little opposition so far to hosting the competition, including from the SVP, while there is also broad enthusiasm from Geneva’s politicians.

Money squabbles over big events are not uncommon in Switzerland.

The country will host the 2025 women’s European football championships, but the government wanted to reduce its promised contribution of 15 million francs to 4 million, before parliament reversed the cut.

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