SOFIA DECLARATION

ISSUED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE INTERARCH CONFERENCE "EUROPEAN POLICIES IN ARCHITECTURE - HOLISTIC APPROACH TO A WORLD IN TRANSITION"

EUROPEAN POLICIES aim to promote and implement well-designed living environments and emphasize a holistic approach, which seeks to achieve a sustainable society, with quality of life and collective well-being for all.

The goal of **INTERARCH' 2026** is to connect policy with practice and help shaping the future of the built environment by inspiring architects and politicians to implement high-quality architecture principles in public policies.
INTERARCH 2026 places a strong emphasis on the need to adopt a holistic, culturally-centered approach to the built environment and helps to raise understanding of the key role of architecture at a higher political level. State and city leaders have to be aware that a high-quality built environment and city management are the driver of economic growth, social cohesion, climate resilience and cultural vitality.

We the Participants in the conference "European policies in Architecture - holistic approach to a world in transition" held in Sofia on 16.10.2026 call on European institutions, national, regional and local authorities, professional organisations and civil society to translate the following principles into policies, funding decisions and practical action:

1. The housing crisis: One of the most pressing challenges facing cities and communities worldwide. It can only be solved by working together. Sustainable reuse of existing building stock is of great importance.

2. Housing is a right, not a luxury: Access to adequate housing must be recognised as a fundamental right. Architecture helps make this right a reality.

3. Renovation first: We call for a presumption in favour of renovation, transformation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Before demolition is considered, the potential for reuse should be assessed against whole-life carbon, resource consumption, cultural value and social impacts.

4. The Architects' role: Architects should be involved from the earliest stages of housing policy, spatial planning and project development, working with residents, public authorities and other professionals. Architects are called to engage beyond design practice, contributing to discussions on housing policy, affordability, and equitable access to the built environment.

5. Towards concrete solutions: Addressing the housing crisis requires practical, sustainable and context-responsive approaches, including instruments to activate vacant properties along adaptive reuse and quality measuring tools for affordable housing. Faster delivery and lower initial costs must not compromise architectural quality, accessibility, health or long-term environmental performance.

6. Healthy and climate-resilient neighbourhoods: We call for integrated planning that connects housing with public transport, walking and cycling routes, everyday services, accessible public spaces and nature. Pedestrian, public spaces, clean air, parks, environmental protection and sports are important factors for human health

7. City management - the transport and functional connectivity between the different activities in a city, the well-designed living environments and high-quality affordable housing and neighborhood, sustainability and climate change resilience, public spaces, water management, control of carbon emissions and waste, as well as inclusive urban planning are the tools for the future city development and the better life of all citizens

8. Cultural heritage and local identity: The transformation of the built environment should preserve and enhance its cultural and architectural values, including those of unlisted and twentieth-century buildings. Renovation should combine appropriate innovation with traditional knowledge, innovative methods and local skills, responding to contemporary needs while respecting the character of each place.

9. Architectural design competitions (ADCs) are a proven tool for achieving quality in the built environment. They are based on clear procedures, independent professional evaluation and equal treatment of participants, with the aim of identifying the best proposal for a given task. We call on public authorities and private clients to make architectural quality, life-cycle costs and social and environmental value central to procurement and funding decisions, rather than selecting on lowest initial price alone. We will focus our efforts on limiting the practice of awarding projects on the basis of "engineering" (design and construction in one package). In line with the ACE–UIA Joint Statement on Architectural Design Competitions of April 2026, competitions should provide clear briefs and sufficient freedom for innovative design solutions. Participation requirements and workloads should be proportionate, enabling access for emerging practices.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO IMPLEMENTATION:

● We call on public authorities to translate these commitments into architectural policies, funding criteria and local action plans, with clear responsibilities and measurable outcomes.

● We call on State and City Leaders, Professionals and Civil society to work together and invite an International Forum to be held in Sofia as soon as possible to approve a New Charter for the Development of Cities and develop a shared agenda for high-quality, inclusive and climate-resilient urban development, building on existing European and international frameworks. Sofia declares its readiness to host the Forum.

SOFIA, 16.10.2026