

Atelier for Young Festival Managers

Beirut, 21 - 27 March 2015

Speech by Inge Ceustermans, Managing Director The Festival Academy, at the occasion of the opening of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Beirut

Welcome, dear **Excellencies**, and thank you for hosting us in this marvelous setting,
Welcome, dear team of the **Beiteddine Art Festival**, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year,
Welcome, dear **Nora Joumblatt** and **Hala Chahine** and the team, who will host us here for the next 7 days and who have developed together with us an inspiring programme and who have been so insistent and encouraging,
Welcome, dear **ESA**, thank you for hosting us at your venue tomorrow and the coming days for intensive work and inspirations,
Welcome, dear **honorary guests**,

Welcome, dear **partners** of the project, thank you for your support. Special thanks to the Beiteddine Art Festival and ESA of course, Beirut Chants Festival, the Austrian Embassy and Middle East Airlines,

Welcome, dear **members of the European Festivals Association**: there is quite a remarkable presence of strong members in Lebanon, including the Beiteddine Art Festival, Baalbeck International Festival, Al Bustan Festival and the Beirut Chants Festival, who you will all have the chance to meet during the Atelier, through the participants, the speakers and the cultural encounters included in the programme.

Welcome, dear **mentors**, and last, but definitely not least, welcome, dear **participants** at the Atelier Beirut, the third Atelier to take place under the newly set-up organization The Festival Academy, initiated by EFA. You find yourselves amongst **36 young festival managers** coming from **21 countries** and 5 continents and an enormous pool of wisdom.

I also welcome you here in the name of **Mr. Darko Brlek**, President of The Festival Academy and the European Festivals Association and Director of the Ljubljana Festival, and Mrs. **Kathrin Deventer**, Secretary General of EFA, who deeply regret that they cannot be here and who asked me to extend their words of welcome to you.

The first time I came to Beirut was exactly two years ago in March 2013 to prepare the Atelier, which we postponed once, as you know, and which can happen in marvelous conditions now. I am so happy to be standing here and to see all of you here! This is a **unique experience** and it will be one of the most special Ateliers so far, I believe.

My first encounter was with the hotel manager of one of the big hotels in Beirut. During our short meeting the electricity fell out. It is normal, he said, we have regular black-outs due to electricity cuts by the government, but we all have generators to solve this; it will be back on in a minute, and it was. And I learned just now that there is even an **app Beirut Electricity cut off** which shows the scheduled black-outs. Lebanese people are **inventive and very resourceful** people who are not easily discouraged by any setbacks, I thought. And this seemed to be very true during the rest of my visit. I discovered an **unbelievable enthusiasm and dynamism** in the people here in doing what they believe in.

You are at a privileged position to be able to get a **taste of this dynamic cultural scene** active in Beirut and to go into **dialogue** with the people working here. **See and learn!**

Not only did I discover an interesting cultural life, I met people displaying an **enormous warmth and hospitality** which you will for sure experience as well. And of course **the food!** My god, Lebanese food is tasty and inventive as well! The **sea**, the **beautiful architecture**, the **history** of this place..., made my stay **unforgettable** and I wish the same for you.

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All this, provides the **perfect setting** for the 7 days of **in-depth exchanges on festivals, on programming aspects** but also on the **essence** of what you are all doing – **working with art and artists** –referring to the quote by Bernard Faivre d'Arcier and motto of the Atelier. Not only with the people of Beirut but also with each other, **with your peers both young and experienced**. I can only advise you to **open all your senses** and to try and **learn** as much as possible from each other and in the first place **to share**, to share your **knowledge, experience, tastes, artists, resources** etc.

And the Atelier will not stop after the 7 days. You will become part of the **Alumni network** which, after this Atelier, will count exactly **300 alumni** from about 60 countries and all continents and some 35 mentors.

You are in a privileged position, I have said it before, I know, also because of the **amazing group of people who will guide you through this 7 days**, with first of all **Mr Hugo De Greef** as the overall moderator: Hugo De Greef, who initiated the Atelier in 2006 when he was EFA's Secretary General. He has selected, together with **Mrs Nele Hertling**, the participants out of an immense group of candidates; they are the most important mentors in the Atelier who have both not missed one of the seven editions so far; then, **Mrs Hortense Archambault** (former co-director of the Avignon Festival together with Vincent Baudriller, who has just been appointed director of MC93 in Bobigny in France – one of the most important national scenes in France) and who will arrive tomorrow; **Bernard Faivre d'Arcier** with a long experience in directing the Avignon Festival and as President of the Lyon Biennial; Two new speakers from the region are: **Rania Elias** from Palestine and **Alain Weber** from Morocco who can give a better insight into festivals in the Arab world; and another mentor who will join us for the first time: **Ruth MacKenzie** who directed the Cultural Olympiad in London in 2012 and is now the artistic director of the Holland Festival. And here I will almost shut up and give the floor to Mrs MacKenzie who will finally warm you up for the work to be done in the next 7 days and set the tone!

But I just want to say shortly that I am very much looking forward to the next 7 days with you and also with **The Festival Academy and European Festivals Association team Naima Delaere and Ysaline Lannoy** and with the Beiteddine Art Festival team also with **Hollie Ghandour** who helped so much in preparing the Atelier and now with the production.