

Atelier for Young Festival Managers

Beirut, 21 - 27 March 2015

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

In the name of the European Festivals Association (EFA) and Darko Brlek, President of EFA, and Kathrin Deventer, Secretary General of EFA, I would like to thank you, dear Nora Joumblatt, Hala Chahine and the Beiteddine Art Festival, for organising this first Atelier in the Arab world. Or, as one of the participants, Sabina Sabic, said earlier: "for daring to bring the Atelier to Beirut," referring to the quote by Bernard Faivre d'Arcier and the motto of the Atelier: "The true role of a festival is to help artists to dare, to engage in new projects."

It was a truly unique experience and I have heard many many many participants say that they are so happy they came to this Atelier in Beirut.

I have learned a lot during this Atelier, and I am sure the same is true for everybody.

I have learned that not only electricity is a scarce good, but also water is. I don't know if there is already an app for that, but it might be a good idea. I have learned that there is no independent scene in Beirut, because all festivals and venues are independent, meaning there is no system which regulates subventions for culture, you cannot apply to the government for it.

I have learned so many things from the Beiteddine Art Festival, the mentors, guest speakers, and encounters with cultural players of Beirut.

I have learned to drink Moscow Mule, and I have learned it is a sign of hospitality that the table is still full of food, so you need to stop eating at a certain moment because otherwise more will come.

I have learned many more things, and I will be talking for hours if I have to sum it all up.

But the most important thing I learned is that there is one thing, I think, which unites the art scene in Beirut, and that is the clear necessity of what you are all doing: to unite the people of the region, country, world through art in the hope to make the world a better, or at least a more pleasant place. This is something we have in common: the Atelier Beirut is uniting people from 21 different countries and we will keep on uniting them in the Atelier network worldwide counting 300 alumni from more than 60 countries after the Beirut Atelier. And this is also the exact reason why the European Festivals Association was created more than 60 years ago after the Second World War. I believe this 'uniting force' is essential and even more so in a region and country which is being challenged by so many difficulties at the moment.

I would like to refer to the words by Mrs Joumblatt: With the Beiteddine Art Festival we try to build a culture of tolerance, a spirit of unity that overcomes religion, politics, descent, and I quote: "Through art we can re-imagine our futures."

I have immensely enjoyed Beirut, the city and the places we visited with, amongst others, the beautiful Beitedinne Palace, which was a moment of sanctuary during the Atelier for all of us I think.

Carla Mardini, Atelier participant from the All Bustan Festival, invited us all to come back. Carla, we'll take your invitation seriously, so get prepared for Atelier Beirut, the sequel.

So, thank you once more, Nora and Hala and the team with Hollie, Emily, Nadia, Magda.

Shukran! Please give them a big applause.

Thank you, Mrs Nada Sardouk for being with us today and for your inspiring speech.

Thank you, Mr Stephan Attali and the ESA team for hosting us here. We have enjoyed our room with a view! And thank you to the technicians and film crew that were with us the whole time.

Thank you, dear mentors, and a very special thank you to the participants for being such a wonderful group!