

Atelier for Young Festival Managers

Beirut, 21 - 27 March 2015

Speech by Darko Brlek, President European Festivals Association, at the occasion of the opening of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Beirut

Dear H.E. Mr. Rony Arajji, Minister of Culture,
Dear H.E. Mr. Michel Pharaon, Minister of Tourism,
Dear Nora Joumblatt, President Beiteddine Art Festival,
Dear Hala Chahine, Director Beiteddine Art Festival,
Dear Ruth MacKenzie, Director Holland Festival,
Dear Young Festival Managers, the Atelier participants and lecturers,
Dear colleagues,

Please accept my apology since I cannot attend the opening ceremony of the new Atelier edition. I am very sorry that I can't be with you tonight although it would have been a great pleasure and privilege for me to be here in this great city. I am glad that Beirut has accepted the challenge to host the Atelier, this unique project of the European Festivals Association. And I am glad that the participants have taken the challenge to come here wishing to learn not just about the festival business but also about different cultures and heritages.

The core mission of a festival is, of course, an artistic one. But different festivals all around the globe have consistently shown over the last decades that a festival can also be an extraordinary agent of change, whether socially, economically or intellectually. It reflects contemporary society and it can be an opportunity to re-invigorate political and social debate. It can and it should be a platform for dialogue between different sectors of society that rarely otherwise meet on neutral grounds. It can use its appeal across borders to link European and non-European, national, regional and local decision makers to contribute to a better and more cultural society. A festival is an important ambassador of the city and the country in which it takes place.

It can also be a good opportunity for the festival's city and country as it contributes to the development of economic sustainability, and it can provide stimulation and support to local businesses. It contributes to tourism, education and constant development.

But – and let me quote Bernard Faivre d'Arcier, longstanding director of the Avignon Festival and president of the Lyon Biennial in France – “the true role of a festival is to help artists to dare, to engage in new projects.” This is also the Atelier's motto.

So, festivals must above all stimulate artistic excellence and give its audience the best artistic experience possible. And don't forget – festivals are fun, too.

The Atelier offers a unique opportunity to meet, to share, to learn, to cooperate, to build relations and to stay connected. These are also the values and advantages of the big family called European Festivals Association. Use them and enhance them.

Dear Young Festival Managers, I wish you that the Atelier will be one of those experiences that will help you to spread the festive / festival mood around the world. I wish you all the best and that you will never stop believing that the world would be boring and empty without culture and art.

Thanks a lot to the Atelier's organiser in Beirut, the Beiteddine Art Festival – a special thanks to its president Nora Joumblatt and director Hala Chahine. I'd like to thank as well all the participants who decided to come to Beirut, all the speakers who will share with you their knowledge at this Atelier's edition and the EFA team for all the help in organising the Atelier.

Sincerely yours, Darko Brlek
President of the European Festivals Association
Director and Artistic Director of the Ljubljana Festival. Ljubljana, March 2015