

ARTS FESTIVALS'



Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue

AN INITIATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN FESTIVALS ASSOCIATION



Introductory Speech

Hugo De Greef
EFA Secretary General

This is an exceptional moment for EFA, and we hope it may be an exceptional moment for all festivals!

As a large network of festivals in Europe, we have taken the initiative to draft an 'arts festivals' declaration on intercultural dialogue' on the occasion of the year of 'intercultural dialogue' that has been set up and launched by the EU. Today, we proceed to the first signing of this declaration.

Festivals are indeed exceptional moments where art meets its public, and where large numbers of people meet art. And art has to be understood in its broadest sense.

Artists – musicians, writers, actors, dancers, you name it – have the opportunity to create their work within a festive moment or – at least – to present an existing work within a specific context.

It is characteristic for festivals to stage exceptional pieces of art to their public, to present new art forms, to supply new creative possibilities... in short; festivals define themselves by offering exceptional quality.

This remains the essence of festivals: making room for art and artists to reach the largest public. The extent to which a festival links up with the regular offer of concert halls, theatres, etc will influence their daily work, will precede innovation, and will be complementary to the exceptional...

Festivals receive more attention in the media and reach larger audiences. How many visitors of festivals exclusively limit their cultural 'consumer' behaviour to 'festivals'?

This is why many – regional, urban or national – governments will support and even organise festivals. Festivals are functioning remarkably well within the attraction programmes of governments. More than once they play a role to lure more tourists. Not only because they boost the image of a city or region, but also because of their economic impact.

EFA is a network of festivals, especially of festivals that are historically focused on classical music. Nowadays, they are working within the many multidisciplinary art forms with attention to contemporary classical music, music theatre, dance... and other art forms. The organisation now unites more than one hundred members residing in some 35 countries, mainly in Europe.



It goes without saying that EFA consults with its festivals, its members on what is most essential to these festivals.

And what is essential to them is precisely this meeting of arts, artists and a large public in an exceptional atmosphere. This concern is the basis of creating opportunities to enhance their attractiveness.

But to EFA, this force and this opportunity of art festivals are also important within a societal reality. More than ever, initiatives such as festivals have to take responsibility in a society, in a changing society. This must be done by the entire cultural sector, by the entire artistic sector. However, festivals are exceptionally well situated to take this social mission to heart and to confer a dynamic to the artistic and cultural practices because of their reach, their attention in the media and hence their strong power of expression.

By doing so, we follow – once again – the example of artists. Artists have something to say about society, they are often committed and their analyses and projections are frequently visionary.

The point is not merely to increase the number of participants, not only to make every effort to have the largest number of people enjoy the festival's programme, especially the more complex and newer art forms. This is of course also a social concern which importance cannot be denied.

But the commitment goes beyond that, it aims at concrete and tangible initiatives originating from the artistic offer itself, going hand in hand with the potentiality of box-office successes, and dealing with the present cultural reality: the reality of a Europe with a growing diversity and hence with a growing necessity to integrate this diversity, to work with it and to consider it as an added value; to endow this cultural dialogue with a high level of realism, and even with a daily obviousness.

And once again, the festivals follow the example of artists.

This is why EFA is eager to cooperate with the "European Year of Intercultural dialogue" programme, launched by the EU. It is as if it were cut out for us.

EFA's history and present are closely linked with the issues of the "year of cultural dialogue".

The association was founded in 1952. During the first decennia, the association was certainly a place where the European gap between east and west could be bridged. Within the organisation, festivals from all over the continent established contacts with each other and worked together.

Fortunately, Europe has changed!

However, there are other, new realities with the same concerns.

There are regions and countries in Europe that still do not have the same possibilities as they have in other countries, regions, mainly belonging to the EU. And there is also Turkey, with a very contemporary and prominent cultural activity. Five Turkish festivals are member of EFA. Moreover, we have members in Lebanon, Asia, and this year we will welcome our first members from African and Arab countries.

Within our proper organisation, the 'intercultural dialogue' thus becomes an increasingly topical theme.

On the occasion of the 'year of intercultural dialogue', EFA has decided to assume an even more active role and to promote the theme as much as possible, not only among its members but also among the largest number of festivals. EFA as an organisation open to the entire festival sector.

It goes without saying that this is mainly linked with our ambition to promote this year's theme as much as possible, to introduce this theme to the largest number of people and to have the largest number of festivals work on this theme.



We have finalised the text of the 'declaration on intercultural dialogue' on the basis of both internal and external meetings and consultations. During these consultations, we have also involved the EU administrative department of culture. In this context, we would like to express our greatest gratitude to this staff of engaged and constructive people. We are also grateful for their support in preparing and finalising our project.

But also the commissioner himself, Mister Ján Figel', has been closely involved and informed about this initiative. We would like to thank Mister Figel' for this cooperation and especially for your willingness to co-sign this declaration. By doing so, you acknowledge, Mister Figel', the social importance of festivals. To us, it legitimises the mission of festivals in this issue. We promise not to let you down.

Today, we will sign the declaration. An exceptional step to EFA and an exceptional step to all festivals in Europe. During the entire process leading to this moment, EFA has invited a number of festivals, member festivals as well as non-member festivals, to be the first signatories of this declaration. EFA would like to thank all these festivals for their collaboration and their presence here. Together they are examples of the dynamic of the European festivals and of their high quality. A dynamic that exceeds indeed the 22 festivals that are here united.

Therefore, this signing is only a moment, however a very important moment. The bigger job starts now. From this moment onward, EFA will work hard – will continue to work hard – to invite the many festivals in Europe and elsewhere to sign this declaration.

However, under certain conditions.

They may only sign this declaration if they can also prove that they organise activities within their programmes and within their relationships to their audiences that meet and facilitate the intercultural dialogue, and this of course, with the largest possible creativity proper to the reality of the festival's work.

On our website we have provided space for active reports on the progress of this all. This will go hand in hand with the use of the logo and further means of identification.

We also hope to enhance the diversity of festivals. Not only the classical music festivals, but also rock festivals, children's festivals, 'alternative film' festivals, literature festivals... are and will be addressed.

It is no coincidence that the Philosophy festival of Modena is present here as one of the co-signers.

It is obvious, that EFA cannot determine the sequence of the semi-annual EU presidents. However, it is no coincidence that the opening of the year and the signing of our declaration takes place here in Ljubljana, Slovenia. And to us, even more, in the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

EFA has members in all countries of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. A number of them are here and will co-sign the declaration. It is worthwhile to name them: the Festival of Ljubljana, of course, the Belgrade Music Festival, the Dubrovnik Festival, the Ohrid Summer Festival, the Sarajevo Winter Festival and the Music Biennial of Zagreb.

In this former nation, cooperation is not a meaningless notion, for also in recent times of war, these festivals continued to work together.

Today, we are living in a Europe, where some parts are still in conflict and where others were at war until some years ago. Today, this reality is present and doubly underlines the purpose and intentions of this declaration.



I will not read out the entire declaration to you of which you will of course receive a copy. To conclude I would like to sum up the intentions to which the signatories will commit themselves.

Festivals and other parties signing this Declaration are engaged:

- In building an effective intercultural dialogue, in the conviction that such a dialogue represents an essential tool for peaceful interaction among different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, languages, beliefs and social backgrounds. Such interaction will in turn encourage a respectful and enriching exchange of ideas and help identify the boundaries that define individuals and communities;
- In raising the awareness of artists, managers, collaborators, volunteers regarding Intercultural Dialogue conceived as *a respectful and free exchange among communities and individuals* and aimed at the promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity which is indispensable for the protection of human rights and democracy;
- In opposing stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and ignorance about different, foreign or minority cultures and are committed to and engaged in promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the framework of the European Year and for the years to come by mobilizing their collective creative resources and celebrating participation as a bond among people.
- In disseminating the European Year documents and its core ideas to the largest number of people possible and ensuring visibility for the logo, brochures and all communication and information materials referring to the European Year in order to promote its essence and objectives.

Before proceeding to the signing of the declaration, I would like to thank the Festival of Ljubljana and the city of Ljubljana. We would also like to thank all people in Slovenia and elsewhere to have realised this project.