

**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR ANGELINA EICHHORST
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO LEBANON**

OPENING OF THE 18th EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL

Cinema Metropolis Empire Sofil – 24th November 2011

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Michel Habis, representative of his Excellency Gaby Layoun, Minister of Culture,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the 18th European Film Festival.

I am pleased to see that the public is returning in great numbers again this year to enjoy a festival which offers a unique insight into European culture and traditions.

The 2011 Festival will show 33 films from 18 EU countries, in addition to 2 guest films from Switzerland and Norway. All films are proud examples of the quality of European film production, some are daring, artistic, some topical, while others force us to challenge our perceptions. Altogether these films show us the diverse and complex way in which the different cultures in Europe deal with universal themes such as love, art or justice.

This Festival comes every year to remind us of the strength of the Euro-Lebanese partnership in the field of culture. The European Union is keen to continue its support to Lebanon as a unique place of dialogue between cultures.

In order to make the Festival a countrywide experience, a number of films will be screened in Tripoli, Jounieh, Saida and Zahlé, and I look forward to attend with His Excellency the Minister and many of our friends some of these events outside Beirut.

Meanwhile Lebanese cinema continues to grow in strength. Many of your films won international awards in recent years. We will screen a Lebanese film to close this 18th edition of the Film Festival. Moreover, 20 shorts films produced by graduate students of the ten audiovisual schools in the country will be screened and showcased to a Euro-Lebanese jury. The winners of the best three short films will be offered the opportunity to attend one of three leading international short film festivals in Europe, thanks to the Embassies of Poland, France and Germany.

The Festival will also pay a tribute to the late famous Lebanese actor Mahmoud Mabsout, known as Fahmen by showing the short film in which he played a leading role, *Beyrouth après rasage (After Shave)* of the Lebanese director Hany Tamba.

Let me conclude by thanking everyone who contributed to the organisation of this Festival. Of course special thanks to H.E. the Minister of Culture Gaby Layoun for his patronage.

I would also like to thank the embassies and cultural institutes of the European Union Member States for providing the films. Without their support, the Festival would not have been possible.

We hope that once again this year the Festival will provide you all with great moments of culture and pleasure.

I now leave the floor to Ambassador Tomacz Niegodzisz, as Poland opens the Festival tonight with the film "The Winner".

Thank you.