

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

OPENING OF THE 19th EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL

Cinema Metropolis Empire Sofil – 29th November 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The representative of His Excellency the Minister of Culture
Gaby Layoun, Mrs Dima Raad,
Excellencies (Minister Selim Jreissati), Members of
Parliament (if any, I will tell you), Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the 19th edition
of the European Film Festival.

Today marks a very important day in our cultural agendas.
Over the two past decades, the European Film Festival has
developed into the *key cultural event* for the European Union
and its Member States in Lebanon. An event that is equally
highly appreciated by *all* audiences alike.

When preparing for this opening, I asked my team to define this "*secret ingredient*" of the European Film Festival that encourages you to loyally return to this event since almost twenty years?

Perhaps it is the attraction to the various – admittedly, sometimes exotic sounding - European languages? Perhaps it is your natural attraction to diversity? Others called it the ultimate sense of freedom! I would certainly hope that it is the quality of the films that brings you here.

Yes, European cinema is rich and diverse. And yes, festivals such as this offer a platform to enjoy this rich diversity and to appreciate alternative, independent films that are otherwise unavailable to the Lebanese public. This time we will show 36 outstanding films from 18 EU countries, in addition to 2 guest films from Switzerland and Serbia. A number of these films will also be screened in Jounieh, Zahle and Tripoli in order to make the Festival a countrywide experience.

Meanwhile, also the Lebanese cinematographic scene steadily grows and Lebanese films continue to win international awards. The festival will screen the film "Le Mur" by Odette

Makhlouf, which has won the Best Short Film Scenario Award during the 2010 European Film Festival's workshop on script writing. In order to also provide a platform to the potentially award winning directors of tomorrow, 19 short films produced by graduate students of the ten audiovisual schools in the country will be screened and showcased to a Euro-Lebanese jury. The two lucky winners of this competition will be offered the opportunity to attend one of two leading international short film festivals in Europe, with the kind contribution from the Embassies of Germany and France.

But our European Film Festival is so much more than the simple screening of films! A film is a form and medium of cultural expression, a cultural product that is always more than just a product. It transports values, norms and traditions alike and can thus serve as an important tool for intercultural communication and understanding.

This year we will also look at the *economic potential* of the cinematographic industry through the organisation of a round table for professionals on the distribution and release of

European and Arab films in Lebanon and the Arab World. In addition, a training workshop for script writing for fiction feature films will complete the programme. I am confident that the skills that the participants will acquire in this workshop will enable them to successfully submit scenarios to producers willing to fund their projects. In the long run, we hope to see the development of a national and even regional industry for audio-visual products which will create jobs and opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the organisation of this Festival. Special thanks to H.E. the Minister of Culture Gaby Layoun for his patronage.

I would 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.

Thank you for being present and I wish you a great screening.

I now leave the floor to H.E. Homer Mavrommatis, Ambassador of Cyprus, as his country opens the Festival tonight with the film "Small Crime".

Thank you