

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the first evening of this month, the Egyptian singer Amal Maher performed in this building, singing songs by the legendary Oum Kalthoum. The performance was transmitted directly to the Oosterpark via satellite. Because I was curious how the local community of east Amsterdam would experience the performance, I chose to go to there. I ran into hundreds of people, glued to the screen, cheering and applauding loudly whenever the flow of sweet-voiced notes would cease. The music that evening sounded familiar to the Islamic people, and excitingly exotic to uninitiated Westerners. And it all took place in an ambience where people were brought together, completing the music perfectly.

Amal Maher's performance was the opening act of a Holland Festival with many highlights and many unexpected, unknown and unheard new works. A large quantity of these works, does not fit within the exact borders of this country. The Netherlands, a country slightly larger than 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>, covers around 2% of the European territory. But, in terms of ambition, it goes far beyond its borders. The country thrives on export, most of it to neighbouring countries. The majority of these exported goods are items that end up in homes, gardens and kitchens: lettuces, tomatoes and French beans, fresh or canned, detergents and bulbs, bicycles and coffee machines. The products aren't distinctly Dutch, but it is trade that has a market in the neighbouring countries. The cultural sector also trades most of its goods. Every year the Netherlands sells cultural goods abroad worth around one point five billion Euros. Many CD's and CD-ROMs, carriers of sounds, text and pictures bearing content which doesn't even originate from this country but which is skilfully registered here and then sold on. Just as coffee machines, products of creative industry are more lucrative rather than creative.

Real creativity is found in high-quality art: the world of visual artists, composers, choreographers and play writers. They are the *R&D* of the cultural economy and the producers of new works and innovative performances, year after year. Year after year, they are also at the Holland Festival, the first platform for Holland's best and newest. In fact, this tiny country is only linked to the world community in two ways: Schiphol airport and the Holland Festival. Schiphol was once a small airstrip where our great-grandparents watched visitors to our country in amazement. The idea of embarking in an aircraft yourself and flying out in search of adventure was no option for them at that time. The Holland Festival was characterised by a similar development. After

the war, it was mainly a showcase for imported art. For this import, we were dependent on Marshall-aid, as we had virtually nothing, apart from the comical duo Snip and Snap.

In the year 2010 Schiphol connects us to the furthest corners of the world. Masses of tourists fly to our country, but we fly out just as eagerly. The Holland Festival follows the example of this two-way traffic: it brings in and it sends out. The Holland Festival together with a number of other festivals in Europe provides the artistic avant garde in this part of the world. Most productions are still developed within the confines of the member states and financed by national subsidies. However, gradually the amount of international co-productions is increasing. In creating stage productions for festivals we more and more see performances assembled out of sets and props from different sources and countries. Through specialization on the one hand and collaboration on the other hand, a transnational added value is created, unattainable for countries in sheer isolation. Tonight we will witness such an assembled performance, the dance opera *Pygmalion*. *Pygmalion* has been realised by four organizers in Amsterdam, Aix en Provence, Athens and Madrid. The production was split into different artistic activities and divided over the co-producers. The New York dance company Trisha Brown was hired in, as well as the orchestral ensemble Les Arts Florissants. Rehearsals were held in Aix for three weeks. All parts of the production have been assembled now in Amsterdam. After Carré, *Pygmalion* will travel to the home cities of the coproducers, so that many audiences throughout Europe will get an opportunity for attending.

It won't be long before international festival collaboration will be the standard. Purely national productions will be the exception. By concentrating and combining manpower, money and artistic ambition from different countries, festival performances can move on to higher artistic standards, whereas distribution of these performances can be extended to many more places. The European Union already stimulates cooperation and distribution financially. In that respect, festival co productions are part of the EU distribution support programs. Showing a distant similarity to the exchange programs of museum pieces between European countries or to the circulation of European films along internationally connected screens. But financial support still comes in small quantities and are only applicable on so called non-national elements of artistic productions. That's because of the still prevailing principle of subsidiarity – that

is: the EU is not supposed to interfere into the national cultural policies of the twenty seven EU member states.

To my opinion the principles of subsidiarity and non-nationality should be reconsidered, at least the general applicability of these principles. They are in some way hampering the desired development of international coproduction for festivals. This development is all the more desired since Europe in the so called Lisbon Declaration set out new ambitions for collectively achieved excellence and high technology based economy. The only cultural achievement the EU can be associated with at the moment is the Eurovision Song Contest. A festival that doesn't elevate. If it does anything, it degrades. To get rid of this wrong image, the EU should immediately rephrase the somewhat vague and evasive criteria for subsidizing festivals, in favour of an unrelenting standard of artistic excellence. This is absolutely not unrealistic if you compare the ambition to support international festivals with the determination to make the Airbus a successful European project. The Airbus, as you know, is a plane that a large number of European countries fabricate together. The U.S. and the WTO cry shame over it, because the EU subsidizes it. But I would rather say that the nerve the EU shows in the aircraft industry should also be shown in the arts. Regarding its cultural policy, the EU should dare to break at least partially free from the chains of subsidiarity and 'non national works'. Good art is by definition international, and the perfect means for expressing the European idea in words, sounds and images. By supporting high-quality productions, the EU is given the possibility to show itself, in and outside the EU, as part of Europe's foreign policy, which is ambitious on paper but still dim in practice. With a major investment fund for festival-related co-productions, the EU will help prominent festivals on their way to the top, enriching many local European communities with artistically valuable supply. So my conclusion could be formulated in the following way: if Europe wants to be a powerful player in the world, it has to stimulate cooperation between art festivals, in the same manner as it did in the international Airbus industry.

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