

OPENING SPEECH Petra & Mohammed (12th November 2019 @Poligon, Ljubljana)

(Mohamed) Dober večer vsem skupaj,
(Petra) Masaa al khair,
(Mohammed) Bonsoir, Mesdames et Messieurs,
(Petra) Good evening, everyone,

(Mohammed)

Allow us to welcome you to the beautiful city of Ljubljana. On behalf of the organizers, we wish to thank all the partners who made this second edition of the Forum *possible* and to all the participants who, in the coming days, will make it *successful*. Creative Forum Ljubljana is a regional platform – a collective endeavour to fully unlock the creative potential for the prosperity and stability of the Euro-Mediterranean and Western Balkan regions.

(Petra)

Nothing seems to determine our society as much as creativity. What used to be the exclusive realm of artists is today on the agenda of pretty much everyone: business people, innovators, strategists, diplomats. Sociologists talk about creativity hysteria, about creativity as performance pressure. Everybody wants to be and should be creative today. Creative forums are popping up everywhere. It is kind of fashionable to organize one.

(Mohammed)

Creative Forum Ljubljana, however, is much more than just fashion. It is one of the very few creative forums with a foreign policy mission and ambition – the ambition to boost creativity as a driver of stability and as a real feel-good factor – the one that makes us, residents, better-off, more included, inspired, understanding, more content; you, me, our neighbours, everybody.

It is the only creative forum that aims at integrating Mediterranean shores by uniting our creative communities in common projects for the future. It is the only forum highlighting the geostrategic importance of the Western Balkans in the Euro-Mediterranean region and linking its huge creative potential with that of the South.

(Petra)

Paradoxically enough, Creative Forum Ljubljana wasn't born in Ljubljana but in Bled, one of Slovenia's most emblematic towns and tourist sites where we will take you on Friday. In 2017, Slovenian minister of foreign affairs and the secretary-general of the Union for the Mediterranean met there and decided to create a platform that would facilitate the integration of the Western Balkans and Southern Mediterranean in an innovative and forth-looking way.

(Mohammed)

The Union for the Mediterranean brings together 43 countries from the Euro-Mediterranean region, united by one overarching goal, namely promoting regional cooperation and integrations towards creating an area of peace, stability, prosperity and security. We are united in this objective, inasmuch as, this week, we stress that we are all here, uniting our creative capital.

(Petra)

Slovenia is a country, which, on the one hand, is historically committed to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and the Euro-Mediterranean integration. On the other hand, it puts a huge focus on culture in foreign policy. Creative Forum Ljubljana is the sum of both. We also have a special affiliation for all the policies that are green – and blue, to protect our common sea. Slovenian water institute is among the leaders of the Plastic Busters Project aimed at cleaning the Mediterranean of plastic. We are particularly proud that this year's Forum bags are created out of recycled marine litter. Sustainability and creativity, hand in hand.

(Mohammed)

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, I would like to commend and applaud the great efforts undertaken by Slovenia to promote creativity in the region, leveraging on its own creative capital and on its genius loci, being the natural link between the Balkans and the Mediterranean.

It was here that in 2008, during the EU Council Presidency, the germ of the Union for the Mediterranean started to form; and it was here that in 2008, it got its first University, EMUNI, one of the most important pillars of youth empowerment and interaction in the Euro-Mediterranean space.

(Petra)

Likewise, on behalf of the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I wish to reiterate our appreciation for the Secretariat's commitment to place creativity on the top of the regional agenda, both under the umbrella of business development and employment, and of social and civil affairs. The Union for the Mediterranean is probably the only format, in which countries from our rather tense and turbulent region all talk, cooperate and co-create.

(Mohammed)

The UfM Secretariat is very pleased about this partnership and keen on further consolidating it in 2020 and beyond. This is not only an event that we celebrate and report on, then move on to something else; this is – rather – a structured engagement that transcends this edition of the Forum and that will manifest itself over the coming two years.

(Petra)

Indeed, what is particularly important to us is the outputs and the continuity of engagement. We are looking forward to the Good News Session at the end of the high-level conference on Thursday, where we hope many of you will take the floor to announce new ideas, new projects and new opportunities for cooperation.

(Mohhamed)

We wish to end this introduction by recalling the Forum's three main goals:

First, we wish to find the ways to boost creativity systematically and strategically. When we listen to policy makers, obviously, everything works. But does it really? How does the creative sector feel? What does it need? What does it expect? The Forum therefore wishes to avoid pre-planned panels and give more room to concrete workshops, informal debates and, above all, to frank and spontaneous dialogue between creatives and governments.

(Petra)

Second, we wish to strengthen the region's creative image. We wish to show to the world that the Western Balkans and the Euro-Mediterranean region share the same enormous potential. The region isn't all about turmoil, conflicts and problems; it's a region with huge human and creative capital, a region where innovation, improvisation and creation are as normal as the air we breathe. It's a region "where life is creativity". This is the slogan of the Forum's very dear partner Zavod Big, which is so topical and so much to-the-point that we cannot but refer to it time and again.

(Mohammed)

Third, we wish to create communities of creative minds that will continue working and creating together, way beyond the Forum. This year, we put special focus on creative hubs, creative entrepreneurs and on the Creative Europe programme. Tomorrow they will meet in tailor-made workshops and on a study trip for an exciting peer-to-peer exchange. This part is a "jewel" of this year's Forum and we are glad that the representatives of almost all invited countries will take part in it.

(Petra)

A special thought goes to all those that couldn't make it here. In Lebanon, the paralyzing protests made it impossible for participants to move. In Syria and Libya, the complexity of visa procedures discouraged even the most motivated creatives from travelling. It is a real – and bitter – irony that those who need such forums most are usually those who cannot come. Mobility does remain one of the key challenges ahead.

(Mohammed)

Finally, and as I happen to be a Professor of Mediterranean Heritage and of Cultural Management, I want to tell you that creativity is not only a vehicle of economic growth, social cohesion or cultural revindication. Creativity is, to my Mediterranean mind, the very essence of our Mediterranean civilization, guiding its cultural compass and ushering the path of progress. It is a belvedere for the inquisitive and a silent serenade to an intellectual apotheosis that marked humanity since the dawn of time.

(Petra)

You surely know Albert Einstein's famous quote that "creativity is intelligence having fun". Along these lines, we wish you to get the best out of these days: contacts, friendships, ideas and the support for them. But above all, we wish you experience enjoyable and fun time in the company of over 200 creatives, entrepreneurs and policy makers from 25 countries.

To get into the mood and heat up the ambience, we now welcome to the floor our first keynote speaker, Jana Konstantinova. Jana is an architect from North Macedonia, based in Lausanne. She is one of those “creative fighters” who put the best of their know-how and creativity at the service of society. She brings “something new from the South, building the creative ambience”. Let this creative ambience overflow the Forum. Jana, the floor is yours.