

Welcoming speech of mayor Bertram Hilgen on occasion of documenta 14 opening in Athens

Mr President Steinmeier
Mr President Pavlopoulos,
Mayor Kaminis,
Mr Szymczyk,
Ladies and Gentlemen

As Lord Mayor of Kassel, the hometown of documenta, and as chairman of the supervisory board of documenta GmbH, I would also like to welcome you all to the opening of the world's most important exhibition of contemporary art.

I am very happy to be here in Athens, Europe's very first cultural capital, and I am even happier to see documenta unfolding in this beautiful town. We are well-prepared for a wonderful documenta -summer, first in Athens, and from June 10th on in Kassel.

When an international jury selected Adam Szymczyk as the artistic director of this documenta, they were fully aware of the fact that he planned to include Athens as a second exhibition venue. I thought his approach was eminently inspiring, and I supported it from the beginning.

I am now more convinced than ever that this decision was justified. Athens is the culmination point of millennia of

European culture and current global challenges concerning politics and society. This exhibition concept provides the opportunity to make this visible and enhances the perspective of documenta twofold.

But what is the secret of documenta? Why is it so indisputably the largest and most important exhibition of contemporary art, worldwide? This position is based on the respect accorded to art and to artists, and to the autonomy and freedom, with which the artistic director can plan and prepare the exhibition during the years preceding it.

documenta takes place every five years; the longer the interval, the greater the interest of the international art world in finding out just how documenta responds to the issues and questions raised by our global present. documenta can be seen as a seismograph for social development. And finally, documenta always displays its very own magic – as we have experienced many times in Kassel, and as you will now experience in Athens.

Just like my highly esteemed colleague Yiorgios I am absolutely convinced that art can build bridges and enables us to get to know each other better, to establish a mutual learning process and to thereby construct a new foundation for living together.

We are currently experiencing that the great and peaceful project of European unity has been exposed to numerous hazards. During my previous visits to Athens I have also gained a very

realistic impression of the very existential issues people here are confronted with, during their daily lives. But I have also seen how the very young and lively, - and very political - members of the cultural and creative scene here in Greece and in Athens are coping with change in their country, in Europe and in the world, and how these artists hope for new impulses from this documenta.

An event like documenta is therefore also expressive of hope. Here I would like to pick up on the statements by our Federal President, Mr Steinmeier, at the time Minister for Foreign Affairs, who said: "These are times that should make one even more cautious when it comes to simple answers."

His unwavering willingness to engage in dialogue, in order to change things to the better in our world, exemplifies the spirit of this documenta-partnership between Kassel and Athens.

For this excellent partnership and for the trusting and appreciative cooperation I would like to thank my counterpart, Mayor Kaminis. I truly enjoyed the generous hospitality I experienced. Athens is a wonderful host.

And finally, I would like to thank Adam Szymczyk and his international team, the many artists, the City of Athens, the institutions and committed individuals who have made this documenta possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here in Athens and beginning on June 10th in Kassel, you have an opportunity to feel the fascination of documenta.

I sincerely hope that the exciting encounter with contemporary art will bring the residents of Athens, the Greeks and visitors from all over the world closer together. I am convinced that our joint documenta will be enormously successful, and will set an example.

Thank you for your attention.