

ProEtnica 2016, Romania's largest interethnic festival, starts in Sighisoara

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ProEtnica 2016, Romania's largest interethnic festival gathering representatives of all the country's recognised ethnic minorities, started on Thursday in Sighisoara, before a sizeable audience. This is the first time in 14 editions that the event is held under the aegis of Romania's Presidency.



Photo credit: Proetnica Intercultural Festival — Facebook (<http://https://www.facebook.com/ProEtnica/?surface=rese>)

The festival, going on August 18-21, is organised by the Youth Interethnic Educational Centre of Sighisoara, with the Mures County Council and the Mures Prefecture among the main partners. The project is funded by the Culture Ministry and the Sighisoara City, with the Mures County Council also providing financial assistance to it.

The event is also enjoying support from the German Embassy in Bucharest and the Department for Interethnic Affairs, according to organiser Volker Reiter, director of the Youth Interethnic Educational Centre of Sighisoara.

"ProEtnica is the largest event designed for intercultural dialogue in Europe. Romania is a model for ethnic minorities' protection. (...) The entire range of activities in the 14th edition of ProEtnica will contribute toward intercultural advancement and the creation of interethnic peace in a pluralist and democratic society," said Reiter.

Sighisoara City Mayor Ovidiu Malancravean pointed out that the local citadel seems an ideal venue for such an event. "We are glad that, together with Mr Director Volker, we have managed to organise the 14th edition of the festival. We hope to continue the tradition into the future," the mayor said.

Presidential adviser Sergiu Nistor delivered a message from Romania's President Klaus Iohannis and also presented the organisers with a diploma attesting to ProEtnica 2016 being unfolded under the President's aegis. "To me, it is a great pleasure, while to you it is an honour and responsibility to receive this title, which honours good organisation and quality of the cultural event and wants to say that Romania's President appreciates to the highest degree you and ProEtnica capitalising on one of our country's biggest values, cultural diversity and interethnic dialogue. It is more than just a value, as it becomes increasingly more a resource; Romania's President has repeatedly said that far from being a problem in Romania, cultural diversity, ethnic diversity and religious diversity are riches, a treasure that we can say it is turning increasingly more into a resource. You make the resource reach those who should know about it and capitalise on it," said Nistor.

Culture Ministry official Irina Cajal underscored the importance of the event to the ethnic minorities of Romania. "This festival is already a valuable tradition in Romania's landscape, being a marvellous example of showcasing and learning about interlinking cultural components, of highlighting and developing into the future artistic folk customs and the spiritual life of all the citizens living on Romania's soil, a genuine interethnic dialogue. I appreciate and want to extend my thanks to the leaders and members of the unions, associations and parties of national minorities of Romania which, understanding from the very beginning the importance of this event, have agreed on holding it and providing permanent support. Without this cooperation, the festival could have never been organised," said Cajal.

Mures County Prefect Lucian Goga underscored in his turn that the event is the largest of its kind in Europe. "I am an advocate of multiculturalism. For those who do not know, I was born, raised and worked for most of my professional career in Sighisoara, and I believe Sighisoara is the best venue to host such an event, because it is here that we lived and are living under the best cooperation relations that start firstly from mutual respect. The prefecture has supported this platform each year and it will continue to do so because only if we — over 20 minorities — meet here getting to know each other, can we respect each other. All the guests of Sighisoara these days will become Sighisoara's emissaries, emissaries of Mures County and Romania," said Goga.

The festival comprises performing arts events to be staged by 19 organisations of national minorities and other ethnic cultural organisations — 62 performances on the stages of the Cetatii Square; in Museum Square and on Museum Street, 11 craftsmanship stands will be set up displaying ethnic communities; the Smaller Hall of the Sighisoara City Hall will be the venue for eight lectures, conferences and roundtable discussions about ethnicities and intercultural as well as interfaith coexistence, while six ethnic artists will be mounting an exhibition of contemporary arts in the Sander Hall of the National Tourist Information Centre.

As a novelty, this year's edition offers a film section where three documentaries will be screened that deal with various themes including interfaith dialogue, intercultural dialogue, ethnic culture, as well as a workshop comprising five activities conducted by ethnic organisations in the areas of dance, culture and customs, along with six ethnic diversity parades.

There are over 600 participants from 20 ethnic backgrounds attending ProEtnica 2016.

The evenings of the festival end with concerts in Cetatii Square to be given by highly-acclaimed bands and soloists, such as Bucharest Klezmer Band, Koszika & the Hotshots, Semnal M, and a folk music soiree featuring Dinu Olarasu, Puiu Ivanitchi and Mircea Vintila.

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