

# ProEtnica: Hundreds of Romanian, foreign tourists sing and dance at four-day ethnic festival

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Four four days, the Sighisoara Medieval Citadel was the venue for around-the-clock activities as part of the ProEtnica 2016 festival, with hundreds of Romanian and foreign tourists singing and dancing to the tunes of ethnic minority artists, while also watching crafts demos, visiting arts exhibitions and watching documentaries.



Debates and lectures on themes relevant to ethnic minorities rounded up the festival, held by artistic and cultural organisations of Romania, researchers as well as leaders of the Federation of Romania's Jewish Communities, the Hellenic Union, the Turkish Tartar minority and the Czechs and Slovaks.

Ensembles and bands staged full-house shows in the town's squares, from Thursday to Sunday evening. Some of the spectators joined Albanian, Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian, Italian, Croat, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Russian, Lipovan, Polish, Slovak, Romanian and Roma performers in round dances. Others sang along Semnal M and Bucharest Klezmer Band — a band whose songs, in the words of its artists, cover love, hatred, happiness and suffering.

For long seen as the largest intercultural dialogue event in Europe, the ProEtnica Sighisoara festival has annually brought Romania to the attention of those following the developments in the cultural life of the European Union, the festival's director Volker Reiter said at the end of the event.

"The festival, this year in its 14th edition, consecrates Romania as a model for the protection of ethnic minorities. It is a very unique event hosted by the Sighisoara mediaeval bastion, built by German ethnics in the 14th century. We had more than 600 participants. Attending were all the organisations of Romania's ethnic minorities; when you carry out such a project, at the end you compare the outcome against what you planned to do. And in this respect, I can say there are very small deviations, so that means that we have done what we set up to do. Hopefully, we have reached our main goal to consolidate interethnic peace in a democratic and pluralistic society by providing the ethnic minorities with a public voice, an agora to display and advance intercultural dialogue," Reiter told AGERPRES.

He added that protecting ethnic minorities is a duty of the state. "Thus, the festival proper will stay national, but we want to have as many guests as possible, perhaps



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simultaneous symposiums for Romania to display its protection system for the ethnic minorities as a model for Eastern and Western Europe alike," said Reiter.

Sighisoara Mayor Ovidiu Malancravan said the ProEtnica festival will continue, with support from the organisations and institutions involved, adding that international support will also be sought for the 2017 edition. "This is the idea of Mr Volker, which we obviously support; we extend our entire support, because this is a model festival and not developing it would be a pity. It is an exportable model," the mayor told AGERPRES.



Maria Korek, official of the Divers Association, a co-organiser, said cultural and scientific debates where books were launched, lectures and roundtable conferences were given, made up an important section of this year's ProEtnica edition, the same as in the previous years. "All this has led to almost the same conclusion, namely that it takes some efforts for us to know each other, but the effort is worth making because interethnic peace is visible in Romania, which allows stability in the country unlike in other countries even close to us, precisely because of the outcome of the existing interethnic and intercultural dialogue as well as a favorable legislation for the development of minorities in Romania. And that is why we believe ProEtnica is a method, a tool we can use to contribute to these good intercultural relations that can nevertheless be further developed and for which we continue to work," said Korek.

Moderator Sanda Vitelaru said that on Saturday a marathon of culture and traditions took place at ProEtnica. "There were no less than 21 ensembles and bands performing on the citadel's stages, 11 hours of shows and just 50 minutes of



intermission. It is worth mentioning that the leaders of ethnic minorities came up with novelties as well for ProEtnica. (...) If we talk about costumes, we have to mention that the League of Romania's Albanians Association displayed a costume called xhubleta that is part of the UNESCO heritage as the oldest folk costume identified in Europe uninterruptedly worn from the Antiquity to our days by Albanian women in Northern Albania. The second evening of the festival brought to the ProEtnica stages the Bucharest Klezmer Band for an extraordinary concert. The band combines the klezmer traditional Jewish music with new rhythms, thus offering a bridge between the past and the present of the Jews. In the current international political and social context, Sighisoara managed to bring to its stages minorities that represent peoples currently in conflict with each other. It is worth mentioning that Lipovan Russians, Turks, Armenians, Albanians, Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Roma and Hungarians mounted the stages without the slightest problem, offering the public a remarkable show of tolerance and understanding," said Vitelaru.

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

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

The event also enjoyed 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.



The festival comprised performing arts events staged by 19



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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 were set up displaying ethnic communities; the Smaller Hall of the Sighisoara City Hall was the venue for eight lectures, conferences and roundtable discussions about ethnicities and intercultural as well as interfaith coexistence, while six ethnic artists mounted an exhibition of contemporary arts in the Sander Hall of the National Tourist Information Centre.

As a novelty, this year's edition offered a film section where three



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documentaries were screened dealing with various themes including interfaith dialogue, intercultural dialogue

documentaries were screened dealing with various themes including interethnic 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.

The 20 ethnic minorities filed over 600 participants for the festival. Organisers estimate there were more than 15,000 visitors in the four days of the event. The AGERPRES National News Agency was a ProEtnica 2016 media partner. AGERPRES (RO – author: Catalina Matei, editor: Karina Olteanu; EN – author: Corneliu-Aurelian Colceriu, editor: Simona Klodnisch)

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