

Mario Draghi: EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS of the ECB – France 2012

Interview with Mr Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, for the special supplement of Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, published on 7 October 2012.

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This year the EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS of the ECB take place for the first time under your patronage as ECB President. Why is this cultural initiative important?

I was very happy to take over the patronage of the Cultural Days from my predecessors Jean-Claude Trichet and Wim Duisenberg. With this longstanding project, we aim each year to bring some of Europe's cultural diversity to audiences in the Rhine-Main area and beyond.

The process of European integration involves not only economic and political cooperation, but also touches the cultural roots and common values which bind all Europeans together. Culture knows no national boundaries. Particularly in times such as the present, it is more important than ever to be aware of our shared cultural heritage and to strengthen this awareness further. On the path towards a common Europe, cultural exchange between the Member States plays a key role.

I am very pleased that France is the focus of this year's EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS, giving us an insight into the diverse cultural life of another EU Member State.

What role do art and culture play in your life?

I can hardly imagine life without art and culture, because they give impulses for new thinking and creativity. Art presupposes both openness and tolerance and opens up new ways of seeing things that we should not ignore and which are essential for defining our quality of life and our future in a positive way. Especially as we have such busy calendars, I think it is important to devote time to art and culture – although, unfortunately, I do not always manage to find time to do that myself.

What do you particularly like about the EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS?

The nice thing about the Cultural Days is that, each year, we can enjoy a programme of first-rate cultural events, and they also give emerging talents a chance to perform in front of a wide audience. The opening events are particularly exciting in that they give the upbeat to several weeks of varied performances. The programme is the result of the creativity of artists, the support of many partners and sponsors, and the commitment of staff both at the ECB and the NCB of the theme country.

I very much enjoyed last year's opening concert by the Orchestra Mozart from Bologna, conducted by Claudio Abbado, and I am also very much looking forward to this year's opening concert by one of France's most renowned baroque ensembles, Les Talens Lyriques.

This is the tenth year of the EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS. What do you think makes this cultural initiative a success?

Without the support of our longstanding partners and sponsors, not to mention our loyal audiences, such an initiative would be difficult to bring to fruition. Our well-established partnerships with the City of Frankfurt, reliable sponsors, local cultural institutions and our media partner hr2-kultur have enabled us for many years to present a unique insight, each autumn, into the contemporary culture of a different EU Member State.

Two years ago, together with our longstanding partner, the City of Frankfurt, we began a new project: the charity concert of the EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS. Under the heading "A

concert for you”, artists perform for a good cause; this year’s concert will be given by musicians from “Le Cercle de l’Harmonie”. Entry to the concert is free, but audience members are asked to give donations for a selected Frankfurt-based charity. This year, we will be supporting the work of “DIE FRANKFURTER LESEPATEN”, whose volunteers help primary school children from various cultural backgrounds aged 6 to 10 years to learn German. In choosing this charity, we would like to promote language acquisition – one of the most important factors for integration – and tolerance towards other cultures. This is in line with the underlying principle of the EUROPEAN CULTURAL DAYS: “Unity in Diversity”.