

Musikfestival der Vielfalt

**Bemerkungen von Botsch. Dr. Eva Nowotny, Präsidentin der
Österreichischen UNESCO Kommission**

Wien, am 16. April 2010

It is not only with pleasure, but with enthusiasm that the Austrian UNESCO Commission has accepted the patronage over this „European Forum on Music“ – surprisingly a first time event in this city which takes such pride in its rich musical tradition, heritage and contemporary musical life. It is thus with sincerity and conviction that I congratulate the European Music Council, the Austrian Music Council and the University for Music and the Performing Arts on this important initiative.

From the vantage point of the Austrian UNESCO Commission I would say that we are partners of this initiative on two levels.

On a general level, the Austrian UNESCO Commission is charged with the support for and the realization of the guiding principles and the ensuing initiatives of UNESCO – one of the oldest of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and charged to contribute to world peace and understanding through education and worldwide cooperation in culture and science. Music is *the* international language par excellence and probably more than any other form of cultural expression able to create a bond of understanding and mutual comprehension between very different cultures and civilizations.

On a more concrete level, we deal with the implementation of the “UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions” – a cumbersome title, which usually is shortened to Convention on Cultural Diversity. This important convention entered into force on March 18th, 2007 – up to now 109 states and the European Community have ratified the Convention, historically in record speed, which speaks for the high political value attached to the Convention.

Having supported the Convention since the first moments of drafting started, Austria has ratified it on December 18th, 2006, and in its legislative process has ensured that the Convention is a binding instrument on the federal, the provincial and the municipal level, as well as for the international cooperation policy of Austria.

Wherein lies now the high political importance of this convention?

It is, first of all, a landmark in the development of international cultural policy, as it constitutes the first binding instrument on cultural diversity. And indeed it has been sometimes called the “Magna Charta of International Cultural Policy”.

It also strikes an interesting balance. On the one side it ensures and codifies the principle of cultural sovereignty, of the right of governments to protect and promote cultural expression in their own territory. This is particularly important for smaller states which are open to the sometimes overbearing cultural influence of a bigger or more powerful neighbor. You may recall in this context the struggle of Canada in the World Trade Organization to protect its cultural life against the strong influence of the United States. On the other side, however, the Convention is much more than a defensive reaction to perceived threats by trade policies and goes beyond the reaffirmation of cultural sovereignty. Parties to the Convention accept the obligation and the commitment to create an environment, in which a diversity of cultural expression and activity is allowed to flourish. This is based on the concept that culture and cultural diversity are an essential pillar of human development and not only enrich the life of individuals but of societies in immeasurable ways.

Austrian cultural history serves as a very convincing proof for the validity of this concept. The huge reservoir of cultural diversity within the former Austro-Hungarian Empire certainly was an important factor in the creative explosion in music, in literature and in the arts as well as in science in what we call now the “fin de siècle”. In a similar way, the political changes in Europe, the opening of all the borders and the expansion of the area of personal freedom and the right to self-

expression contributes today to the richness of the cultural life in our country and in particular in this city.

So, promoting the dialogue of different musical languages, of different musical heritage, across ethnic, genre or national boundaries, under the common roof of this Festival of diversity is very much in the mainstream of this important convention and I wish you every success for this undertaking.