



Visa report highlighted but serious problems remain

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While visa issues continue to create controversy between European concert organisers and European Immigration and Visa Authorities, the ELMF / Freemuse white paper '*Visa / the discordant note*' plays an essential role in various international fora.

At a meeting in Germany on 19-20 May 2009, the *German Coalition for Cultural Diversity* discussed artists' mobility problems. Concert organiser Birgit Ellinghaus presented the main conclusions of the Visa report. After the meeting the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Werner Weber, expressed his great interest in the recommendations of the report.

Facilitated by the German Commission for Unesco, the summit was part of a series of meetings intending to qualify the German Government in the practical implementation of the Unesco Convention on Cultural Diversity. On a meeting in Brussels 23 June 2009 mobility of artists and visa issues will once again be in the focus of an EU sponsored international meeting. Here, Rita Nagy, policy officer on visas at European Commission DG Justice, Liberty and Security, will talk about 'Recent developments on visa issues at EU level'.

The meeting on 23 June is organised in collaboration with the PRACTICS project. PRACTICS is an EU-funded three-year project coordinated by the Finnish Theatre Information Centre (TINFO) which joined forces with ten other cultural organisations in Europe with the aim to facilitate the provision of information and advice to cross-border mobile cultural professionals. Under this project pilot "Cultural Mobility Contact Points" (CMCPs) will be set up in four EU-countries/regions: Belgium, Spain, Wales and the Netherlands.

New system for issuing artists' visas

Meanwhile a new system for issuing artists' visas in the United Kingdom has created a lot of controversy. A campaign against the Home Office's restrictions has been launched by several artists and heads of national arts institutions.

The Manifest Club's campaign has documented several cases of visa "turn downs". The new system has been strongly criticised by the Iranian film-maker Abbas Kiarostami who in May pulled out of directing *Così fan tutte* for the English National Opera because of the UK's "unduly time-consuming and hugely complicated" visa system.

An ENO spokesperson had said that Kiarostami did not feel he was treated in a respectful way when applying for a UK visa.

In short, the visa stories continue!