

Montreal, October 11, 2012

We came out of the Bratislava congress, held at the end of September, with the feeling of having achieved a lot in very little time. It had been three years since coalition leaders had been given a chance to meet. Delegates had a lot to share about what had been accomplished by their coalition, but were as eager to discuss the years to come. In total, 16 coalitions from the American, European and African regions were represented, with colleagues from Canada, Morocco and Australia joining via Skype.

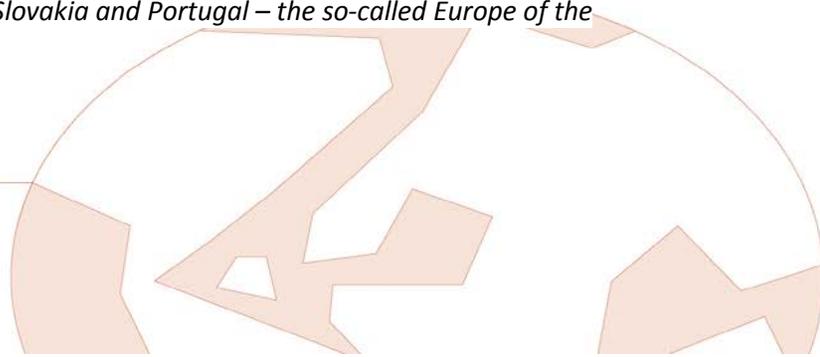
We were all aware that this was an important moment for our movement, as the energy level and momentum that has led to the adoption of the Convention needed to be realigned to address the new challenge of implementation. The time has now come to see whether or not the Convention can meet the high expectations it has raised. Everyone was aware that these were dire times for the UNESCO and the cultural sector in general. The strength of our national coalitions, and of its Federation, is a vital sign of the capacity of civil society to contribute to the implementation of the Convention to prevent it from being marginalised, let alone slipping into oblivion.

The congress therefore focussed on a programme of action until the next congress in 2014 and beyond. Christine Merkel of the German Coalition suggested that October 2015 could become a target date for a major gathering in Paris to mark the 10th anniversary of the Convention, bringing together Fellows of the international U40 network « Cultural Diversity 2030 », Coalition representatives and national contact points.

Delegates discussed possible areas of collaboration, both regionally and internationally, around some of the key issues that got them mobilized following the adoption of the Convention:

- Status of the artist
- North-South cultural cooperation
- Cultural expressions of minority groups such as indigenous peoples
- Cultural rights and freedom of artistic expressions
- The cultural exemption in trade agreements, namely the Canada-EU and Transpacific Partnership (TPP)

On status of the artist, our colleague Pavol Kral has offered to take the lead in compiling all best practices that may be shared with him, especially in terms of definitions of the artist, as the Slovak Coalition is now being recognized by the new social democrat government as a valuable partner in drafting the new status of the artist law. Past initiatives such as the joint FIM/FIA Manifesto on the *Status of the Artist and the UNESCO's World Observatory* were brought to the attention of delegates. It was also noted that countries such as Slovakia and Portugal – the so-called Europe of the



Regions- had different needs than more advanced countries like UK, France and Germany. The Austrian and Slovak coalitions saw that there was an opportunity to collaborate more closely, realizing that their challenges were similar.

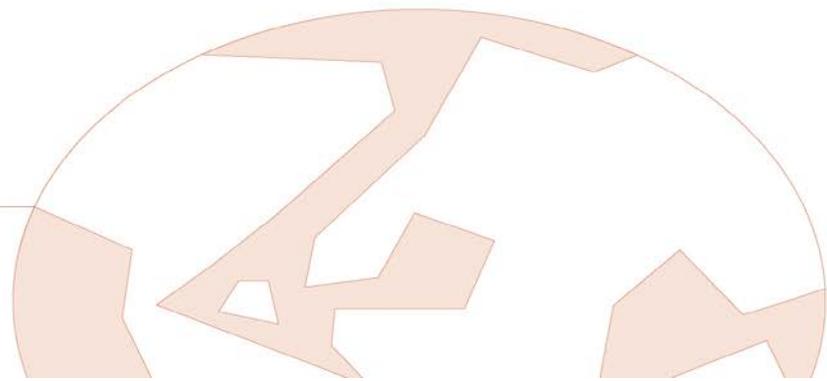
On North-South cooperation, delegates adopted a resolution calling on the European Commission to ensure that the new “Creative Europe” programme which brings together the Culture, MEDIA and MEDIA Mundus programmes will not only focus on the economic value of the cultural sector but also take into account smaller creator organizations which play a central role for the diversity of cultural expressions. Delegates adopted another resolution urging the EU programme for development and cooperation, “Agenda for Change”, to integrate cultural considerations in keeping with the EU’s obligations as party to the Convention on the diversity of cultural expressions. This is of high importance to cultural groups in neighbouring and developing countries. Holly Aylett of the UK Coalition has played a leadership role on this front.

On cultural rights and freedom of expressions, delegates felt that the Federation should join the global network to monitor censorship in the arts and support artistic freedom of expression Artsfex to be launched at the world conference in Oslo, on October 27. Delegates felt it was important to consult the members of their national coalitions and solicit the participation of other cultural INGOs, such as the International Federation of Musicians. Christine Merkel, who has been a member of the working group preparing the Artsfex founding documents, will represent the Federation in Oslo.

On trade agreements, it was agreed that a common advocacy platform would be developed for coalitions in countries taking part in the Transpacific Partnership agreement (TPP) to express their demand for the UNESCO Convention to be recognized and for discussions on intellectual property not destabilize the existing national copyright regimes. The Chilean Coalition, headed by Mane Nett, has been very active on this front. Delegates also suggested that an observatory mechanism be set up, perhaps involving universities, to share timely information on trade agreements.

Delegates also shared a common concern for the precarious situation of public service broadcasters in the context of the current financial crisis, with the striking example of Portugal where the privatization of the national public broadcaster RTP is being considered. The congress therefore adopted a strong resolution, which includes a call for the Intergovernmental Committee of the Convention to include the status of public service broadcasters in its 2013-2014 work programme to be adopted by the Conference of Parties next June. The secretariat of the Federation will prepare a platform document to be presented at the ICG on this and other issues to be discussed such as the evaluation of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, its fundraising strategy and the quadrennial periodic reports.

The congress also adopted a resolution calling for the international community to assist Mali in preventing further assaults on its tangible heritage and human rights freedoms. More broadly, this raised the question of what could / should be done to censure State Parties who are in clear breach of their commitments under the Convention.



The Board of Directors approved the request of a newly formed Bangladesh Coalition for Cultural Diversity, the fourth in the Asia-Pacific region. It also welcomed the application from Zimbabwe's Nhimbe Trust but agreed that the statutes of the Federation would first be amended to allow for organizations that are not coalitions per se, and even individuals, to join the Federation as « associate » members. Everyone felt that national coalitions would benefit from the expertise and commitment of the 70 young professionals who belong to the international U40 Network « Cultural Diversity 2030 ». More broadly, it was said that conditions were favourable in many countries for our movement to reach out to new allies in unchartered territories, as testified by the recent successes of the Hammamet (Tunisia) and Alexandria (Egypt) seminars.

We heard from Mellakh Abdelhay, of the Moroccan Coalition, that his country would ratify the Convention in the first months of 2013 and that the new minister of Culture supported the idea to hold the next congress of the Federation in Morocco in 2014.

The terms of most board members whose mandate had expired were renewed. For the first time, a vice-president for the African region was designated. The board composition is now as follow:

Rasmané Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso), president
Solange Drouin (Canada), treasurer
Mané Nett (Chile), secretary and vice-president, Latin America
Beat Santschi (Switzerland), vice-president, Europe
Ray Argall (Australia), vice-president, Asia-Pacific
Kodjo Cyriaque Noussouglo (Togo), vice-president, Africa
Mellakh Abdelhay (Morocco)
Jorge Bosso (Spain)
Pascal Rogard (France)

On a final note, it must be said that the Bratislava congress was largely successful due to the flawless organization of our hosts. Old friends came together, new friendships were established and culture was celebrated as we visited the [Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum](#) and listened to live jazz trio in the historical Malá Scena theatre. Our intensive three-day work sessions ended on a high note with a tour of town at sunset followed by an exquisite farewell dinner in the pure Slovak tradition.

It was Alejandra Diaz from the Paraguay Coalition who recalled that Jozef Svonavsky at once vowed that the Slovak Coalition would one day host the congress of the Federation. This was in Seoul, South Korea, in 2004. To the benefit of us all, the international civil society movement, and possibly to the Convention, he has kept this promise made to himself. Hats off to you Jozef.

Charles Vallerand
General Secretary, International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity

