

## **The Vienna Charter goes Danube**

### **Adopted at the Präsidium of CoDCR, Brussels, 26 March 2013**

Vienna would like to make the proposal of a common project for the Danube Area to the CODCR; It concerns the Vienna Charter, actually to date the biggest local participatory project in Europe ever. The aim of the process was to agree on common ground rules for the future of our city.

At the launch of the project on 13 March 2012, Vienna's Mayor Michael Häupl, Deputy Mayor Maria Vassilakou, and Executive City Councillor Sandra Frauenberger described the objectives of the project:

"Large cities are diverse and heterogeneous, and diversity increases with internationalisation. But good neighbourly relations cannot be enacted by law. The people in our City need to come to an understanding and formulate mutually acceptable solutions. The Vienna Charter will provide the framework for good neighbourly relations, actively promote the dialogue between the citizens and build solidarity."

The special thing about this project was that the Viennese themselves could choose the topics and thousands participated actively in the development of the Charter in open discussions- "Charter Talks"-, via Internet or telephone, with the aim to set the course for a good and respectful climate in our city in cooperation with all our citizens."

However, an open process such as this one, where the people of Vienna would determine the contents of the Charter, requires fundamental principles and clear rules: in a democratic constitutional state there are some things that are not open for discussion.

Therefore, a group of experts (legal experts as well as experts of everyday life -residential building caretaker, school student, school principal...) developed a core document, based on a number of fundamental and inalienable elements of international legal norms and the Austrian Constitution. The core document consists of three parts: democracy and the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, women's and children's rights

Transparency, openness, and credibility are the key principles of the Vienna Charter project.

An independent advisory committee was established to safeguard these principles and to ensure that the opinions and wishes of the Viennese, would be reflected in all the phases of the process; the committee also acted as an arbitration panel to resolve disputes. The members of the advisory committee reflected the wide range of partner organisations: they came from different professional backgrounds, consisted of three women and three men, both old and young, and two of them had been born in a country other than Austria.

An invitation letter from the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor was sent out to all cooperation partners of the different Administrative Groups of the Vienna City. 325 partner organisations from an impressively diverse range of fields declared their intent of supporting the process actively by holding Charter talks and/or using their information channels to spread awareness of the project.

Charter talks were organised by partner organisations and individuals. Anyone who wanted to organise a Charter talk could register it online or by phone at the Charter hotline. The organisers could use pre-printed posters and flyers to which they only had to add the time and location of the event to advertise the talks, and the Charter logo was available on the website. The organisers could also decide the main topic for the discussion. They could either choose one of the three main topic clusters or let the participants decide themselves at the beginning of the discussion on what they wanted to focus.

No matter what the topic, they should always address the following questions:

- What is important for good neighbourly relations in Vienna?
- What do the participants expect from each other?

What are they prepared to do?

- What should become part of the Vienna Charter?

In total, 651 Charter talks were held in all districts of Vienna and at nearly any kind of venue imaginable (in club houses, pubs, offices, schools, people's flats, parks, and public swimming pools). Some 8500 people participated in them, investing a total of 12,700 hours into discussing good neighbourly living. The participants represented a true cross-section of Vienna's population: children, young people, senior citizens, blue and white collar workers, entrepreneurs, non-working persons as well as people with different mother tongues and countries of origin, people with special needs, people with different religious beliefs, worldviews and political opinions, and people with different sexual orientations.

The vast majority of the contributions overlapped strongly in several key issues, so that the main contents and core elements of the text nearly wrote themselves. They were assembled into the "Vienna Charter", which was presented to the public as the result of the process in a press conference on 27 November 2012.

**The City of Vienna, together with PA 10, would like to invite Cities in the Danube Area to develop what could become a “Danube Charter”, which could be developed on the basis of the Vienna Charter, depending on the possibilities and strategies of the respective cities. This could develop in one of the biggest European participative and democratic projects, involving cities and metropolitan areas, civil society, social partners, business as well as responsible stakeholders of all kind.**

