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Dear subscribers and friends of the Munich Philharmonic,

The events in and around the Ukraine have been dominating the headlines over the last few weeks, causing new rifts between East and West that are distressing to all of us. I, personally, have also become the subject of accusations and controversial disputes. I would like to take this opportunity to make a personal statement.

I am immensely proud of the fact that I have been appointed by the city of Munich to head the Munich Philharmonic as Music Director in the 2015/16 season. Yet this appointment means much more to me. In my opinion it is based on trust and on the belief that, together, we can and must succeed in upholding this city's unique musical culture and to guide it into the future. I am fully aware of the magnitude of this task and the responsibility associated with it and my future orchestra. Therefore, I shall do my very best to ensure that our concerts are filled with unforgettable moments.

I am a musician and conductor. However, I am also a Russian citizen with close connections to my native country. For nearly a quarter century I have been in charge of the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, one of the world's most prestigious theatres, home to the the Mariinsky Opera, Ballet and Orchestra. My range of musical activities is not limited to this one post. I have been conducting music in the most important cities around the world for many years and work together with many orchestras and musical colleagues. Music is both my profession and my passion and I have devoted myself to it, heart and soul, from a very early age. I also assumed responsibilities to ensure that the cultural and musical tradition of St. Petersburg continues to blossom.

Future political developments could give rise to problems along the lines of what we are currently experience since some people might interpret my involvement given my nationality. In some countries I am seen as a representative of a "different" society, which does not stand for the values and principles of Western life, or does not advocate for them strongly enough. But is this accurate? After all, our Russian musical culture was Europeanised by Mikhail Glinka and is influenced and shaped, in particular, by the German musical culture. Many people in my native Russia are very well aware of this.

Yet, on the other hand, I cannot ignore the fact that parts of Russian society live according to fundamental principles that are different from those of Western societies. For example, many elements of Russian culture are based on the Russian Orthodox religion and the traditions associated with it which still plays a fundamental role in people's lifestyles. It is important to recognize that this tradition has helped the Russian population to survive such difficult eras in the twentieth century.

I respect my people and their traditions. I also respect the principles of life that are extremely important to the people of Russia. These include upholding taboos that have not applied in Western countries for many years, but where many attempts and much time was needed to abolish them. With respect to my personal stance, there is no one in my ensemble and team who could accuse me of anything. One of my most important principles is respect for others and their personal lives.

Of course, I am aware that my work, my initiative and my commitment - to the extent that music has an influence on everyday life - demand a high degree of responsibility towards my fellow citizens and at times these functions can be construed in a political nature. Nevertheless, I am a continuous believer in music's power to reinforce societies and their great traditions. That is why it is very important to me to help promote and invigorate educational music programmes.

I know that many colleagues throughout the world support me in my efforts. Yet this can and must not hide the fact that circumstances of Realpolitik can suddenly infiltrate the common ground of our cultural work and cause harsh and jarring discord. In my opinion, it is particularly crucial at times like these to still have the courage to listen to the other side and to exchange opinions. Moreover, we should not lose respect for each other and never allow for communication to breakdown. We should always be able to exchange thoughts and ideas.

It might sound banal, which does not make it wrong, in fact, quite the opposite is true in my experience: Music is the best bridge-builder!

I look forward to welcoming you to many concerts, perhaps as early as July as the Munich Philharmonic and Marinsky Orchestra complete their Stravinsky Cycle

Yours sincerely,

Valery Gergiev