

Speech for the dinner

Dear Mr Commissioner,

Dear Members of Parliament

Dear Mrs Director General,

Ladies and gentleman

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Later this month, the European Union will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. 60 years of peace and prosperity in our continent, 60 years of better understanding the diversity and richness of our neighbours and of our differences. And since 50 years, European publishers have been privileged witnesses and actors of the European construction under an umbrella organization, GELC, before, FEP, now.

I am very happy that you have accepted my invitation to join FEP for this important anniversary. 50 years, for a trade organisation at European level, is very a respectable age.

To celebrate this anniversary, I would like to start with the past, some words about the history of our Federation.

Already, in 1959, European publishers were already interested in the European construction. I quote for minutes of a meeting of the International Publishers

Association, back then: *'we believe that the publishers should adopt a positive attitude to the movement for European integration'*. And finally, in 1967, on 19 January, the act of foundation of the Groupement des Editeurs de Livres de la Communauté, the GELC in its French acronym, was signed and European publishers had a joint representation.

The founding members were Belgium (with two associations, respecting their cultural diversity also expressed in the existence of two main official languages), France, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. Meetings were held in French and German. English came later when the UK joined GELC in 1970. Years after years, new book publishers' associations joined, often at the occasion of the accession of their country to the European Union, and by now, we represent 28 publishers' associations of 27 European countries.

Ten years after its creation, in 1977, GELC members prepared their very first position paper on copyright. The Commission had commissioned a report from a German academic and this required immediate answer from the publishers because some challenging affirmations. Problems and difficulties exist from the very beginning. Things don't change!

Well maybe they do change. Imagine, in 1987, the European Commission asked GELC to have an official representation at every meeting. After giving it some thoughts, the publishers declined the offer, preferring remaining an independent body. This did not prevent continuing to enjoy an excellent collaboration with the Commission, Commissioners and officials, always available to receive us, to listen to our positions and to consider our

initiatives and proposals. In 1989 the EC released an important plan to promote books and reading.

We have always been active in the cultural field. GELC run the translation programme for the EC in the late eighties and today, together with the European and International Booksellers Federation and the European Writers Council, FEP runs the European Union prize for Literature which reward each year 12 emerging authors of fiction, from across our continent.

And since 22 years, we are proud to have invited many politicians and officials at book fairs and especially at the world largest book fair, Frankfurt where we host an annual Rendez-Vous. I hope that you will be able to come this year, Mr Commissioner.

The invitation stands also for the Members of Parliament and for all colleagues. Europe is very proud to host the three largest book fairs; Frankfurt, I wish to thank Jürgen Boos, the President of the Fair to be with us today, London (which is next week) and Bologna, the book fair for children books.

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me now look at the present and the future. European publishing is the first cultural industry in Europe with a market value of around 40 billion euros. And in the world, European publishers are leaders with 6 of the 10 largest publishers being European companies. Every year, we publish more than half a million new books and in many instances, we publish them in several formats, print, electronic or audio. We invest in the future of knowledge. We

invest in the future of entertainment. We invest in the future of education. We innovate every day – to be fair with my colleagues we are a very innovative industry that takes risks every day, in some cases, very significant risks, technological, off course, but specially editorial, giving the chance to publish to new authors.

We often hear the question? do we still need publishers? Yes we do; no reasonable doubt!

Why?

Because publishers select talents that best express the sensibilities and trends of our societies

Because publishers invest a substantial part of their profits in emerging authors, probably losing money in seven out of every 10 published books. Each publishing house has an experimental laboratory where it invests important sums in R & D, which in our case means in the publication of new authors whose success we do not know.

Because publishers select, commission and finance publications to inform discussions through literature, children books, academic publications or textbooks, allowing children, students and their teachers, citizens to better apprehend and understand the world in which we live. Publishers contribute decisively to an active and informed exercise of citizenship

Because publishers put their credibility at stake with every book they publish, because publishers are trustworthy and provide for brands in certified

information, in a world where we are drowned in too many unverified information.

Because publishers believing in words, we, the publishers of Europe, fight for freedom of expression, in Europe and all over the world.

This is why we – you – need publishers; this is why our societies, our nations and our countries need publishers. Europe needs publishers

We are extremely honoured to have with us tonight some of these publishers who have on top of their daily work dedicated their time to our Federation, let me honour them by introducing them

1990-1994 Pere Vicens (Spain; Cataluña)

1996-1998 John Clement (UK – Scotland)

1998-2000 Ulrico Carlo Hoepli (Italy)

2000-2002 Michael Gill (Ireland)

2006-2008 Jonas Modig (Sweden)

2008-2010 Federico Mota (Italy)

2010-2012 Fergal Tobin (Ireland)

2012-2014 Piotr Marciszek (Poland)

2014-2016 Pierre Dutilleul (France)

Let me also honour past presidents that cannot be with us today: Pierre Dutilleul (France - 2014-2016), Arne Bach (Germany - 2004-2016), Anton Hilscher (Austrian - 2002-2004), Volker Schwarz (Germany - 1994 – 1996 – passed way

last year) and our founding fathers Alain Gründ (1990-1992) and Fernando Guedes (the last president of GELC) - a man of vision and a great publisher, a very good friend of mine and always an inspiring person (either as man of virtues and as a publisher with great values)

I am happy that João, his son and a former representative of Portugal at FEP, is with us this afternoon, representing his legacy and remembering to all of us that, although being part of an industry, we need to be and act as gentle, friendly and correct people towards our colleagues, partners and stakeholders, and also towards our opponents.

Finally, my gratitude on behalf of the industry to all publishers who have dedicated time and resources to stand for our sector. Thanks to all and each of you, publishers and directors, for your constant commitment and devoted work in favour of our common goal, both cultural and economic.

One final word

If publishing is about making available to the world talents in all genres, publishing is also about dialogues between cultures.

Dialogue is, I trust, a key word for all of us.

- For publishers, as we have to keep on explaining what we are doing and why our investment is worth being protected.
- For the European institutions and national representations, here represented, to engage with us, here in Brussels, in Strasbourg and in our respective capitals.

- For sister organisations from the book chain and from the larger cultural and creative world, to jointly defend balanced solutions promoting this cultural diversity we are all so fond of.

Let me end by thanking you all for attending this celebration. Allow me specially thank

- ✓ the Commissioner (Tibor Navracsics)
- ✓ the Director General in charge of Culture (Martine Reicherts)
- ✓ the Members of Parliament (Mrs Neena Gill, Mrs Angelika Niebler, Mrs Inese Vaidere, Mr Axel Voss)
- ✓ the co-President of the European and International Booksellers Federation (Jean-Luc Treutenaere), the President of IFRRO (Rainer Just), and the former President of the International Publishers Association (Richard Charkin).

I am now delighted to pass the floor to the Commissioner in charge of culture, Mr Tibor Navracsics.

After the speech of the Commissioner

Thank you Commissioner, let me wish you a lovely evening and thanks for being one of the friends of European publishers.