

Opening remarks

European Union Prize for Literature 2017 Awards Ceremony

Brussels, 23 May 2017

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Distinguished Guests, Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, and welcome to the 9th awards ceremony of the European Union Prize for Literature.

I am honoured to be here with you tonight, together with Vice-President of the European Parliament, Dimitrios Papadimoulis.

I would like to express my gratitude to our partners – the Federations of European Publishers and European and International Booksellers and the European Writers' Council. Together, you represent the whole book sector in Europe. Your dedication to the European Union Prize for Literature, from the very beginning in 2009, is truly recognised.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the members of the 12 national juries. More than half a million new titles are published every year in Europe. You are our trusted guides in European contemporary literature, selecting the very best new authors for us to discover.

The European Union Prize for Literature rewards literary talent. We are all here to pay tribute to this year's winners: 12 new and emerging literary voices from 12 European countries – Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

In itself, this list of countries is enough to evoke great literary images and expectations. It is also an inspiration, awakening the desire to taste something new, from other places, in other languages and other realities. Something we did not know was there – but that we recognise and that gives us a sense of belonging to a bigger European picture.

The European Union's action in the field of culture has a dual objective: to promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and to support our cultural and creative sectors. With the European Union Prize for Literature we are doing both things.

We recognise the importance of the European book and publishing sector, both in cultural and economic terms. The EU's exports of books exceed the imports. Books are the leading category of cultural exports in 16 EU Member States. Uniquely among European cultural industries, European book publishing is a global leader – and should remain so. We must continue to create incentives for investment. We must encourage innovation and reward creativity. We must support

the book publishing sector as it tackles the challenges and opportunities of the digital era. This is how we will preserve our diversity and ensure Europe's creative edge.

The European Union complements action taking place at national level. We support the European book sector both through ongoing policy work – for example as regards copyright reform – and through our specific funding.

With the Creative Europe programme we support literary translations as well as hundreds of transnational networks, platforms and cooperation projects in all cultural sectors.

For example, between 2014 and 2016 European publishers received over EUR 10 million in grants from Creative Europe. This helped the translation of close to 1 500 books from and into more than 30 European languages. About 350 of these translations are of books that have won the European Union Prize for Literature.

Translation is essential to wider circulation of literature, exchanges and intercultural understanding. This is particularly true as our societies get more diverse. We strongly believe that literature, culture and creativity can play an important role for integration and intercultural dialogue.

Literature is important to all of us. Stories and storytelling create an ongoing dialogue between different cultures, between past and present. They are part of who we are, and together, all our stories make up Europe's cultural heritage – which we are going to celebrate throughout 2018, the European Year of Cultural Heritage. These stories, like the other components of our shared heritage, are vital in building the Europe of the future.

The European Union Prize for Literature is unique. It is the only book award for new and emerging authors from such a range of European countries and languages. Since its launch in 2009, and including this 9th edition in 2017, the Prize has been awarded to a total of 108 remarkable authors from 37 countries. With the Prize we wish to showcase Europe's contemporary literature. We want to inspire people to translate, publish, sell and read books from other countries.

It is said that literature is a way to get to know other worlds and that a book is a door open towards new realities. I want to thank authors for inspiring us, for giving us food for thought, for touching us with their work.

I wish you a wonderful evening with many literary discoveries across Europe!