

Brussels, 2nd February 2021

Keep the book accessible everywhere and to everyone

Letter from the Federation of European Publishers to the Portuguese government

The Federation of European Publishers represents 29 national associations of books, learned journals and educational content, in all formats, in Europe.

Today, publishers from all over Europe are respectfully asking you to reconsider your position regarding the re-opening of points of sale for books in Portugal. Sadly, the Portuguese book sector already suffered decline in sales of almost 20% in 2020, while the book markets in most large European countries experienced far less severe decreases.

We are fully aware that the health situation is dramatic and that every effort must be made to stop the spread of Covid-19. In exceptional circumstances, exceptional decisions must be taken. But preventing Portuguese citizens from acquiring books at the points of sale that remain legally permitted to open, in a country already suffering from systemic reading failures, risks worsening the economic impact on the sector, while needlessly endangering cultural diversity. We are concerned that this will result in fewer books being published and fewer debut writers ever reaching their audiences. This will have long-lasting consequences for literature and reading, putting an entire ecosystem at risk.

A country which is proud of its culture and especially its literature should not forbid access to books entirely, even as bookstores must remain closed for safety reasons. Preventing citizens from buying books wherever they can and permitting only online channels to operate in a country where online book sales represent only 8 to 9% of overall sales of books is a serious restriction on universal access to an essential good.

We would like to point out that in other European countries, the governments, forced to close all non-essential retail outlets, have supported the book sector e.g. by injecting funds through massive public purchases of books through local bookshops to improve public libraries' collections. Unfortunately, the funds so far allocated by your government have failed to adequately support an industry that accounts for tens of thousands of jobs. If writers, publishers, and readers are not permitted to sell and buy at points of sale that remain open, Portugal risks witnessing the biggest decline of publishers and bookstores since 25th April 1974.

Today, we solemnly ask you to permit bookshops to effect contactless sales at their doors and to allow sales of books through other stores which legally remain open. We also ask you to earmark adequate funding to support the book sector and help all actors in the book value chain to overcome this crisis. As President of the Council of the European Union, your example could provide a beacon of hope for the European book sector and we call on you to allocate sufficient amounts from NextGenerationEU to culture and, in particular, to publishing.

Yours respectfully,



Peter Kraus vom Cleff
President