

# Book World Prague '23

11–14 May 2023  
Prague Exhibition  
Grounds

28th International Book Fair  
and Literary Festival

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Theme:  
Authors  
Without  
Borders



# Book World Prague brought together cultural professionals from Central and Eastern Europe

For the first time in its history, Book World Prague welcomed representatives of literary centres and agencies within the programme section entitled Central and East European Book Market. Its aim is to act as a platform for meeting professionals from the book industry from Central and Eastern Europe. A similar section can be found at other important book fairs around the world. This year's initiative is the first step towards CEEBM becoming not only an organic part of the largest book fair in the Czech Republic, but also a "shopping window" of the Central and Eastern European book business.

Over sixty interested individuals registered for the intensive two-day program. In addition to representatives of Czech and Slovak literature, guests came from Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Ukraine. They were mostly representatives of literary centres, but also publishers or authors themselves, many of whom play multiple roles. Representatives of Czech publishers, literary agents, journalists, translators and prominent cultural figures were also invited.

Thursday's launch of CEEBM followed the opening ceremony of the fair in the beautiful premises of the newly renovated Bohemia Pavilion. **RADOVAN AUER**, Director of Book World Prague, welcomed the guests with a new and joyful announcement about zero VAT for books, which was acknowledged with applause by the present representatives of the CEE literature community as this made the Czech Republic the first to do so within this literary region. "Our new project is to build a Central and Eastern European centre for the sale of rights, which we are implementing with the support of the PPF Foundation," said Radovan Auer at the grand opening of the centre. "We want to become a mirror of literature of Central and Eastern Europe. We reached out mainly to national institutes; we want to share ideas here and build a respected business centre. I am glad that a number of foreign experts responded to our invitation, and I will look forward to the results that will be produced here within the next two days." Jana Tomas Sedláčková from the PPF Foundation added, "The Czechs are talented and are able to stand up to global competition, they just need a platform where they can present themselves. Which is why the idea of creating a centre for the international book market was born. We believe that this activity will provide a platform that will help Czech authors enter the international scene."

The afternoon programme included presentations by individual participants on the situation of the book market and the condition of literature and readership in general in the above-mentioned countries. Several consistent trends across all language areas were mentioned, such as the rise of audiobooks and stagnant e-book sales; the overview of the turbulent rise of translations from Ukrainian was useful, and information that Bulgarians read a lot but do not buy books or that Croatia provides author status, including social and health support, was surprising. The evening debate on the influence of politics on literary creation was leisurely hosted by journalist Petr



Text and photo Jitka Hanušová

Vizina. Foreign participants showed great initiative and spontaneously took turns at the microphone to share personal experience related to the topic.

Participants were most interested in the Friday morning discussion about whether a certain genre can define the literature of a specific country and whether and how it can be turned into an "export article", similar to what happened with Nordic crime fiction, Japanese manga or Polish literary reportage. The panel included **GUILLAUME BASSET**, Dramaturg of Book World Prague, **PAVEL MANDYS**, literary

critic and publicist, and **FILIP OSTROWSKI**, founder of the Absynt publishing house. One of the key findings, which turned out to be common to the entire Central and Eastern European area, is the lack or complete absence of literary agencies compared to larger language territories. The discussion continued in the lobby, while in the main theatre of the Bohemia Pavilion translators and authors from the CELA (Connecting Emerging Literary Artists) project, which has been carried out in cooperation with the Czech Literary Centre for several years, and local publishers discussed the so-called speed-dating. The debate part of the programme ended with a panel on the EU Literary Prize in the Professional Forum theatre. For both days, the Bohemia Pavilion also served as a place for individual meetings of Czech publishers with foreign guests or for meetings of the literary agents present.

Since its launch, the CEEBM project has provided an important space for sharing experience, exchanging best practices and developing cooperation. If we support the interest of both Czech cultural professionals and foreign guests, we can create an inspiring source of information and contacts in the coming years which all the book industries of the represented countries can use to further cultivate a professional book and literary environment.

## Culture Must Not Be Silent

A man of many talents, poet, novelist, essayist, translator, performer and director, **SERHIY ZHADAN** is undoubtedly one of the biggest stars of Ukrainian culture and also of this year's Book World Prague. He was welcomed by hundreds of spectators and readers at the festival.

Serhiy was in Prague also last year when he performed with his group Sobaky. This year, in addition to the concert he also presented his new novel **Internat (The Orphanage)**. Friday's meeting with visitors to the fair was not just about writing, they discussed the direction of Ukrainian culture, aid and the current and future situation. Serhiy was very energetic, he spoke quickly, passionately, interestingly. He easily engaged the audience in the discussion. The otherwise shy audience then asked one question after another. It was no surprise that many of the visitors were Serhiy's countrymen who found refuge in the Czech Republic.

"From the beginning of the aggression, I had problems creating anything," admitted Serhiy. "The words were suddenly not enough, they were limiting. But I remember very well the first moment when we started playing again and suddenly everything made sense. We played in the subway in Kharkiv where hundreds of residents were hiding. We had a guitar, we started singing, the kids joined in and I suddenly understood. I realised that even in the situation we were in, it was necessary to continue giving concerts and organizing meetings. Culture must not



Serhiy Zhadan

be silent; it must go on. When everyone is singing, there's energy, power." Serhiy's new novel Internat (The Orphanage) is set in eastern Ukraine and it is of course influenced by the war. "The main character goes to pick up his nephew in another city, when a big offensive begins, which complicates his journey and changes him," revealed Serhiy and also reflected on the concept of hero and heroism. "In Ukraine, heroism takes on a different dimension, actually many dimensions. A hero is a person who picks up a weapon and fights. But a hero is also a civilian who saves others or a volunteer or a person who saves our cultural heritage, our monuments," Serhiy added and shared with the visitors a story of one heroism which may not look

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The Saturday performance of the band **ZHADAN AND SOBAKY** which presented a punk-rock rendition of the poems and lyrics by **Serhiy Zhadan** pleased not only the Ukrainian community. The costs of the concert, as well as the Ukrainian presentation at the festival, were covered by the PPF Foundation. All proceeds from the concert, i.e. CZK 248,000, were donated to the Kharkiv volunteer battalion of Chartija. Serhiy Zhadan received the symbolic check at the end of the concert from Jana Tomas Sedláčková from the PPF Foundation and Radovan Auer, Director of the fair. (Photo Anton Filonenko)

## Data Research Has Shown that the Rate of Penetration of Czech Literature into Foreign Language Markets Is Accelerating

The Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS examined data from thousands of libraries around the world. The goal was to create a comprehensive picture of Czech literature in the world and show its trends. Visitors to the festival learned about the position of Czech literature during the programme Czech Literature Without Borders.

**ONDŘEJ VIMR**, who engages in global and digital literary studies at the Institute of Czech Literature, explained right at the beginning of the presentation that to define the boundaries of what Czech literature actually is and what is included in the study was a complicated task. In the end, the criterion for including authors in the research was that they had to have at least one original Czech book published. This particular research left aside professional and scientific literature but included literature for children and youth.

The study covered the last 200 years of Czech literature. The researchers examined 25,621 records from 1917 to 2022 related to 1,200 writers and translations into 103 languages. More than 95 percent covered the last 100 years. Female writers used to make up only 15 percent of all authors, but in recent decades their numbers have risen to 20 percent.

The research revealed a range of interesting information and trends. For example, the pace at which Czech authors penetrate foreign markets is accelerating. The hardest thing for a writer is to get beyond the first translation. Next milestone is the translation to the fifth language. Books are most commonly translated to German, English, Polish, French and Slovak. The volume of translations varies over time. The previously widely used Russian and Hungarian are now giving way to, for example, Italian or French.

What is Czech literature really like? That was another interesting question the researchers asked. In different time periods, the British and the Russians, for example, had a com-

pletely different idea of what Czech literature was, what topics it covered and who was its main voice. The data showed 5 large clusters between 1947 and 1989 in which groups of authors were translated in a similar way. Some authors were thus translated more in the Central European region. Slightly different works were published in the Nordic countries and in Western Europe.

After the social change in 1989, the view of Czech literature was more balanced. Books were translated mostly to English, Italian, French and Chinese. Around 400 translations of Czech works are published every year. The entire study was published in the literary science journal *Česká literatura* and is also available in an electronic version.

## Thankless Foreigner

**IRENA BREŽNÁ**, a Swiss writer, journalist and interpreter of Slovak origin, talked to the visitors of the fair not only about her book *The Thankless Foreigner*, but also about emigration, which she experienced first-hand.

The meeting with Irena Brežná was interspersed with reading from her book ***The Thankless Foreigner*** which contains her own experiences from emigration. "These are not my literal memories but rather my rendition of them," she explained. She and her family left Slovakia for Switzerland after 1968 and the first steps on the new, albeit free, land were not easy for her. She was young and she felt uprooted, cut off from friends, language and culture. "But Switzerland was generous to us, they accepted us collectively, we didn't have to prove individual persecution. We were welcomed refugees." Although she was and is grateful to Switzerland, she is also critical of it in her book. "I was worried about how the book would be accepted in Switzerland but at one

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This year the Czech Literary Centre, a section of the Moravian Library, which is in charge of the Czech national round, nominated Ondřej Štindl, whose novel ***Tolik popela*** defies the standards of contemporary Czech prose and can also appeal to foreign readers according to the jury.

Publicist **KRYŠTOF EDER** who took part in the debate at Book World Prague was one of the members of the jury of the national round. "It was my first time on the jury and it was very interesting. It was important to choose a book that can appeal even to foreign readers. So we thought a lot about how the given book would be comprehensible to a person who does not know the Czech setting, whether it could still give them something. That was one of our selection criteria." The translation of the selected book and information about the author is forwarded by the national jury to the seven-member international jury, which is made up of professionals from the book world, agents, booksellers and people working in the book industry. However, only countries that are not competing in the given year are represented in the jury in order to avoid a conflict of interests. "It's not easy to choose a winner. We spent the whole day debating and the vote was tight. We evaluate literary qualities and focus on how universal the messages of individual authors are, the spirit and atmosphere of the book. This year, the quality was really high," said Domenico la Magna and he also highlighted the Czech nominee Ondřej Štindl and his book *Tolik popela*.

The winner receives EUR 5,000 and, like the nominated authors, he or she will be promoted and will have access to foreign fairs. "We want the winning work and the nominated books to reach the widest possible audience," added Domenico la Magna.

This year the winner was Croatian author **MARTINA VIDAČIĆ** who impressed the jury with her novel ***Stjenice***. Special mentions went to Estonia, Finland, France, Kosovo and Cyprus. The award ceremony took place on 28 April at the book fair in Leipzig.

meeting where I read from it, people laughed at certain passages and thanked me for holding up a mirror to them." Although she admits that there were also some negative reactions and misunderstanding with people pointing out how she dared to criticize Switzerland when it offered her a new home. She responded by saying that when her heroine criticized something, it did not mean that she was not happy in the host country. Nevertheless, *The Thankless Foreigner* was received mostly positively, which is evidenced by the Swiss Literature Award the author won for this book. Irena Brežná not only found a new and free home in Switzerland, but also a job. She was a writer but she also worked for the Swiss radio and became a reporter. "People often ask me if I found a new home in Switzerland. But when you lose something, you don't always have to find what you lost, you can also find something else," concluded Irena Brežná. "And I found my 'something else' in Switzerland."

# We Have to Talk About Historical Experience, We Cannot Remain Passive, Agreed Karšaiová and Vojnović

Books by **JANA KARŠAIOVÁ** and **GORAN VOJNOVIĆ** take place in different countries and in different atmospheres. And yet, they have something in common – their theme is a personal story influenced by “great history”.

Karšaiová debuted with her novel ***Divorzio di velluto***. It is a story of two spouses and two republics originally written in Italian. “I wanted to write about our generation which was shaped by historical events. Things that happen in politics affect private affairs,” explained the author of Slovak origin living in Italy.

Goran Vojnović was 11 years old when war broke out in Yugoslavia. His hero is of the same age. “It was a strange time. Everything changed and yet everything stayed the same. I continued to live in my child’s world but everyday duties were interspersed with fear and new situations,” said the Slovenian author. War raises too many questions and provides no answers which in his opinion is a good starting point for writing.

The generation that both writers describe has a different view of historical events than their parents. “As kids we were the victims of the situation. It’s different for my parents – they can blame their naivety. They had illusions about the place they lived in and the war shattered them. To this day, a clash of two opinions is evident in society. One says that there is always at least some possibility not to become a war criminal. The other claims that it is simply fate and some things can’t be escaped,” said

Vojnović describing the complex situation in the former Yugoslavia.

Jana Karšaiová presented another problem affecting our society. “The generation I am describing doesn’t have a role model for decision-making because in communist times no big decisions were made. “Homo sovieticus” was born and the next generation spent their formative period in the dark,” she said. She believes that the way out of this mess is not to remain passive. Her heroine has to come to that conclusion as well. Goran Vojnović agrees. According to him, passivity lies in the inability to talk about war traumas and in focusing on a better tomorrow instead of facing the unpleasant past. His book ***Yugoslavia, My Fatherland*** thus contributes to an important conversation.

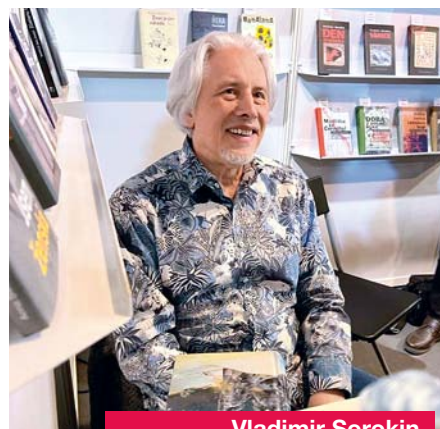
Both authors also touched upon the topic of identity. “I didn’t get a chance to discover who I was. I was forced to assume my identity. When you live in the Czech Republic and speak Czech, nobody asks you who you are. But it is a common question in the former Yugoslavia. And in 1990s it was even worse – it was black and white. Identity wasn’t something complex,” explained Vojnović. “I live in Italy, my book was published in Italian and it is about Czechoslovakia. And I am of Slovak origin. People always wonder if I am an Italian or Slovak author. I would prefer if we could have a fluid identity. Life would be better for all of us,” added Karšaiová.

## “In War, Prose Withers But Poetry Thrives,” Says Russian Writer Vladimir Sorokin

“I am Russian and I can’t see Russian from the outside. But the war left its mark on our relationship with our language. I realized that when my friends and I speak Russian now, there is a new feeling of shame – we speak the language of the aggressor,” said **VLADIMIR SOROKIN** at the very beginning of the discussion. He spoke openly about war and literature in front of hundreds of spectators.

The Russian author currently living in Berlin openly criticizes Russian aggression in Ukraine. “Literature has never stopped war. It is hard to write prose during war. Writers need some distance for their work. But war is such an ontological funnel that sucks all distance in. Although poets thrive. A lot of them have recently appeared, the war has woken them up and a lot of strong verses about the war have been written. It is also the time of journalism,” Sorokin described the current situation.

His writing was also given space during the discussion. The author explained how he approaches his storytelling. “Almost all of my stuff over the past twenty years has been about a world that exists at a point between the future and the past. I write like that because I am not happy with the present.” According to Sorokin, today’s world is too complex and it is impossible to describe it through linear writing.



In his work, he therefore uses a system of literary mirrors to depict challenging topics.

During the discussion, Vladimir Sorokin described the genesis of his character Dr. Garin and also reflected on whether literature is good for health. With the exception of texts written purely for commercial purposes, the author believes that literature has the ability to wake up readers from routine life. “For me, literature is a hard drug that helps us forget who we are and where we are,” he concluded.

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like heroism at first glance but it definitely is. “It is about my friend serving in the Ukrainian army. She learned that a group of people, both adults and children, remained in the so-called grey zone between our and the Russian army far from Kharkiv. They didn’t have time to evacuate and didn’t know what to do, where to go or whether to stay. She changed to civilian clothes, got to them and began to convince them that they had to leave everything and quickly move to the Ukrainian side. They didn’t want to go, they protested, they were rude to her, but she didn’t give in. She took two children by the hand and left. Thanks to her insistence, the others actually left, too. They all managed to get to Kharkiv in time and were safe. My friend showed immense bravery and strength not only by going after these people, but also by persuading them to follow her. She wanted to save them no matter what and she managed it. And that too is heroism.” The debate then turned to the question of the difficult position of the Ukrainian language. “There are people who live in Ukraine but don’t want to speak Ukrainian. Abroad, people ask me in surprise if Russian and Ukrainian are so different. Ukrainian is our internal language problem,” admitted Serhiy. Another question he answered was about the Ukrainian young generation. What are they like? “Young people who are sixteen, seventeen, eighteen are just discovering Ukrainianness for themselves. It may be difficult to understand that until then they spoke Russian, watched the Russian program and only now they are discovering their history, a new universe, and starting from scratch, but it is so. They are just starting to realize who they are,” explained Serhiy who is very active on TikTok where he recites his verses and has many young followers. Serhiy’s view on the current and future Ukrainian literature, on how it was affected by the war, was also interesting. “A lot will be written about the war, it will certainly influence literature, but that time hasn’t come yet. Now it is mainly poetry and short texts that are written. We need some distance for longer texts. I can see a lot of interest from abroad where they would like to know our view of the war, to see it in a different way than through the news, but we can’t fulfil this demand now. We need some time.” Serhiy himself has published a book of Facebook posts that have a great informative value about the situation in which Ukraine and its people find themselves. “If someone had told me two years ago that I would publish a book of Facebook posts, I would have laughed at them saying what would be the point of such a book. But now I know that the German publisher who wanted that book a lot was right. It was worth it. It showed the world the war from a different point of view than it is presented in the news.” Serhiy added that he greatly appreciates the invitation to Book World Prague because it is culture that helps nations to communicate and people to understand the situation. “Culture is important also during the war. Especially during the war!”

# Love in Three European Forms



Sabina Jakubowska, Marit Kapla and Ondřej Štindl

Three European authors – Polish author **SABINA JAKUBOWSKA**, **MARIT KAPLA** from Sweden and **ONDŘEJ ŠTINDL** representing Czech literature met in a debate to introduce themselves to festival visitors and present their books, for which they were nominated for the EU Prize for Literature.

*“I am a journalist, but I have dreamt of being a writer since I was a child. In the end, I am more of a journalist than a writer, although in my books the two professions come together. If I wasn’t a journalist, I wouldn’t be a writer either,”* Marit Kapla introduced herself to the visitors.

This year’s Czech nominee for the EU Prize for Literature Ondřej Štindl is a man of several professions. He is a journalist, writer but also a musician. In his case too, all of his talents are interconnected. *“Rhythm is important in both literature and music. Even when I’m writing, I can hear music in the background.”* Unlike her colleagues, Polish author Sabina Jakubowska is not a journalist, but a history teacher and archaeologist. Writing is her hobby. She made her debut with a book from the young adult category and is currently presenting her new book **Akuszerki**, which she wrote based on the diary entries of her great-grandmother who worked as a midwife in Krakow. *“I wanted to portray a strong female character, to create a heroine who is coura-*

*geous. My great-grandmother’s diaries provided inspiration and a glimpse into midwifery in the 19th century and the prejudices and knowledge at that time,”* Sabina Jakubowska described the creation of her book, for which she was also nominated for the EU Prize for Literature. Marit Kapla found her inspiration for her book **Kärlek på svenska** in TV interviews. *“I worked with a documentarist who asked the Swedes about love in his film. The Swedes rarely talk about love, they are not that open, but he managed to get them to talk about it. I thought that I could write a book based on these interviews and he agreed. All respondents also agreed. I wrote the interviews exactly as they came out, I didn’t add a single word, and that’s what I think makes them special.”* Ondřej Štindl started writing his book **Tolik popela** during the covid pandemic and he admitted that it was that time that left its mark on his story. *“It is about a man who has a strong end of life experience. It makes him look at his existence so far and try to find some meaning in it,”* he briefly described the plot.

During the debate about the books of all three authors, it became clear that they have one fundamental theme in common and that is love, although each time in a different form, but comprehensible to all readers regardless of their nationality. It is a universal “world-wide” theme. *“Is it brave to talk about love?”*

*I don’t know if it’s brave, but it’s not easy,”* said Ondřej Štindl.

All three authors read an excerpt from their books, a translation of which was also available to the visitors, and judging by the positive response, it really did not matter whether the excerpt was written by a Swede, a Pole or a Czech. The texts thus crossed all boundaries, to which the organizers of Book World Prague wanted to draw attention under the theme Authors Without Borders.

**DOMENICO LA MAGNA**, representing the Federation of European Publishers, added that the excerpts from the books of the present authors will also be published in an anthology which is currently being prepared and which will present all this year’s nominees for the EU Prize for Literature.

## EU Prize for Literature

The European Union Prize for Literature, supported by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, annually honours writers whose work can “transcend borders”. The aim of the prize is to draw attention to the creativity and diversity of European literature and to encourage interest in foreign works.

*“The purpose of this prize is to introduce and promote European authors, especially those who are in the middle stage of their career but who have not become big names yet. Receiving the prize or even the nomination should help them gain visibility and reach European markets,”* explained **VIKTOR DEBNÁR** from the Czech Creative Europe Desk, who has been involved since the beginnings of this prize in the Czech Republic and who was in charge of setting up our first national commission. Czech authors who won this prize in the past include Tomáš Zmeškal, Jan Němec, Bianca Bellová and Lucie Faulerová.

Although the prize is intended for the total of 41 European countries, for organizational reasons only a third participate each year. This year, in addition to the Czech Republic, authors from Armenia, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Poland and Sweden competed for the prize.

The prize has been awarded since 2009, but changed its status last year. While previously each country elected its laureate, now, based on nominations from national juries, the European jury selects one overall winner and awards five special mentions. *“The reason for the change is transparency of the competition, meaning there is only one winner. However, we will promote all nominated authors because all works are of high quality and should reach foreign readers. That is why we publish an anthology where everyone is represented,”* explained **DOMENICO LA MAGNA**, representative of the Federation of European Publishers.

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Snapshots from the fair



# The Jiří Theiner Award Supported Iranian Authors Fighting for Freedom

The award named after Jiří Theiner, exile editor-in-chief of Index on Censorship, who translated the works of Klíma, Havel or Vaculík to English in 1970s and 1980s, is an integral part of Book World Prague. The fair hosts the award ceremony every year in the presence of the initiator of this prestigious award, Pavel Theiner, son of Jiří Theiner. The venue stays the same but the status of the Award changed. "For ten years, it was awarded to laureates who contributed to promoting Czech literature abroad. But the world is changing, unfortunately in many places for the worse, and we considered it important to draw attention to places where autocracy threatens freedom of speech," said Radovan Auer, Director of Book World Prague, when explaining the reason for the change which took place last year. "Last year the Award went to Ukrainian authors and this year we want to draw attention to what is happening in Iran. Which is why we decided to give the award to Iranian artists, writers and publishers fighting the local regime," added Radovan Auer.

The ceremony was joined by **SHIRIN EBADI**, Iranian activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, by means of a pre-recorded toast. She recalled the history of the fight for freedom in Iran and the role of women in it. "Iranian women gained the right to vote in 1961 and even won seats in the Parliament before Swiss women. But then in 1979 the Islamic revolution took place and the fight for equality began," recounted Shirin Ebadi. She mentioned repression, imprisonment, executions and, last but not least, the event that stirred Iranian society in recent months when a young girl was killed by government agents just because her hair was visible. It was this brutality that sparked a wave of defiance in Iran. "The



Tinoush Nazmjou, Mahdiyeh Sadrnezhad

youth are aware that they have no future with this government," added Shirin Ebadi. Her speech was followed by a pair of guests and representatives of Iranian artists, **TINOUSH NAZMJOU**, a Paris-based publisher publishing exiled and censored Iranian authors, and **MAHDIYEH SADRNEZHAD**, an actress and supporter of the freedom movement in Iran who also lives in Paris. "I decided to start the publishing house to help authors who can't publish their works or face censorship in Iran. Although an exile publishing house is nothing new in Iranian history. Our country is volatile and the tradition of publishing such books is centuries old. We simply continue in it," explained Tinoush Nazmjou. Mahdiyeh shared her life story and the reason why she decided to emigrate from Iran with the visitors. "I was an actress and I always felt pressure from the

regime, but it gradually escalated to such an extent that it was no longer possible to work in such conditions. Then in 2019, when fifteen hundred people were killed, it was the last straw for me. I decided that I could not live in such a country and emigrated," she explained. As she began to talk about the events of the last few months when thousands of people ended up in prisons for simply speaking out, for trying to live a normal life, when Iranian women were raped and blinded and gas was used in schools for girls, she was overcome with tears. It was a very emotional moment. "I felt that I had to do something. I live in freedom, I can be the voice of the oppressed, I can speak for them, and so through my profession, through protests, I can influence society, help the world learn about what is happening in Iran." Both guests concluded by agreeing that change in Iran is inevitable but unfortunately it is still a long shot.

## Iranian Writers Must Be Able to Write in Such a Way that the Idea Is Missed by the Censor, but Understood by the Readers

"Writing books in Iran is an art in itself. A writer faces many obstacles and has to avoid many forbidden topics," said Iranian writer **AMIR CHEHELTAN** opening the discussion. During the last hundred years of censorship in Iran, Iranian writers had to learn to write in such a way that the censor does not understand what is being said, but the reader does.

Cheheltan currently publishes his books in exile. When censorship became even more intense, he realized that he could not betray himself anymore and that he did not want to lose his freedom. Censorship forbids, for example, the topics of politics and erotica. And it is these two motifs that he explores in his new book **Revolution Street**.

Right at the beginning of the book, Amir Cheheltan describes an unpleasant situation in which a doctor reconstructs the hymen of a patient suffering from pain. "Violence and harshness have a long history in Iran. People are used to it and it is nothing unusual. And as for the described situation – it is also typical for Iranian society. We want to be modern, but we still get influenced by old superstitions. Which is why for many people it is still important that a girl entering marriage is a virgin. Hence the reason for these procedures. Fortunately, re-

cent years have brought a sexual revolution and the situation has been slowly changing," said Amir Cheheltan.

In the next excerpt, the author presented another phenomenon of Iranian history. He described how the regime removed inconvenient people. "Twenty-five years ago, a number of poets and cultural figures died under suspicious circumstances. Newspapers reported on it and for the first time the government stopped denying that these murders were happening. People started talking about it. Thanks to that the public learned that the secret services met in a sauna in the north of Tehran and planned these attacks," the writer added to the scenes he describes in his book.

Amir Cheheltan believes that it is necessary to talk about difficult topics. "Difficult topics are our everyday life. I try to document them. What is happening in Iran also has its roots in colonialism and imperialism," the writer said. He concluded the discussion with a reminder of the great history of Persian poetry. "Its history dates back a thousand years and that is really very unique. It is a legacy for us and for the whole world. I hope that contemporary Iranian prose will also find its place in the world."

## How to Fight against Iranian Censorship

Nakoja means a place that does not exist. Or utopia. And it is also the name of a Paris-based publishing house that publishes Iranian authors and defies strict Iranian censorship. "We print books by exile authors as well as those still living in Iran. And then we send them back to the country. An underground book market emerged there," explained **TINOUSH NAZMJOU** who founded the publishing house a few years ago.

Nakoja publishes all books in paper form as well as electronically to ease their distribution. The publishing house also organizes the Tehran Book Fair, Uncensored, which sort of mocks the official Tehran International Fair. "We decided to imitate this fair, but in an uncensored version. We travel with books from town to town, hold open-air debates and build on the relaxed Iranian atmosphere," described Tinoush Nazmjou.

The guest believes that dictatorship is based on symbols. The regime creates an atmosphere of terror. It also affects how authors write. "Writing is an intimate thing. But artists are often terrified so they censor themselves in advance. Self-censorship affects the ability to rebel. It makes us submissive."

Mahdiyeh Sadrnezhad from the Nakoja publishing house described the corrupt system maintained in Iran by several ruling families who control both politics and business. The discussion also covered the topic of women's involvement. According to Nazmjou, literature written by women plays a very important role. Feminism has reportedly been on the rise in recent years in Iran. Women are also often in the front lines during protests. "In Iran women are subordinate. However, many of the novels we publish are written by female writers. They realized they had to fight censorship. So they write books that are more interesting," added Tinoush Nazmjou.



**Zita Izsó** Madarsko / Hungary



**Cornelia Travnicek** Rakousko / Austria



**Rosa Montero** Španělsko / Spain



**Zofia Bałdyga** Polsko / Poland



**Vladimir Sorokin** Rusko / Russia



**Joachim B. Schmidt** Švýcarsko/Island / Switzerland/Iceland

## Svět knihy Praha '23

### Zahraniční hosté

foto Dirk Skiba

## Book World Prague '23

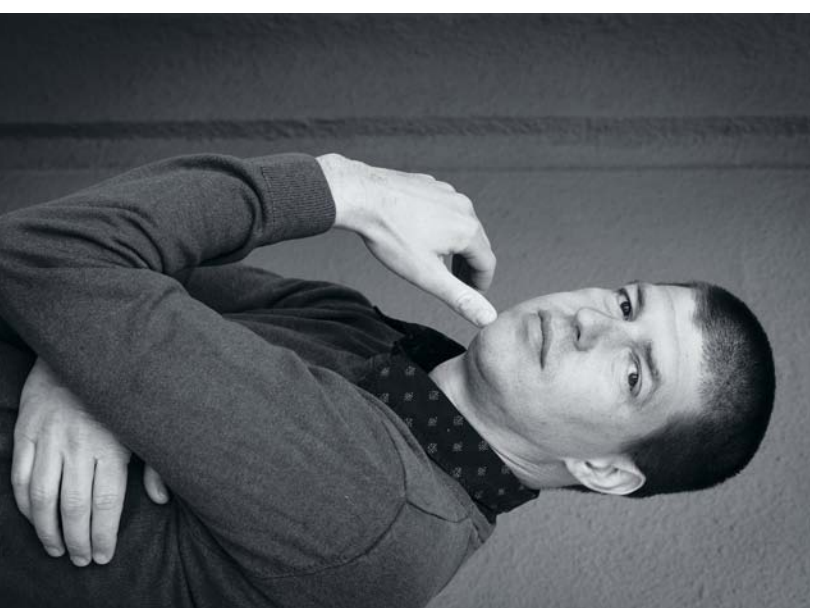
### Foreign Guests



**Serhij Zadan**    Ukrajina / Ukraine



**Maylis de Kerangal**    Francie / France

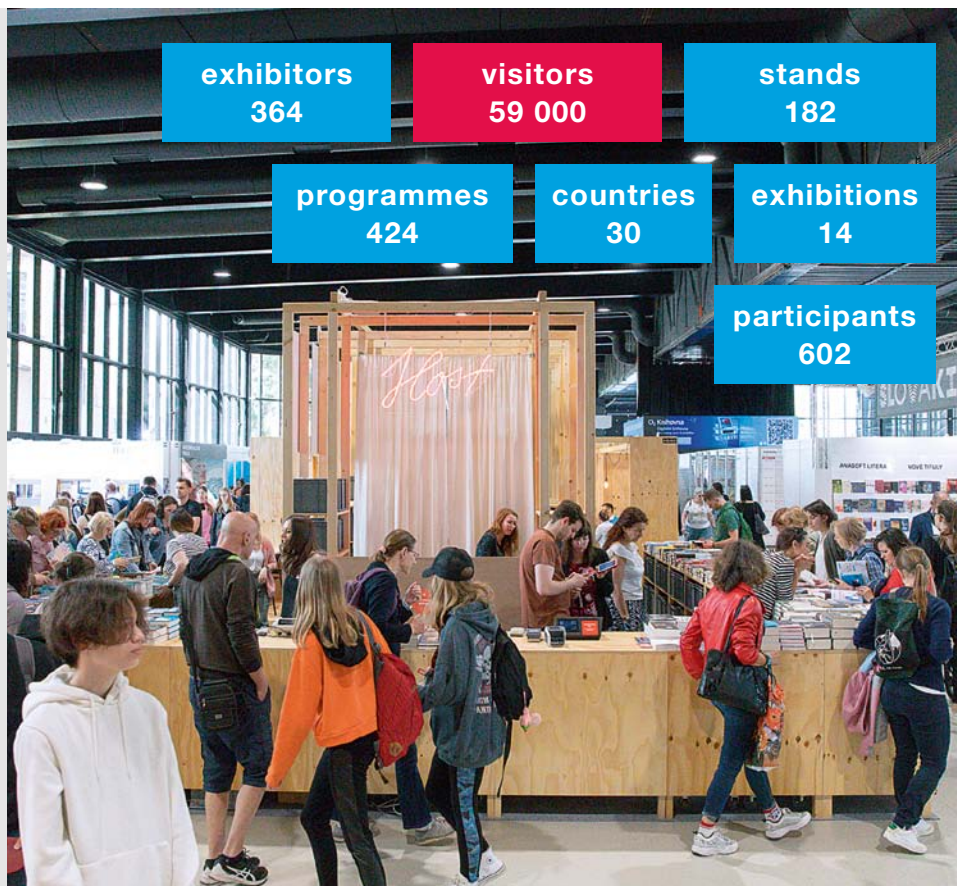


**Goran Vojnović**    Slovinsko / Slovenia





**The International Book Fair and Literary Festival Book World Prague** returned to the Prague Exhibition Ground in Holešovice from 11 to 14 May 2023 and was unique especially in terms of its theme. The concept of „Authors Without Borders“ emphasized all authors transgressing national borders and even exceeded the attendance expectations. Over the course of four days, Book World Prague drew almost 60 thousand readers. The festival featured Russian literary provocateur Vladimir Sorokin, Ukrainian literary star Serhiy Zhadan and German crime writer Volker Kutscher. The most popular Czech authors voted by visitors were Alena Mornštajnová, Kateřina Tučková and Michael Žantovský. The Jiří Theiner Award went to Iranian women and men fighting against oppression. Book World Prague presented the new Central and East European Book Market project, the Growing With a Book section dedicated to young readers proved its popularity again and the festival did not ease up on its support for Ukraine and helping Ukrainian refugees maintain contact with their language and literature. Visitors to Book World Prague 2023 were able to find hundreds of exhibitors in all the newly reconstructed Křižík pavilions while the programme part took place at the Prague Exhibition Grounds in tents.



## Acknowledgements

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### Auspices

Markéta Pekarová Adamová, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic  
Martin Baxa, Minister of Culture  
Bohuslav Svoboda, Mayor of Prague

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