

# Fund for Central and East European Book Projects

## NEWSLETTER

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### Meeting your enemy, finding your friend

Two young writers, one from Serbia, the other from Kosovo, took a remarkable initiative. Far away from home they met, became friends, and decided to use their wartime-experiences in bringing about a dialogue between enemy nations. *Mexico - War Diary* of Vladimir Arsenijevic, and *Freedom of Horror*, a collection of poems of Xhevdet Bajraj, are to be published simultaneously and, more important, in both the Serbian and the Albanian languages. Arsenijevic and Bajraj are not only authors, but also editors of the publishers that are starting this dialogue.

In Belgrade the publishing house *Rende* hopes to make *Mexico* and the Serbian translation of *Freedom of Horror* into a take off for a series of books, titled the Icebreaker. The model being 'two titles, two translations, four books', the aim is to 'break the deep ice that exists in the cultural exchange of all nations that once formed Yugoslavia'. Twice or three times a year *Rende* intends to publish contemporary works of fiction, poetry, drama or essays by a Serbian author and at the same time by an author from one of the neighbouring parts of the former Yugoslavia.

In Kosovo *Rende* found a partner publisher, named *Sabaium BB* that originated in the literary journal *Sabaium MM* and is run by the brother of the poet Xhevdet Bajraj. *Sabaium BB* will, just like *Rende*, start a bi-national series of literature. The enterprise is 'risky but also necessary', says Xhevdet Bajraj. He points out that contemporary literature from Kosovo is virtually unknown in the surrounding regions, and vice versa hardly any literature from the former Yugoslavia is available in translation in Kosovo.

If it were not for the International Parliament of Writers, Arsenijevic and Bajraj probably never would have got together and the plan for a bi-national series of books would not have been born. In *Mexico* Arsenijevic describes how one day, in the autumn of 1998, he was called by the Albanian writer Bashkim Shehu. Shehu, who lives in Barcelona, told him that the International Parliament of Writers had a programme, named 'Asylum Cities': writers who had difficulty expressing themselves freely at home were offered temporary 'asylum' elsewhere. Where did Arsenijevic (whose first novel *In the Hold* made him an international celebrity) want to go, Venice or Mexico City? 'The next instant', Arsenijevic recalls in his book, 'I heard my own voice saying: Well, Mexico City then!'

But while he was preparing his departure, NATO began bombarding Belgrade. Arsenijevic had bought a notebook with an 'electric blue' cover and had given it the task to become his sunny, Mexican travel diary. Instead, he used it to write down his impressions about sixty days of bombardments and war, just until he succeeded in fleeing Yugoslavia and escaping to Mexico. He added an introduction about his gradually evolving long distance relationship with Bashkim Shehu, and a third chapter in which he recounts the tragic war experience of his friend Xhevdet Bajraj.

Bajraj (born in 1960) is a well known poet in Kosovo. His book *Emblem of Death*, published in 1993, was awarded as Kosovo's best book of the year. That same year Bajraj was sacked from his work as a civil servant in the tax department of Orahovac, in an ethnic cleansing operation by the Serbian authorities.

Bajraj fled Orahovac in 1998 with his wife and two children when Serbian forces occupied the town. He returned, but not for long. When the NATO-bombing campaign began, he managed to send his family to Albania, while he stayed in Orahovac. After two months of hiding, he was arrested and later deported from Kosovo. Bajraj met his family in Albania and from there they all flew to Mexico.

His earlier poems are said to reflect the social and political reality of Kosovo, while his recent work contains more personal, lyrical notes.

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## **Balkan History Programme**

*It seems the international community has not yet properly understood that in order to bring about a significant change in the region and make possible its real integration with Europe, political and economic intervention is not enough... programs need to be developed in order to change the culture... and first of all the way history is taught... in other words, to change the mentality which produces 'fear of the other', wrote an Albanian publisher to the CEEBP last year. Abuse of history and the creation of historical myths for political purposes have certainly played an important role in the disastrous conflicts in the Balkans in the past decade.*

*A letter from three Bulgarian editors struck a similar note: For nearly fifty years under communism, not a single title of Turkish or other Balkan origin was translated and published in Bulgaria. The same holds true about Western historiography. ... nationalism is being preserved by national mythology, old textbooks, ignorance of history ... We feel strongly that the nationalistic and romantic tradition must be changed. In our opinion one of the most effective ways to achieve this is to offer to the Bulgarian reading public - students and young people especially - a different perspective by translating and publishing books written by Balkan and European scholars.*

Over the past years, the CEEBP has occasionally supported independent publishers bringing out translations of seminal works in the field of European history. The Balkan History Programme was developed in response to these and similar requests from publishers in the region, as a part of the CEEBP's Grants Programme.

The History Programme provides support for translation, publication and dissemination in various Balkan languages, of works which offer a diversity of perspectives, unbiased approach, comparative research and a critical analysis of national concepts, myths and clichés, and which set local history in a wider international context. Its aim is to provide an alternative to historical literature steeped in 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism, and to influence the way history is conceived of by historians, intellectuals, teachers, and the wider, educated public.

The CEEBP has invited an expert committee of historians to monitor the programme, and to advise in the assessment of grant applications.

The programme will be co-financed by the Salomon von Oppenheim Stiftung for the coming four years, as well as the Prince Bernhard Fonds. The CEEBP seeks additional financial partners.

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## Grants

In April 2000, the CEEBP awarded grants for five periodicals, (including one for electronic equipment) and fifteen books. The grants for books were awarded for two publications in their original language, six East-East translations, and seven West-East translations, three of which were allocated within the framework of CEEBP's Balkan History Programme.

### Journals

- ◆ *Arca*, Romanian cultural quarterly
- ◆ *Margina*, Macedonian cultural quarterly
- ◆ *Rec*, Serbian quarterly on domestic social and political changes
- ◆ *Strední Evropa*, Czech political, cultural and historical monthly
- ◆ *Trištvrte Revue, Liberte*, Slovak cultural bimonthly (equipment)

### Books

- ◆ Vladimir Arsenijevic, *Mexico - War Diary*, **Rende**, Serbian edition
- ◆ Vladimir Arsenijevic, *Mexico - War Diary*, **Sabaium BB**, Prishtina, translation from Serbian into Albanian by Anton Berishaj
- ◆ Xhevdet Bajraj, *Freedom of Terror*, **Sabaium BB**, Prishtina, Albanian edition
- ◆ Xhevdet Bajraj, *Freedom of Terror*, **Rende**, translation from Albanian into Serbian by V. Arsenijevic and X. Bajraj
- ◆ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Der Moderne Soziale Konflikt. Essay zur Politik der Freiheit*, **Dituria**, translation into Albanian by Gjergj Peci
- ◆ Eva Grlic, *Sjecanja* (Memoires), **Múlt és Jövő Kiadó**, translation from Croat into Hungarian by Ildikó Iovas
- ◆ Danilo Kiš, *Enciklopedija mrtvih (Encyclopaedia of the Dead)*, **Stigmati**, translation from Servo-Croat into Bulgarian by Zhela Gueorgieva
- ◆ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, **Critique & Humanisme**, translation into Bulgarian by Stiliyan Deyanov
- ◆ Bertrand Russel, *History of Western Philosophy*, **Aletheia**, Polish translation by Tadeusz Baszniak, Adam Lipszyc and Michal Szczubialka
- ◆ Fred Uhlman, *Reunion*, **Edicije Bozicevic**, translation from English into Croatian by Saša Drach
- ◆ Peter Zilahy, *Az utolso ablakzsiraf (The Last Window Giraffe)*, **Belgrade Circle**, translation from Hungarian into Serbian by Arpád Vicko
- ◆ Peter Zilahy, *Az utolso ablakzsiraf (The Last Window Giraffe)*, **Polis Publishers**, translation from Hungarian into Bulgarian by Stefka Hrussanova

### Balkan History Programme

Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans. Twentieth Century*, The Book House, translation into Albanian by Gjergj Peçi

Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1481*, Amicitia Publishing House, translation into Bulgarian by K.G. Georgieva

Machiel Kiel, *Art and Society in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, Lyubomadrie Publishing House, Bulgarian translation by Rossitsa Gradeva

The CEEBP also allocated contributions for the participation of Central and East European publishers in the Frankfurt Buchmesse Rights Managers Meeting, as well as for entries of Central and East European publishers in the Frankfurter Buchmesse Rights Catalogue 2000.

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## Slovak Publishing Project

At a well attended press conference in Bratislava at the end of March, the Dutch cultural attaché M.H. Monroy-Winter announced that the Dutch government has allocated more than 367 000 Euro in support of the Slovak Publishing Project. The project is aimed at improving dissemination and circulation of thought conducive to the development of

democracy, pluralism, civil society, and European integration, and at enhancing the plurality and viability of the quality publishing market.

Independent publishers played an important role in the recent democratic developments in Slovakia. A core of these publishers, the Index Association of Independent Publishers, asked the CEEBP to assist in their joint efforts in solving problems caused by the policy of the previous government, whose authoritarian, nationalistic and anti-Western policies drove the country into economic shambles and social polarisation.

A comprehensive programme has been developed to achieve effective dissemination of quality books and periodicals. A joint Book Club, a joint subscription and distribution service, joint presentation and promotion, training courses, expert on-the-spot consultations, improved small print-run management, and the purchase of electronic equipment will provide the publishers with the entrepreneurial knowledge and tools necessary to operate in a market economy.

The project will be implemented in the coming three years in collaboration with and contributions from the Milan Šimečka Foundation, the Open Society Foundation in Bratislava, the Slovak Ministry of Culture, and the Open Society Regional Centre for Publishing Development in Budapest. The largest financial contribution to the project has been made by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (programme for social transformation Matra).

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## Books Recently Published

*Le Livre noir du communisme*, published in Bulgaria by Prozorec, Sofia 1999 (with the CEEBP's support) and in Slovakia by Agora, Bratislava 1999 (without our support). When this Black Book appeared in France in 1997, it stirred a fierce debate. Not, according to specialists, that the 800 page volume contained much new historical material, or that the material itself is questionable; but because of the introduction by the French historian Stéphane Courtois.

Courtois reintroduced the German *Historikerstreit*, by comparing the death toll of the nazi's to that of the communists, and suggesting that the nazi's were inspired to commit their crimes by the communists. In doing so, Courtois wanted to show that the Western world has consistently paid too much attention to the murderous machinery of the nazi's and too little to that of the communists.

The introduction was attacked even by some co-authors, because Courtois calculated that communism was responsible for 100 million murdered people. Courtois' death toll for the Soviet-Union, twenty million, was disputed by Nicholas Werth who nowhere in his chapter on the Soviet Union mentions this figure, which he considers an exaggeration.

Nonetheless, the *Black Book* is seen as an important inventory of the terror of communist regimes during the twentieth century. French historians, together with a Polish and a Czech specialist, present an overview of the crimes committed in the Soviet Union and China, by the Comintern, in Central and South East Europe, in Latin America, Africa and Afghanistan.

Although the emphasis is put on the super-powers of communism, the Soviet-Union and China, the *Black Book* covers the whole world. In doing so, the book provides material, which enables the reader to discern patterns in communist repression. In the countries where the terror reigned, the book may serve as a reminder of the horrors of the recent past, undeniable evidence of the criminal character of communist dictatorships, and as an impetus for further research.

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## **IN TRANSITUM**

### **A Balkan Translators Mobility Fund**

Last year, after consultations with cultural organisations and translators in the Balkan region, the CEEBP, the European Cultural Foundation, and KulturKontakt, in cooperation with Pro Helvetia, launched a new project. In Transitum was set up to increase the quality and quantity of literary translations between the languages of the Balkan region. It is aimed at translators who translate literature from one of the Balkan languages to another, from the following countries: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia.

To be eligible for support, the applicants must have signed a contract with a professional publisher concerning the translation of a specific title of good quality; they must send in their curriculum, and support their application with a detailed description of their planned activities during the stay. In Transitum also allocates grants for study visits for translators, and assists in defraying the costs of reference works.

Grantees are offered a stay for a period of two to four weeks in the country of the language they translate, to focus on translating, research in libraries and institutes, meeting authors or exploring the literary scene. The grants cover the costs of travel, accommodation, and a modest *per diem*.

The Executive Board of In Transitum, consisting of representatives of the funding organisations, awards grants twice per year with the help of advice from both regional and West European experts. The criterion used in the assessments is the quality of the proposed working visit plan, which should be specific, practical, and purposeful.

The first In Transitum grants were awarded in March of this year. Eight translators were offered a grant to visit the country of their interest in the period April-September. Six Bulgarian translators received grants for trips to Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Croatia; one Slovenian translator will go to Bosnia and one Bosnian translator will visit Greece.

In order to assist the translators in the best possible way, In Transitum established partnerships with literary organisations in all target countries. These local partners are responsible for the practical arrangements of the visits, such as providing accommodation, arranging access to libraries and literary appointments.

Eventually, the project coordination will be transferred from Western Europe to a competent organisation in the region.

For more information, please visit the website [www.intransitum.org](http://www.intransitum.org). Here you will find the latest news, a database of relevant people and organisations in the Balkan region and an on-line discussion forum.

Contact per e-mail: [intransitum@intransitum.org](mailto:intransitum@intransitum.org).

The next application deadline for grants in the period from October to March is 15 August 2000.

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## **SPONSOR A BOOK**

**Have you always wanted to write a book but never had the time to do it?**

**You can help to publish one.**

**The CEEBP invites private donors to sponsor a book title.**

**During the past years the CEEBP has spent an average of 4 500 Dutch guilders to help defray the costs of publishing a book in Central and Eastern Europe.**

**For more information please contact the CEEBP's Bureau:**

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## **FUNDING**

European Cultural Foundation

Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds

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Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Netherlands

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands

KulturKontakt, Austria

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