

20 YEARS OLD FAIR

in the memories of foreign partners and friends

” In May 1997 we brought Finnish authors, prose and poetry to Prague. With us came also Santa Claus' post office and the Moomins, which were made alive with the help of devoted students from Charles' University. What we especially remember is everybody's wonderful commitment to literature and the happy sparkling light inside the beautiful fair hall. And the delicious smažený sýr!

Finland was the first Guest of Honour at Svět knihy, and we still see the influence of that every year in the amount of literary translations from Finnish to Czech. The lovely way we were welcomed at Svět knihy and in Prague has made us, too, come again to the city – as professionals but also as tourists and friends. A special thanks for this belongs to the soul of the fair, Dana, our dear friend ever since.

Hanna Kjellberg & Tiina Lehtoranta
Finland

” WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN PRAGUE

When I first set foot in Prague, it was much closer to Vladivostok than it was to Brussels. It was easy to memorize the list of publishers I needed to meet – it consisted of only one name. The director and I met for ten minutes, in which we agreed that he would publish Czech translations of several works by Michel de Ghelderode. He was sweating, his anxious appearance suggesting that his position as director was dependent on the concluding of this particular contract. I realized very quickly that there was no point in telling him anything about the jazz concert we and some Czech dissidents had held in Paris in support of Charter 77.

Then the map of the world changed. Suddenly Vladivostok was very far away indeed and Brussels became almost like a suburb of Prague. The Prague I visited in 1991 was very different from the one I remembered; it was as though everything was newly painted and all the lights had been turned on. The people I met had nothing in common with the publisher of Michel de Ghelderode. They were brimming with élan, they drank beer by the gallon, and they kept ideology, whether left- or right-wing, at a distance. They came up with a new idea for remaking the world about three times a night. What an amazing time that was!

At the Golden Tiger, Hrabal read from his work, accompanied by an accordionist. Bill Clinton played saxophone at the Reduta. At the Belgian Embassy the Ambassador Bernard Pierre and the Representative of the Federation „Wallonia-Brussels”, Zenon Kowal were playing rock music, both on the guitar, with Emil Viklický on piano and Laco Trop on drums.

Since then, every May the sun has shone brighter over the exhibition grounds, putting a light in the eyes of thousands of lovers of literature. Book World Prague is a festival, and it would be a shame to miss it. Wallonia-Brussels took part in the very first book fair held in the Czech Republic. Basically, every spring Prague becomes my second home. For one week in nineteen consecutive years I have exchanged the cobblestones of Brussels for the embankment of the Vltava, Trappist for Pilsener beer, Jenever for Becherovka. I have savoured the sound of Czech even though I have succeeded in memorizing just a single sentence of it – the one that is heard at every Prague Metro station: „Ukončete prosím výstup a nástup, dveře se zavírají“ [Stand clear of the doors, please].

So it would be unthinkable for me to miss the 20th anniversary event. Today, now that I have embarked on what is known as „the third age”, I no longer travel about the world from one book fair to the next. But I always make an exception for Prague; perhaps I'll be here for the 25th event, too, and perhaps even some after that, until the door closes once and for all on my life as a trader in stories.

I wish the Prague book fair a long and healthy life.

Léo Beeckman
Wallonia-Brussels

” Dear Dana,
Let me congratulate you on the twenty year anniversary of your Prague Book Fair. And let me congratulate us, your colleagues round the world, that you still stand for the Prague Book Fair and still will go on standing for it. I know better than anyone else how difficult it is, to lead such an institution through times in which book friends and book lovers have begun to disappear and where a strong and overwhelming digital industry is overtaking the information world, of which our beloved book industry is a part.

We, our European culture, our spiritual life within this machine century needs books and reading. If we lose this cultural technique (books and reading), we will lose parts of our cultural identity, we will lose ourselves.

Therefore, Dana Kalinová, go on fighting for your wonderful small Book Festival in Prague, which book lovers of the world have loved and will go on loving.

Best regards

Peter Weidhaas

From 1975–2000 director and curator of the Frankfurt Book Fair, Germany

” No matter how much we tried to hide it, it was not until the night before the very opening of the book fair, when we could see the impressive white and red stand (or should we say „grandstand”) in the central hall of the Palace of Industry, that we really came to believe that Poland would indeed become the Book World 2010 guest of honour. In the end we not only survived what turned out to be the biggest incursion of Polish writers into Prague in history, but will remember it as one of the greatest adventures the Polish Institute set out to undertake in its long history. We are especially proud of the fact that we were probably the first to have brought a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the Book World – the poetess Wisława Szymborska. It is clear none of this could have been achieved without the forthcoming assistance and help of the book fair's director Dana Kalinová and the entire Book World team, capable not only of managing the venture – almost any manager could do this nowadays – but, first and foremost, to imbue this gigantic and seemingly impersonal event with a friendly, almost family atmosphere. It is because of this, despite the amount of time and energy spent on the presentation every year, that we are once again looking forward to the upcoming Book World.

Maciej Ruczaj
Head of the Programmes Department, Polish Institute in Prague

” Romania was guest of honour at the Book World Prague fair in 2012, an occasion that allowed us to make a wide and varied presentation of Romanian culture in the Czech Republic. The Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI) works regularly with the Prague book fair; each time the fair is held we come together with the Ministry of Culture of Romania to prepare a stand at which we present the latest and most interesting Romanian publications of that and the previous year. This cooperation has always gone extremely well, and RCI Prague has always met with extraordinary openness and kindness and utmost professionalism on the part of the organizers of the Book World fair. Thanks to this long-lasting partnership, interest in Romanian books and Romanian literature has grown with each passing year. Romanian culture is much better known and more popular in the Czech Republic today than it was eight years ago, when the current management of RCI Prague began its term of office. For all this we owe gratitude to the Book World Prague fair, and we wish to express our thanks to its director, Dana Kalinová.

Mircea Dan Duta
Director, Romanian Cultural Institute – Prague

” Book World and the Prague International Book Fair have been an important partner of Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) for over a decade, since the first LAF cooperation agreement was signed by partner organisations from around Europe at the Prague Book Fair 2001 which also hosted the first LAF Conference. Since then, LAF has developed into a significant European literary initiative and platform for cooperation, thanks to the contribution, input and expertise of partners such as Book World with its international outlook, professionalism and good ideas. Being one of the leading book events in the region, Book World has provided a forum for activities focused on European literature and its relations with the rest of the world in the culturally stimulating surroundings of the beautiful city of Prague.

Alexandra Büchler
Manager, Literature Across Frontiers

” REMEMBERING PRAGUE BOOK FAIR 2003: AFRICA IN THE SPOTLIGHT
More than 10 years later, it is still a distinct pleasure to remember Prague, the city of monuments, and the host of the 9th edition of the Prague International Book Fair, from April 24th to 27th 2003.

That year, Africa was the guest of honour, and the central theme – „Dialogue between continents” – gave the event full attention. The dream could not have come true without the strong commitment and friendship of two important Czech officials, Mrs. Dana Kalinová, director of the Prague book fair, and H. E. Jaroslav Olša, the Czech ambassador to Zimbabwe at that time.

The first symbol was the honour the African publishers received when the chairman of the African Publishers Network (APNET) was invited to cut the ribbon opening the fair. A simple act perhaps, that had revealed, however, the amount of attention that organisers would give Africa and its image at this event.

Second symbol was the Czech public's clear and deep interest in the quality participation of renowned African literary figures, such as the Nigerian Niyi Osundare, the Congolese Caya Makhélé, Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe, the Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma, Meshack Asare from Ghana, and many others. The press extended a warm welcome to them, allocating them important place in its reporting throughout the week, in newspapers, TV debates, on websites and in radios.

I recall yet another symbol, which was the holding of a professional meeting on April 25th 2003, called „Breakfast with APNET”, which helped establish direct contact between African publishers and their local counterparts (publishers, booksellers and literary agents), most of whom came with the objective to learn more about APNET. African delegates welcomed the initiative of some Czech publishers to translate African literary works, including the very first translation into Czech of a children's book published by Éditions Ganndal of Guinea.

Without doubt, the 9th edition of the International Book Fair in Prague has been a great success for African books, recognized by all the professionals present.

M. Aliou Sow
Former Chairman of APNET, Conakry, Guinea