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## THE EUROPEAN WRITERS' COUNCIL ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2021 WAS SUCCESSFULLY HELD ONLINE – NEW BOARD ELECTED

### **Authors' Rights, freedom of speech, and cooperation across borders: The writers and translators of the European book sector stand together for a sustainable future and the diversity of books.**

*Brussels, 9 June 2021*

45 delegates and representatives of EWC member organisations from 26 countries participated in the second virtual Annual General Assembly in the history of the [European Writers' Council](#) on Monday 7 June 2021. The meeting marks the end of a three-day political-literary conference of the EWC and includes the election of the new board for the term 2021-2023.

At the EWC's [Burning Issues Forum](#) on Friday 4 June, 19 delegates and special guests from 15 countries debated the social, economic, and civil status of authors in the European book sector and the increasing pressure on freedom of expression. Saturday 5 June was dedicated to the [Invasion of Reality](#): In four online panels with 18 guests and moderators from 14 countries, novelist, poets, publishers, academics, journalists and activists spoke about the transformation of literature in the times of pandemics, about the present and future of Belarus, and the necessity of science and research in times of conspiracy theories. The evening ended with poetry readings from the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey.

**Nina George**, international bestselling novelist from Germany, is re-elected as President of the European Writers' Council. The two Vice Presidents are the lawyer **Maïa Bensimon**, General Counsel for the Société des Gens de Lettres in France, and the poet **Miguel Ángel Serrano**, Secretary General of the Asociación Colegial de Escritores in Spain. The newly elected board includes crime writer **Eystein Hanssen**, Chair of the Norwegian Society of Authors, Finnish non-fiction writer **Markku Löytönen**, Professor of Human Geography, and **Alena Makouskaya**, Director of the Civil society organization "Homeland" and member of the Secretariat of the Union of Belarusian Writers.

"The Corona crisis revealed not only the predetermined breaking points of the legislations around intellectual property, but also in societies and their fragility in general", says **Nina George**, President of the European Writers' Council. "With this in mind, the newly elected EWC Board has several tasks to face: To continue to defend the economic and legal situation of writers and translators –and to understand the social ruptures that have become visible. These also affect authors, question their role anew, and require a holistic policy."

"Culture shapes all human and social action in depth. Books have a special role in this: they are the basis of understanding and the discovery of commonalities and differences", adds Vice President **Miguel Ángel Serrano**. "This is even more essential because in the pandemic, societies not only distanced themselves physically, but also increasingly mentally. In order to preserve the book culture of the future, it is essential to defend the role of authors –this ranges from the economic and legal rights to the issue of well-planned social systems and the appreciation of authors for a democratic society." Vice President **Maïa Bensimon** underlines: "The national implementation of the Directive



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on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, which is due to become mandatory on 7 June, offers a unique opportunity to set the course for the next twenty years and to commit to writers and translators –and therefore invest in culture and strong democracies. The EWC therefore calls on all EU Member States which have not done so already, to move immediately towards an author-friendly transposition, including the transparency obligation also for third parties and the proportionate remuneration.”

#### **The digital future and the need of sustainable education**

Newly elected Board Member **Eystein Hanssen** points out: “One of the dynamic challenges became obvious during the Pandemic: the value gap in the area of digital exploitation of books and text works. Every use must be remunerated, that is the core rule, but it has been undermined by streaming flat rates and overall shrinking shares for e-books and audio books. Therefore, one of our tasks should be to closely monitor the developments of the electronic market, including in artificial intelligence – and to enforce fair rules in the interest of authors.”

“The ‘information food chain’ starting with those producing and providing – be it literature, articles, e-media, or educational and academic book and text works – must be kept alive and flourishing”, Finnish non fiction writer and re-elected EWC Board Member **Markku Löytönen** adds and recommends: “Member States are now more than ever requested to raise the budgets for educational, academic and teaching materials, instead of promoting further exceptions and limitations.”

#### **Democracies under Pressure: we must not look away**

**Alena Makouskaya** from Belarus stresses the importance of freedom of expression and democracies getting under pressure: “Being from a country which has come to legal default, we usually look at the EU countries as a good example for us”, the re-elected EWC Board Member says. “As the freedom of expression is a cornerstone of every healthy society and one of the main concerns of EWC, I hope the EWC study **Writers under Pressure** will be realized, to evaluate the situation of book authors in the context of various levels of restrictions – state restrictions, market, hate speech, – and to take timely countermeasures. Limitations and boundaries do not come all over sudden.”

“I see us, the writers and translators, as seismographs”, concludes EWC President **Nina George**. “Books are the backbone of a multiple opinion-forming opportunity, a mental vaccination against stereotypes, bias, xenophobia and the filter bubble effect. We, the authors and the chair persons of the writers’ and translators’ associations will not have it any easier in the upcoming years. But since we are the ones who can make a difference now, that is exactly what we should keep on doing.”

For queries, please contact EWC Secretary General Myriam Diocaretz: EWC-Secretariat(at)inter.nl.net

**The European Writers' Council** is the federation of 46 national organisations of professional writers and translators in 31 countries including the EU and EEA, as well as Belarus, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey, altogether writing in 31 languages. The EWC’s member associations represent 160,000 authors in the book and text sector in all genres. <http://europeanwriterscouncil.eu>

**Link to the release:** <https://europeanwriterscouncil.eu/annual-general-assembly-2021/>