



Leipziger  
Buchmesse



The region in focus at the 2020–2022 Leipzig Book Fair

# Common Ground. Literature from Southeast Europe

Press kit

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Press release after the cancellation of the Leipzig Book Fair

## Focus Region of the Leipzig Book Fair 2020-2022 presents literature from Southeast Europe over the next two years

**This unique cultural-political project lives on beyond this year's Leipzig Book Fair**

The partners of the TRADUKI network confirm with a heavy heart the cancellation of the Leipzig Book Fair 2020. As the focus region of the Leipzig Book Fair we would have loved to kick off "Common Ground. Literature from Southeast Europe" on 12th March and present the region's authors, literature, and culture. As diverse as the countries, people, languages, religions, history and stories may be –for the first time they wanted to present themselves together under the banner of "Common Ground": to emphasise everything that unites them – and not dwell on historic or current conflicts.

It has been a long-standing plan to introduce the German-speaking public to the undiscovered literature of Southeast Europe: And so, the three-year-long project of the focus region 2020-2022 will also play an important role at the Leipzig Book Fairs in the next two years. "And 'Common Ground' and its spirit is not restricted to its events at the Leipzig Book Fair, it reaches far beyond", says Antje Contius of the S. Fischer Stiftung, who runs TRADUKI. "Our authors will have other opportunities to exchange ideas with their readership in the German-speaking countries. We are already looking forward to their participation in the Leipzig Book Fairs 2021 and 2022."

Moreover, there are events planned at the Berliner Volksbühne as well as the Literarische Colloquium Berlin for spring and summer of 2020 and in November 2020 a slew of "Common Ground" events are planned to take place at the Buch Wien. In addition, we are in talks with several literature houses all over the German-speaking region to stage readings and discussions in connection with "Common Ground". Our partner country Romania will be guest of honour at this year's Belgrade Book Fair, meaning that the project "Common Ground" will also hold events in the region itself.

We invite audiences to get acquainted with books already published in the German language, away from the book fair, to form a new opinion of the region. March sees the release of short-story collections by two very interesting newcomers from Southeast Europe: *Grün wie ich dich liebe grün* (Folio) by Slovenian writer Ana Schnabl, who received many accolades for her debut, and *Nennt mich Esteban* (eta Verlag) by Bosnian author Lejla Kalamujić, who has also received many prizes for her work (eta Verlag). In addition, we also see the German publication of *Partisanenpost* (bahoe books) by Serbian comic artist Aleksandar Zograf, whose work has already been translated in over 15 languages. And there is always room for the classics: *Im Brand der Welten: Ivo Andrić. Ein europäisches Leben* by Michael Martens (Zsolnay 2019) was published last year, the first biography of the Nobel laureate in the German language. To commemorate the 30th anniversary of Danilo Kiš's death, one of his early novels, *Psalm 44* (Hanser 2019), was published for the first time in German.

Further information can be found at [www.traduki.eu](http://www.traduki.eu)



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## BACKGROUND

The TRADUKI network is a project of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria, German Federal Foreign Office, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Literaturhaus Wien and the Austrian Association of Translators on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport of the Republic of Austria, Goethe Institut, S. Fischer Foundation, Slovenian Book Agency – JAK, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture of the Principality of Liechtenstein, Cultural Foundation Liechtenstein, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Albania, Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Culture and National Identity of Romania, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Montenegro, Leipzig Book Fair, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia and Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria.

### **Note to editors:**

We would be happy to put you in touch with interview partners and to arrange informal conversations.



The programme for the Leipzig Book Fair 2020 (*as it was planned*)

## 'Origin and Belonging' – beyond catastrophes and clichés

In 1980, the prominent Yugoslav author Danilo Kiš wrote that one mustn't be "taken in by the well-worn myth according to which we Yugoslavians and the Hungarians abstain from literature since we can only find entertainment in our politically exotic communist themes [...]". As important as the subject of politics may be for the countries of Southeast Europe, its literature is rich in all kinds of other themes and facets. 'Common Ground' aims to highlight these and thereby depict a different, more authentic picture of the Balkans – beyond catastrophes, clichés and prejudice. "Literature also throws light on the tranquil and the quotidian, and can play a part in helping cultures to get to know each other," says Hana Stojić, Curator of the 'Common Ground' programme. "Today, in times of peace, it is a good moment for both the Southeast-European countries and the German-speaking countries to meet as equals. The non-simultaneity of societies remains a European constant, and yet we have decided to utilise this period of peace and to consider what actually unites us. What is our 'Common Ground'?" The programme therefore aims not only to present books and people who provide insights into the region's social and political upheavals. It seeks, above all, to present the people and their personalities, complete with their ordinary and – to a greater or lesser extent – everyday problems.

In the first year as the region in focus at the 2020–2022 Leipzig Book Fair, 'Common Ground' focuses on the **main theme of 'Origin and Belonging'**. Of course, the breakdown of political systems plays an important part in that – it is a matter of values that become worthless overnight, a question of perpetrators and victims. However, it is also about what happens to people when they leave the place where they were born. How do you settle down in a new country and gain a foothold in a new language? How can you understand and accept your origins? Many authors from the Balkans write (engaged) literature with the secret desire of helping others to avoid painful experiences in the future. And some find in literature a paradise from which they feel they have been expelled. Literature can be one way of providing healing – at least temporarily while writing and reading.

From 12 March, over the course of around 20 events, there is an opportunity to see a completely new picture of the Balkans and its literature. The readings feature authors with international profiles as well as engaged newcomers, and the subjects range from classics to contemporary poetry, and from comics to curiosities. In the week leading up to the Leipzig Book Fair, from 2–5 March, the **Balkan Film Week** in UT Connewitz will get guests into the mood for the region in focus at the 2020–2022 Leipzig Book Fair.

### Programme highlights at the Common Ground-TRADUKI Forum (Hall 4, D507)

One of the main highlights is the first event at the book fair stand immediately after the official opening ceremony with international guests from 14 countries: 'On how to translate sorrow' is the subject matter of the Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov, who has been delighting German-language critics for years (12 March, 1.30 p.m.). Here, the master of melancholy, who



also knows how to play the registers of irony and humour, interweaving those with a generous portion of tenderness and warmth, examines one of the central aspects of the project: there is a good reason why the network from which 'Common Ground' emerged is called TRADUKI (Esperanto for 'translation').

The event titled 'On the unexpected discovery of one's own patriotism', in which the focus is on 'migrant literature', provides answers to the question of whether language can become a new home. Presented by Tijan Sila, the event presents Darien Levani and Elvira Mujčić, two authors who now pen in their new language (12 March, 3.00 p.m.).

In addition to emerging young authors, the literary classics also feature: 'Homo poeticus – in spite of it all' is the tagline paying tribute to the great Danilo Kiš. *Psalm 44*, his last novel to remain untranslated, was published in German on the 30th anniversary of his death. Two young authors influenced by the writings of their role model Danilo Kiš will take to the stage to elaborate on his work (13 March, 12.30 p.m.). Under the title 'In the eye of the worlds', the first biography of Ivo Andrić, the only winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature from Southeast Europe, will be presented in German (14 March, 12.30 p.m.). The panel will include the author Michael Martens, who narrates the life of the great European author knowledgeably and with great style.

The event 'Virgjineshë, burrneshë, sworn virgins. Transgender in times of blood vengeance' will explore an extraordinary phenomenon: women living in patriarchal societies who permanently take on the role of a man and switch their gender and social identity (13 March, 2.00 p.m.). Miryam Schellbach will chair the event with the authors Rene Karabash, Jeton Neziraj and Michael Roes, all of whom have engaged with this subject in their literary work.

In 'Esteban, oh how I love you, Esteban. On illness and pain', two young female voices from Southeast Europe will take to the stage to present books recently translated into German. Lejla Kalamujić and Ana Schnabl will dare to look into the abyss that is existence, and expose themselves to the longing for belonging (14 March, 11.00 a.m.).

### **Three events in Café Europa (Hall 4, E401)**

The political dimension of 'Common Ground' will be reflected in three events in Café Europa (Hall 4, E401).

The subjects under the microscope include the European capitals of culture, post-socialism and the EU accession process after the French veto. What consequences will this veto have for the countries of the western Balkans? Where do they go from here? Has the dream of a joint Europe gone up in smoke for everyone involved? These and other questions will be discussed by figures such as Michael Roth, the Minister of State for Europe in Germany's Foreign Office, the author Robert Alagjovzovski, who served as Minister of Culture in the Macedonian government from 2017 to June 2018, and Dubravka Stojanović, Professor of History at the University of Belgrade and an expert on the processes of modernisation and Europeanisation in Southeast Europe (13 March, 3 p.m.).

### **The Balkans come to Leipzig**



With three major events, the Balkans will also have a presence in and around the city of Leipzig. The 'Migrated. Feminine' event in Kaiserbad promises powerful poetic images and plenty of warmth and humour. Writers Julijana Adamović, Lidija Dimkovska, Elvira Mujčić, Katja Oskamp and Tatiana Țibuleac will tell of ruptures and upheavals, of migration and of finding oneself again (12 March, 8 p.m., Kaiserbad).

In 'The good days', a **casino evening in Literaturhaus Leipzig**, short readings of works recently published in German, along with wine and music, will whet your appetite for Southeast Europe. Contributing to the proceedings on this evening will be Drago Jančar, whose novel *Wenn die Liebe ruht* [And love itself] occupied bestseller lists around Europe for weeks, and Michael Martens, author of *Im Brand der Welten* [In the eye of the worlds], the first German-language biography of Ivo Andrić, the only winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature from Southeast Europe (13 March, 7.30 p.m., Haus des Buches).

The legendary **Balkan Night in UT Connewitz**, where seven authors share very personal insights into life in the Balkans, promises to be a fiery and festive highlight. The ethnically Hungarian 'devil's fiddler' Félix Lajkó and his trio will turn up the heat and get the crowd going. This performance by the virtuoso from Vojvodina (the region of the Hungarian minority in Serbia) will be the musical highlight of 'Common Ground'. In addition, the animated short film *Blind Vaysha* will be screened, which is based on a literary work by the renowned Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov and was nominated for an Oscar in 2017 (14 March, 8 p.m., UT Connewitz).



## Authors from Southeast Europe (selection)

### Julijana Adamović



© Matija Krstić

Julijana Adamović, born in the Vojvodina region in 1969, is an award-winning Croatian writer. Her first collection of stories was awarded the Kiklop Prize for best debut. She has also published children's books, as well as volumes of poetry and stories. In 2018, she published her autobiographical novel *Divlje guske*, which reflects on the social situation in socialist Yugoslavia and raises questions about identity through its plot following two seven-year-old twin sisters. Julijana Adamović currently lives in Vukovar, Croatia

### Lidija Dimkovska



©Tihomir Pinter

Lidija Dimkovska (b.1971, Skopje, North Macedonia, living in Ljubljana, Slovenia) has published six poetry books, three novels, one American diary and one short stories' book translated in numerous languages. She received the European Union Prize for Literature for her novel *A Spare Life* and the Special Mention for European Cultural Heritage for her short stories cycle *When I left Karl Liebknecht*. She edited an anthology of young Macedonian poetry, an anthology of contemporary Slovenian poetry in Macedonian, and an anthology of contemporary minority and immigrant writing in Slovenia. She has participated in numerous international literary festivals and readings and was a writer-in-residence in Iowa, Berlin, Graz, Krems, Vienna, Salzburg, Split, Tirana and London. In German she published two poetry books translated from the Macedonian by Alexander Sitzmann: *A Decent Girl (Anständiges Mädchen, 2010, Edition Korrespondenzen*, shortlisted for the German literary prize »Brücke-Berlin«) and *In Black and White (Schwarz auf weiß, 2019, Parasitenpresse)*.

### Georgi Gospodinov



© Phelia Barouh

Georgi Gospodinov (1968, Bulgaria) is the author of *Natural Novel* and *The Physics of Sorrow*, winner of Central European Angelus Award (2019) and Jan Michalski Prize (2016), finalist for Berliner Brücke Prize, PEN American Translation Prize, etc. His novels are translated in more than 20 languages. Gospodinov writes in different genres including poetry, essays, plays, nonfiction books, etc. His recent books in German are *Lapidarium* (poetry, eta verlag) and *8 Minuten und 19 Sekunden* (short stories, Droschl). In 2019/20 Georgi Gospodinov is fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin.

### Jovica Ivanovski



© Sašo Dimosk

Jovica Ivanovski, born in 1961 in Skopje, is the author of more than 10 volumes of poetry, the most recent of which was released in 2019 and was awarded with a prize at the Struga Poetry Evenings festival. His poems have been translated into various languages, including English, Serbian and Slovenian. His works have been awarded several prizes. He lives and works in his home city of Skopje.

### Drago Jančar



© Jože Suhadolnik

Drago Jančar was born in Maribor, Slovenia, studied Law, worked as journalist, editor and free-lance writer. Author has been described as "the seismologist of a chaotic history". His novels and short stories have been translated and published in many European languages and in U.S.A., his dramas have also seen a number of foreign productions. In 2003 he was awarded with Herder Prize for literature, Jean Améry Preis for Essays, Frankfurt Book Fair 2007, Hemingway Prize, Lignano, Italy 2009, Le Prix Européen de Littérature, Strasbourg 2011, Prix du Meilleur livre étranger (Prize for the best foreign book), Paris 2014.

### Lejla Kalamujić



© Vladan Antić

Born in Sarajevo in 1980 where she still lives. Graduated at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology. She's the author of collections of stories: *Anatomija osmijeha* and *Zovite me Esteban*, play *Ljudožderka ili kako sam ubila svoju porodicu*, and short biography *Zaim Imamović: Život jednog sevdalije*. Writes prose, plays, essays and reviews in various magazines and on web portals in B&H and EX-YU countries.

### Rene Karabash



© Georgi Kazakov

Rene Karabash (real name Irena Ivanova) was born in 1989, in the town of Lovech, Bulgaria. She is a writer, theatre director and actress. She is the author of the poetry collection *Hips and Butterflies* and the novel *Ostajnica*. In 2019 *Ostajnica* won her the prestigious Literary Award "Elias Canetti". The same year it was nominated for "Novel of the year" from 13 Centuries Bulgaria and for the annual Peroto National Literary Award. *Ostajnica* is in the selection of the annual Catalogue of the National Book Center, Contemporary Bulgarian Prose 2019. Theatre and cinema adaptation of the novel are forthcoming. Rene Karabash is founder of Rabbit Hole, a Creative Academy for Writers – the



first of its kind in Bulgaria – which brings together some of the most prominent Bulgarian writers, screenwriters and playwrights.

### Damir Karakaš



© Tom Čuveljak

Damir Karakaš, born 1967 in Plašćica, Croatia, studied agriculture in Zagreb. Initially he worked for the newspaper *Večernji list*, later he reported as a war reporter from the fronts in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. From 2001 he spent several years in France. To date, Karakaš has written several novels and collections of stories, for which he has received numerous awards. Many of his short stories and novels have been filmed and adapted for the stage, among others by award-winning Croatian director Dalibor Matanić. His novel *Erinnerungen an den Wald* (*Memories of the Forest*, folio 2019) is available in German translation. He lives in Zagreb.

### Tom Kuka (Enkel Demi)



© Fani Aliko

Enkel Demi alias Tom Kuka was born in Tirana in 1972. He was educated in Tirana and graduated from "Luigj Gurakuqi" University in Shkodra. He has been working as a journalist since 1990 with the first opposition newspaper in the country, the Democratic Renaissance. He has developed a career in print, radio and television. He is currently a television and radio anchor person. That is why he chose another name as an author. The last literary editions in the periodical Enkel Demi were discontinued in 1995. Since then it has not stopped writing, but publishing. He is back in November 2016 under the name Tom Kuka with the novel *Hide* (*Ziziphus jujube*) on the Pavement. After two years, in November 2018, Tom Kuka comes up with the novel *Stones of Loneliness*, a family saga. Then in November 2019, Tom Kuka publishes his third novel, *The Wicked Hour*.

### Darien Levani



© Andrea Tornello

Darien Levani, born in 1982 in Fratar, Albania, studied law in Albania and Italy. He works as a lawyer and journalist, and he published his debut novel *Solo andata, grazie* in 2012, for which he was awarded the Nuto Revelli Prize for best debut work. Levani has since written numerous award-winning crime novels in both Albanian and Italian. Most recently, he has released *Toringrad* (2016) and *Tavolo numero sette* (2019). Recurring themes in his books include the perpetual dance between politics and corruption, as well as the search for truth and justice. Levani lives in Ferrara, Italy



### Jeton Neziraj



© Zeichnung von Biba Kayewich

Jeton Neziraj is the Director of Qendra Multimedia, after serving as the Artistic Director of the National Theatre of Kosovo. He has written over 20 plays that have been staged, translated and published in more than 15 languages. As a playwright, he has worked with theatres and companies including La MaMa in New York, Volkstheater Vienna, City Garage Theater in Los Angeles, National Theater of Montenegro, Turkish National Theater, etc. His plays have won numerous prizes and have been performed in theatre festivals throughout Europe. The Guardian wrote about his work. The German theatre magazine Theater der Zeit and the German Radio Deutschlandfunk Kultur have described him as 'Kafka of the Balkans', while Los Angeles Times called him "a world- class playwright who challenges our complacency at every twist and turn".

### Damir Ovčina



© Milomir Kovačević Strašni

Damir Ovčina, born in 1973 in Sarajevo, studied literature and is now the director of a school for blind and visually impaired children. He publishes work on his website, [impruva.ba](http://impruva.ba). His first novel, which he published a good 20 years after his debut work, received acclaim in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a scale that had not been seen in a long time. *Two Years Night* (Rowohlt, 2019) was awarded the Hasan Kaimija Prize for the country's best work of prose in 2016, as well as the Mirko Kovač Prize, which is one of the most important literary prizes in the southern Slavic region.

### Vladimir Pištalo



© Nebojša Babić

Vladimir Pištalo (1960) is one of the most significant contemporary Serbian writers. His most well-known works include the books of poems in prose *Slikovnica* (Picture Book, 1981), *Manifesti* (Manifestoes, 1986), *Noći* (Nights, 1986), and *Kraj veka* (End of a Century, 1999); the collections of short stories *Vitraž u sećanju* (Stain Glass in the Memory, 1996) and *Priče iz celog sveta* (Stories from all around the World, 1998); and novels *Milenijum u Beogradu* (Millennium in Belgrade, 2001), *Tesla, portret među maskama* (Tesla: A Portrait with Masks, 2018, NIN Book of the Year Award), *Venecija* (Venice, 2011), and *Sunce ovog dana: Pismo Andriću* (The Sun of This Day: Letters to Andrić, 2017). Pištalo is also the author of two unusual literary biographies: *Aleksandrida*, a fairytale-like story dealing with the life of Alexander the Great, and Korto Maltese. *Tesla: A Portrait with Masks* was translated into sixteen languages, and *Millennium in Belgrade* into six.



### Blerina Rogova Gaxha



© Ridvan Slivova

Blerina Rogova Gaxha (1982), lives in Pristina, Kosovo. She is a poet, essay writer and journalist. She has released three collections of poems – *Gorgona* (2009), *Floors* (2013) and *She comes from the East* (2016) – as well as a work of theory, *Kadare's Prose Forms* (2015). She won the international literary Crystal Vilenica Award in 2015 in Slovenia, and the national award for best book of the year in 2010. The author has given many readings across Europe, and her poems and essays have appeared in renowned anthologies and magazines in German, English, French, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, etc. She is a member of the PEN centre in Kosovo. Her writing has also appeared in German in the magazines *Wespennest*, *Lichtungen*, *Beton*, *Abwärts!* and *Der Maulkorb*, as well as in the Grand Tour anthology.

### Ana Schnabl



© Matej Pušnik

Ana Schnabl (1985) is a Slovene writer, editor and doctoral student. Her short stories entitled *Razvezani* received Best Debut Prize in 2017 and the Croatian Edo Budiša award in 2019. Her second book, the novel *Mojstrouina*, will be published in April of 2020. She has already begun work on her third book, this time a crime novel with a thick plot. When she is not writing crime, she is writing autobiographical essays, which maybe someday will be published in a book as well. In her doctoral work, she focuses on feminist autobiographies. She lives in Kamnik, northern Slovenia, with a boyfriend, two dogs and a cat.

### Ognjen Spahić



© Roko Crnić

Ognjen Spahić, born in 1977 in Podgorica (then called Titograd), is one of the most important Montenegrin writers of his generation. His first collection of short stories was released in 2001. This was followed by other collections and novels, including *Puna glava radosti* (2014), for which he was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature. His books have been translated into numerous languages, including Arabic and Italian. He lives and works in Montenegro.

### Tatiana Țibuleac



© Natalia Rusu

Tatiana Țibuleac was born in Chișinău in 1978, into a family where storytelling was a way of life. She started working with media while at University, where she studied Journalism and Communications. She first made her name as a reporter in the mid-1990s at the newspaper FLUX, writing about ordinary people in extraordinary times. In 1999, she went across to work



in television at PRO TV – a Romanian TV station – where she was a lead reporter and anchor for the main news programme. In 2007 she moved to Paris. Her first book *Fabule Moderne*, a collection of short stories, was published in Moldova in 2014. In 2017, her first novel *Vara in care mama a avut ochii verzi* received awards from the Moldovan Writers Union, the Romanian Literature Magazine "Observator Cultural" and Observator Lyceum. It was translated into French and Spanish. In 2018 she published her second novel *Gradina de sticlă*, the book won the European Prize for Literature in 2019.

### Aleksandar Zograf



© privat

Aleksandar Zograf (real name Saša Rakezić) lives in Pančevo, across the Danube from Belgrade. He published collections of comics in US, UK, Italy France, Germany, Japan and elsewhere, and in 2003 he started to work on weekly comics for the Serbian independent weekly magazine *Vreme*. His stories are centered around different topics, from flea market finds, to travels, dreams, archaeology, and even WW2, which is the main topic of his new book published by Bahoe, from Vienna.

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