



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LITERARY FESTIVAL TIRANA GATE 2026

12th edition

7 - 8 - 9 October

*When Silence Speaks: Literature That
Crosses Borders, Challenges Narratives,
and Restores Excluded Voices*

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WHEN SILENCE SPEAKS

Literature that transcends borders, challenges narratives, and restores excluded voices

Welcome to the 12th edition of the Tirana Gate International Youth Literary Festival! Twelve years ago, when we began this journey, we believed that a literary festival could be more than a series of encounters with writers and books. It could be a gateway.

A gateway through which Tirana could meet the world, and the world could hear the voices coming from Tirana. Today, twelve editions later, that gateway is still open. And this year, we have chosen to open it to a theme that, in the times we are living through, seems particularly important to me: “When Silence Speaks.” At first glance, silence appears to be an absence. An absence of words, of voice, of presence. But literature has taught us that silence is not always emptiness.

Sometimes, silence is a story that has not yet been told. A memory that has not yet found its own language, a voice that has been left out, a person who has not been heard. And this is precisely where the task of literature begins: to listen even to what remains unspoken. To search for the voice beyond silence. To enter those spaces where conventional narratives have not entered, or have not wanted to enter.

For human history is not only what has been written by the loudest voices. It is also what has remained in the margins: in family memories, in small stories, in the experiences of those who have not had the opportunity to speak. Literature has the power to restore these voices. Not by speaking for them, but by creating the space in which they can be heard. This is also why, this year, we are speaking of literature that transcends borders, challenges narratives, and restores excluded voices.

The literary word knows no such borders. It travels from one language to another through translation. From one culture to another through reading. From one generation to the next through memory.

A novel written in one place can speak to us of a pain we have known somewhere entirely different. A poem written far away can make us recognize ourselves. This is the wonder of literature: it crosses boundaries without needing to erase difference. We do not need to be the same in order to understand one another. We only need to be willing to listen. And this is precisely where young people have a special role to play.

For Tirana Gate is a festival for young people not only because they are the readers of the future, but because they are the voices shaping the present. They have the right to question. To challenge. To rewrite. To seek other stories. To bring to the center what was once left at the margins.

At a time when, every day, we are confronted with a multitude of voices, when everything seems to demand to be heard at once, and ever more loudly, perhaps our greatest challenge is to learn how to listen. To distinguish voice from noise. To listen to silence, too. And to understand that, sometimes, what is left unsaid can be just as important as what is said.

This is what we hope to do during these days at Tirana Gate 2026: to create a space for encounters where literature can speak freely, but where silences can also be heard. A space where authors meet readers, where languages meet one another, where experiences do not exclude one another, but enrich one another.

After twelve years, we continue to believe in this simple yet powerful idea: A book can open a door. A spoken word can cross a border. A story can restore a voice. And a voice can change the way we listen to the world.

I would like to thank all the writers, poets, translators, publishers, partners, and friends of the festival who have made it possible for this gateway to remain open for twelve years. And a special thank you to the young people who make this festival what it is. Because a literary festival lives not only on stage. It lives in the questions a young person asks after meeting an author. In a book picked up after the festival. In an idea that continues to be discussed. In a voice that, once heard, refuses to remain silent.

So let us open this gateway once again! Let us listen to the voices that come from afar and to those that are close to us! Let us listen to the words! But this year, above all, let us listen to the silence, too.

Welcome to Tirana Gate 2026. The gateway is open.

IRENA TOÇI



Director of the Tirana Gate International Youth Literary Festival



ADIVIJE HOXHA

Albania

Adivije Hoxha is an Albanian poet and writer, born in Rremull, Mat, and based in Durrës. She has published several poetry collections, including *Paradise Without Angels* (2004), *I Miss You* (2008), *I Am Your Sigh* (2010), *Different from Yesterday* (2014), and *Shadow of a Dream*. Her poetry explores love, longing, human emotions, homeland, and the challenges of life with sensitivity and lyrical expression. She has been published in various newspapers and literary anthologies and has received recognition for her contribution to Albanian poetry, including the “Penda Budi” Award and a Career Award at the “Muza Poetike Budiane” festival.



ALFREDO VILLAVERDE GIL

Spain

Alfredo Villaverde is a writer, poet, journalist, essayist, and a prominent figure in Spanish cultural life, originally from Guadalajara, Spain. He is President of the Association of Writers of Castilla-La Mancha. The author of around sixty books, his extensive body of work encompasses poetry, prose, essays, theater, biography, and travel literature. Among his best-known works are *Confirmación de la intimidad*, *La sed de Tántalo*, *Viaje a la mañana*, *El viaje prodigioso*, *La saga de los albinos*, and *El diablo usa pintalabios rojo*.

Villaverde has received numerous national and international awards and honors, including the Fernando Rielo World Prize for Mystical Poetry, the Castilla-La Mancha Novel Prize, the Ciudad de Guadalajara Poetry Prize, the Alfonso VIII Poetry Prize, and the Río Ungría Poetry Prize, as well as the Don Quixote and Europa Universitas Journalism Awards.



ANNA KOVE

Albania

Anna Kove is a writer and translator of German literature into Albanian. She studied Albanian Language and Literature and graduated in 1990 from the Faculty of Philology at the University of Tirana. In 2004, she completed a Master's degree in "Media and Cultural Exchange" at the European University Viadrina in Germany. Anna Kove is the author of several books, including *Where Were You, Valentine?*, *Burning Waters*, *The Nymph of the Lost Tree*, and *Sunday Bells*. Literary critics consider Anna Kove one of the talented voices of contemporary Albanian prose. She has introduced into Albanian the works of important authors of German literature, including Hermann Hesse, Paul Celan, Herta Müller, and others. In 2023, Anna Kove was named Translator of the Year at the National Awards, awarded by the Ministry and the Book Fair jury, for her translation of Nobel laureate Günter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum*.



ANILA KRUTI

Albania

Anila Kruti is an Albanian writer, particularly known for her literary works for children and her poetry. Her writing combines imagination, sensitivity, and meaningful social themes, creating stories that engage young readers while conveying important messages. Her works include *Flutura e Majit*, *The Fantastic Journeys of Armir*, *The Blue Angel*, and the poetry collection *The Sky Accepts No Patches*. *Flutura e Majit* was recognized as the best children's book at the Pristina Book Fair.



ANTONIO CAIAZZA

Italy

Antonio Caiazza is a journalist at the RAI office in Trieste. For many years, he has covered events in the Balkans for various publications. He has produced television reports, written articles, and published two books about Albania: *In alto mare. Viaggio nell'Albania dal comunismo al futuro* (In the Open Sea: A Journey through Albania, from Communism to the Future), Instar Libri, 2008, and the novel *La notte dei vinti* (The Night of the Vanquished), Edizioni Nutrimenti, 2014, which recounts a bloody purge within Albania's Stalinist nomenklatura. In 2025, the novel was published in Albanian under the title *Nata e të mundurve* by Botimet Toena. Albania is also the subject of his book *Una storia scomoda* (An Uncomfortable History).



ARBËR SELMANI

Kosovo

Arbër Selmani is the author of five books, including *48 Piano* (2022) and *Testosteron* (ALBAS, 2025). He has received the Prince Claus Fund SEED Award 2025 in the Netherlands, as well as first prizes at the Tirana Gate Festival 2021 and ResPoetica 2024. He is a recipient of the Literary Creativity Fund for Young Writers, awarded by Albania's National Book and Reading Center (QKLL), with whose support *Testosteron* was published.

In 2018, he was a fellow of the European Parliament's Sakharov Programme for Human Rights Defenders. His writing has appeared in literary magazines and platforms including *Asymptote*, *World Literature Today*, *Fruit Journal*, and *Changes Press*. Selmani is also the Albanian translator of André Aciman's novel *Call Me by Your Name*.



ARTA MARKU

Albania

Journalist, literary critic, and author Arta Marku has worked for the newspapers Koha Jonë, Gazeta Shqiptare, Shekulli, and Panorama. Her writing has focused primarily on culture and literature.

As editor-in-chief, she has led social and cultural periodicals such as AKS, SPEKTËR, VIP, PSIKOLOGJI, LETRA NGA DIASPORA, among others. Since 2014, she has hosted the television program BIBLIOTEKË on RTSH, dedicated exclusively to books, as well as the radio programs SCRIPTA MANENT, MUZEU I PËRDITËSISË, and PALIMPSEST. She is the author of the books Kthinat e kujtesës, Dhomat pa mure, and Letrat e mia kredenciale (Toena, 2018). She currently serves as Director of the National Center for Books and Reading.



BEN ANDONI

Albania

Ben Andoni is a translator of nearly 50 authors and an Albanian journalist. He began his journalistic career at the newspaper Koha Jonë, where he later served as Culture Editor and subsequently as Kosovo Editor. In 1998, he became Culture Editor of Gazeta Shqiptare and later of Korrieri.

He served as editor-in-chief of the weekly political magazine ABC and as deputy editor-in-chief of MAPO and the political magazine Java. He also worked as a correspondent for the Belgrade-based BETA news agency.

He studied Geography and History at the Faculty of Philology and History and completed postgraduate studies in Business Administration at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies.



BESNIK MUSTAJ

Albania

Born in 1958, graduated in French Language and Literature at the University of Tirana in 1981. As one of the founders of the first Democratic Party in Albania, he became involved in politics in 1990. He was elected four times as a Member of Parliament. . He is Albania's first post-communist ambassador to Paris (1992- 1997). In 2005 he was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2007, he resigned from his Ministerial office and from all of his other political and public functions in order to dedicate himself full-time to writing. He has published more than 20 books, which are novels, essays, short stories and poems. He has won many awards in Albania and abroad. His last published book is "Fat i marrë".



DAMIR KARAKAŠ

Croatia

Karakaš is a writer and playwright whose plays have been staged throughout Croatia, Serbia, Germany, Chile, and Côte d'Ivoire. He has received numerous national and international literary awards, and his works have been translated into ten languages. This year, he received the prestigious City of Zagreb Award for the Arts. Following its publication, Proslava received numerous excellent reviews and was awarded the prestigious literary prize for the best Croatian novel in 2019. Most recently, it was among the ten books shortlisted for the EBRD Literature Prize in London. In the United States, it received numerous highly positive reviews in renowned literary publications, including Kirkus Reviews and the Los Angeles Review of Books. The film adaptation of the novel has also won numerous awards. Its premiere took place at the prestigious Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.



DIANA ÇULI

Albania

Writer, journalist and translator. She is the author of twelve novels, three short story collections, two plays and three film scenarios. Many of her novels have been adapted for the screen and translated into Italian, Macedonian and Chinese. Her work has received national and international recognition and she has been awarded with several literary prizes. Her recent novel “Murder in the Prime Minister’s Office” in 2019 received Winner of the “KULT” Academy Award “Best Novel” of the Year in 2014. In 2017, he was awarded by the Albanian Editors’ Association Prize as Best Translator of the Year. The last award was “The Olive’s Branch” for The Best Book for Children’s Literature, by the jury of the Ulqini Book’s Festival, on June 2021.



DRITAN SULÇEBE

Albania

Dritan Sulçebe is a writer and publisher, born in Tirana in 1983. He holds degrees in Law and International Relations and has worked as a diplomat and as a researcher in the field of civil society, both in Albania and abroad. He is the author of a number of articles and studies on international relations. In 2022, he published the dystopian novel *Astral Time* (Kohë Astrale) (Toena Publishing, 2022). Dritan Sulçebe is the founder of the publishing house Kandrë Botime.



DRITAN THOMARAJ

Albania

Dritan Thomaraj is an Albanian poet and writer originally from Kuç, Vlora. He is the author of the poetry collection Valsi i Valëve (The Waltz of the Waves). His poetry has been included in several international literary anthologies, including Valentinovo in Croatia, Open Line 3, and International Golden Pen. His work has also appeared in various literary publications. His poetry explores human emotions, life experiences, and the inner world through a sensitive and reflective style.



EDUART BARDHI

Albania

Eduart Bardhi is a young Albanian researcher, literary critic, poet, journalist, and writer who is developing his profile in the field of literature and contemporary studies. His work ranges from literary creation to criticism, essay writing, and academic research, with a particular interest in Albanian literature, memory, literary reception, and the relationship between the literary work and the reader. Throughout this journey, Bardhi combines his creative profile with that of a researcher, viewing literature not only as a space for artistic creation but also as an object of interpretation and scholarly inquiry.



EMILIOS SOLOMOU

Cyprus

Emiliou Solomou was born in 1971. He is currently a secondary-school teacher of Greek Language and Literature. Many of his short stories have been published in magazines and anthologies in Cyprus, Greece, and abroad. He has published the children's books *The Scarecrow* (2000, 2018) and *The River* (2022), as well as the following novels for adults: *Like a Sparrow, He Flew Swiftly* (2003; translated into Bulgarian and Albanian), *An Axe in Your Hands* (2007, State Literary Award for Best Novel; translated and published in Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, and Italy), *Diary of an Adultery* (2012, European Union Prize for Literature 2013; published in translation in 13 European countries), *Hatred Is Half of Revenge* (2015; translated into Polish, Albanian, and Serbian), and *Hold Your Breath* (2023; forthcoming in Albanian from Toena). A new novel, *Child with an Unknown Father*, is scheduled for publication in October 2026 by Kastaniotis Publishing House in Athens.



ERENESTINA HALILI

Albania

Erenestina Halili is an Albanian poet, journalist, researcher, and academic, with extensive experience in literature, journalism, scholarly research, and cultural studies. She completed her studies in Language and Literature at the Faculty of History and Philology of the University of Tirana, where she also pursued academic training in journalism. In 2012, she was awarded a PhD in Philological Sciences. She currently lectures in the Department of Literature at the University of Tirana, where her academic work focuses particularly on Albanian literature and drama.



ERIS RUSI

Albania

Assoc. Prof. Eris Rusi (1983) is Head of the Department of Language and Literature at “Fan S. Noli” University, Korçë. He holds degrees in Text, Linguistics and Literature from La Sapienza University of Rome, as well as advanced training in Editing and Cultural Communication in Italy. With more than 15 years of academic and cultural experience, he lectures in comparative literature, translation, and modern literary studies. Rusi is also a writer, editor, and literary translator from Italian and English into Albanian, awarded nationally and internationally, including the “Servantes” Literary Prize (2023). As Executive Director of the NGO Literary and Cultural Activism, he leads cross-border projects in literature, cultural heritage, and youth engagement, while continuing to publish both creative and scholarly works.



ERSI SOTIROPOULOS

Greece

Ersi Sotiropoulos is a poet and a writer of novels and short stories. She has received numerous literary awards, including the National Literature Award (twice), the Book Critics’ Award, and the Academy of Athens Award. She has also received the Dante Alighieri Award.

Her novel *What Remains of the Night* won the Mediterranean Prize for Best Foreign Novel in France. She was appointed Harman Writer-in-Residence at Baruch College in New York. She has served as Cultural Attaché at the Greek Embassy in Rome and was a fellow in the Writing Program at Princeton University.

Her latest book, *Senorita*, was published in April 2026.



FATMA MEMALLI

Albania

Fatma Memalli, born in April 1999 in the city of Durrës, is a new voice in Albanian literature. Her debut novel, *Rikrijimi*, was selected among the winners of the 2026 “New Authors” Literary Creativity Fund. She holds a degree in Psychology from the University of Tirana and is currently pursuing an interdisciplinary program in Environmental Communication. At the heart of her literary work are themes of existence, transformation, and the blurring of boundaries between inner life and reality. Her diverse experience in youth and social organizations and in intercultural settings—as a local coordinator, interpreter, and data curator—has shaped her interest in using storytelling and communication as tools for social impact. For her, writing is perhaps the most human of superpowers: the teleportation of a person from oneself to oneself.



FLORI KASAJ

Albania

Flori Kasaj is the author of six books, published since 2022, with a body of work focused on children’s literature and the science-fiction genre. He has a background in the exact sciences, with a specialization in physics. In 2024, his book *Andrush* received the Award for Best Children’s Book at the Pristina Book Fair, while in 2026, *The Little Astronaut’s Diary* received the “Olive Branch” Literary Award at the Ulcinj Book Fair. His book *The Bee Park* was selected for financial publishing support by the Ministry of Culture through the National Center for Books and Reading.

From 2024 to 2026, Kasaj served as a member of the jury for the Fund for the Support of Literary Creativity, Children’s Books.



FLUTURA AÇA

Albania

Flutura Aça is an Albanian poet, novelist, and publisher, born in Elbasan in 1966. She studied Economics and later Albanian Language and Literature at the University of Elbasan. She began publishing poetry in the late 1980s and has since established herself as one of the distinctive voices of contemporary Albanian literature. In 1997, she was awarded the international “Lyre of Struga” Prize at the Struga Poetry Evenings. Among her major poetry collections are “Three Autumns Away,” “Walls of Solitude,” “Feast with Anxiety,” “The Song of Arethusa,” “The Sun Trap,” “Barefoot,” “An Invitation to Flirt,” and “The Guardian of Light.” She has also made a significant contribution to Albanian prose, with novels including “A Woman’s Solitude,” “The Cross of Forgetting,” “Ashes,” “Where Are You?,” “Dolls Have No Homeland,” “Guests in the Tenth Circle,” and “The Son.”



ISMET KALLABA

Montenegro

He has been a journalist at Koha Javore, the only Albanian-language weekly newspaper in Montenegro, since its establishment, and since December of last year, he has served as its Editor-in-Chief. He is a lecturer in the Journalism and Communication study program at the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi.” He is a member of the Association of Artists and Intellectuals “Art Club,” which brings together the most prominent Albanian creators in Montenegro and which he has headed since 2016. He is also a member of the National Council of Albanians in Montenegro and of other associations primarily engaged in preserving and developing the culture of Albanians in Montenegro. He is the author of dozens of scholarly and journalistic articles and has participated in national and international scientific conferences.



IVANA TRAJANOSKA

North Macedonia

Ivana Trajanoska (Skopje, 1981) is a writer, interdisciplinary researcher, translator, and Professor of English Studies at University American College Skopje, North Macedonia. She serves as President of the Forum of the International Association of Word and Music Studies (WMA), Graz. She is the author of the novels *Razglednici* (Postcards, 2008), *Desa* (2021), and *Jeta* (2026). The manuscript of her second novel, *Desa*, received the Silver Pegasus Award for Best Unpublished Novel in 2020 and was a finalist for the Novel of the Year Award in North Macedonia in 2021. *Desa* has since been translated into Albanian by Milena Selimi (Harpa, Tirana, 2023) and into English by Maja Trajanoska (Dess, Ars Lamina, Skopje, 2026).



JAMARBËR HOXHA

Albania

Jamarbër Hoxha is a young Albanian author and avid reader, known for his extraordinary passion for books and literature. He began reading at a very young age and, throughout his childhood, distinguished himself through his interest in Albanian and world literature.

Jamarbër is on the autism spectrum. In 2020, at the age of nine, he was named “Best Reader” at the Tirana Book Fair.

In addition to reading, Jamarbër has also been engaged in writing poetry and prose. In 2021, he published his first poetry collection, “Lulëkuqja” (The Poppy), containing 101 poems. He has also published “The Autistic Boy” and “Under the Sounds of the Viola”.



LIRIDON MULAJ

Albania

Liridon Mulaj made his literary debut with the poetry collection *I pakuptuari*. Just one year later, he published the experimental novel *Kërkohet një vrasës*. In 2020, he published the novel *Mos harro të më kujtosh*, which was shortlisted for the National Literature Award and the European Union Prize for Literature, and was also ranked among the four best-selling books by Albanian authors in Kosovo and Albania in 2020. In 2022, he published the novel *Provinca*, which won the “Rexhai Surroi” Literary Award and was a finalist for the 2022 National Literature Award. In 2023, he won the “Best Poetry” award at the International Poetry Festival “Korçë Poetry Nights.” He is the founder and artistic director of the “Kamza Lexon” Book Fair, artistic director of the “Presheva Flet” Book Fair, as well as the “Valë dhe Fjalë” Book Fair in Shëngjin. He is also the initiator and organizer of the first “Stephanophana” Literary Festival (2025). He is a member of the PEN Centre of Albania.



MAJLINDA TOÇI BAMI

Albania

Majlinda Bami graduated from the University of Tirana, Faculty of History and Philology, with a Master’s degree in Linguistics, and is a candidate for a PhD. She is a professional in the fields of librarianship, culture, and the book industry in Albania. She currently serves as Director of the National Library of Albania.

She is also a lecturer and the author of professional books and scholarly articles on libraries, artificial intelligence, cultural collections, and information services. She has contributed as a curator of national exhibitions and as an organizer of literary festivals.



MAKLENA NIKA

Albania

Prof. Assoc. Dr. Maklena Nika was a lecturer of Modern Greek Literature at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of Greek Language. In 2022, she was honored by the Ministry of Culture and the Hellenic Foundation for Culture for promoting Greek culture in Albania. She has translated around 30 significant works of Greek, French, and American literature into Albanian, including works in theater, prose, and poetry by authors such as Nikos Kazantzakis, André Breton, Bill Clinton, and others. She is the author of three poetry collections: *Unë, ti, ne* (Me, You, Us), Marin Barleti Publishing House, 2000; *Oksimoron* (Oxymoron), Toena Publishing House, 2020 (a candidate for the National Literature Award, Ministry of Culture); and *Nitroglicerinë* (Nitroglycerin), Toena Publishing House, 2023 (a candidate for the National Literature Award, Ministry of Culture). In May 2025, she received the “Crown of Poetry” Award at the Korçë Poetry Nights Festival.



MANIELA SOTA

Albania

Maniela Sota completed her higher education at the Faculty of Literature of the University of Bucharest, Romania, specializing in Romanian and English Language and Literature. She has translated several successful novels, including *Michael Jackson: The Magic and the Madness* by J. R. Taraborrelli, *Maitreyi* by Mircea Eliade, *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover, *Tell No One* by Harlan Coben, and others. Maniela Sota is also the author of several English-language textbooks for primary and secondary schools. She is the author of the poetry collections *Tears of Colors* and *When Eyes Speak*, as well as one of the co-authors of the anthology *In the Wings of a Dream*.



MARTINA HEFTER

Germany

Martina Hefter lives in Leipzig. She studied contemporary dance in Berlin in the 1990s and later at the German Institute for Literature at Leipzig University. Alongside her work as a writer, she creates performances for the stage, often in collaboration with other artists. Her novel *Hey, Good Morning, How Are You?* was awarded the German Book Prize and the European Prix Grand Continent in 2024. For her literary work, she also received the Grand Prize of the German Literature Fund, as well as the Wiesbaden Literature Prize, particularly for her interdisciplinary work in literature. Her most recent publications also include the poetry collections *It Could Also Turn Out Beautiful* and *Going into the Woods, Stealing Wood for a Bed*, likewise published by Klett-Cotta. Her new novel, *Looking at the Sun*, will be published in October 2026.



MERITA ISUFI

Great Britain

Merita Isufi Avdyli is an Albanian author based in the United Kingdom, an educator, researcher, and community leader. As the founder of Successful Mothers, she has dedicated her career to creating spaces where women, young people, and underrepresented communities can find their voices through literature, education, and cultural dialogue. She is the author of the bilingual children's books *Dea Starts School*, *Come On Dea*, *My Brother and Me*, as well as *Dear Mother*. At this festival, she is participating to reflect on how literature gives voice to silence and challenges dominant narratives, as well as to lead a creative writing workshop aimed at inspiring young people to discover and write their own stories.



NAMIK DOKLE

Albania

Namik Dokle studied journalism and agricultural economics. For 20 years, he worked in the media as a journalist and editor-in-chief at two of the country's leading newspapers, Puna and Zëri i Popullit. He has published three collections of short stories and written 14 plays. Several of his plays have received national and international awards. He has published seven novels: Vajzat e mjegullës (The Girls of the Mist, 2015), Lulet e skajbotës (The Flowers of the Far Edge of the World, 2017), Ditët e lakuriqëve të natës (The Days of the Bats, 2018), Kolerë në kohë të dashurisë (Cholera in the Time of Love, 2020), Covid-1984 (2022), Dhjetë gramë nder (Ten Grams of Honor, 2023), and Asnjë trokitje në qiell (No Knock on Heaven, 2025). In 2024, he published Vallëzim me Hënë (Dancing with the Moon), a collection of Gora legends. In 2026, he published Atje ku dielli lind dy herë (Where the Sun Rises Twice), the Saga of Gora.



RALUCA NAGY

Rumania

Raluca Nagy is an anthropologist and writer. Her debut novel, Un cal într-o mare de lebede (A Horse in a Sea of Swans), won the national “Sofia Nădejde” and “Observator Cultural” awards for debut fiction and was shortlisted for the First Novel Festival in Chambéry, France.

Her novel Teo de la 16 la 18 (Teo from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.) was shortlisted for several national awards and was Romania's finalist for the European Union Prize for Literature (2022). Raluca has also written Despre memoriile femeii și alți dragoni (On Women's Memories and Other Dragons), published by Nemira Publishing House in 2023, which was shortlisted for the “Observator Cultural” and PEN Romania awards.



RITA PETRO

Albania

Rita Petro (1962) is a renowned Albanian author who heads Albas Publishing House. She has made a notable contribution to contemporary Albanian poetry, known for its “scandalous” and controversial spirit and modern imagery that moves away from traditional poetry. Her poem “Vrima” was published in Romanian by Corint Books under the title “Originea lumii.” Petro has won several important national awards. With her novel “Lindur së prapthi,” Rita Petro was nominated for the 2024 European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL). She has also received the National Bibliophilia Award – Lumo Skendo, 2014, the “Career Award for Poetic Creativity,” 2015, and was nominated for the 2014 National Awards for her poetry collection “Vrima,” for the 2022 National Awards for her novel “Lindur së prapthi,” and for the 2024 European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL) for the same novel.



RUMENA BUŽAROVSKA

North Macedonia

Rumena Bužarovska is a writer, literary translator, and lecturer. She is the author of the novel *Tony* (2024) and four collections of short stories, which have been translated into numerous languages. Her collections *My Husband and I'm Not Going Anywhere* have received widespread acclaim. She is also the author of two nonfiction books: the essay collection *Near God, America* (2024) and a study on humor in contemporary American and Macedonian short fiction (2012).

Bužarovska is also a literary translator from English into Macedonian. She writes for the regional magazine *Velike Priče*, co-hosts the feminist program *Radio Mileva*, and is co-founder of the women's storytelling event *PeachPreach* in North Macedonia. She teaches American literature and translation at the State University in Skopje.



SALIM NIZAM

Turkey

Salim Nizam is an award-winning writer who has received recognition in prestigious literary competitions, including the Honorary Mention (Mansiyon) at the Ömer Seyfettin Turkish World Story Competition (2005) for his novel *Sisli Göl*; First Prize at the Ömer Seyfettin Story Competition in Gönen (2006) for his story *Köy Saatçisi*; an Honorary Mention at the Ümit Kaftancıoğlu Story Competition for his story *Ters Lale*; an Honorary Mention at the Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu Story Competition (2008) for his story *Bandırma Yanıyor*; First Prize at the Mahmut Tunaboylu Story Competition in Çorum (2010) for his story *Leylekli Konak*; and an Honorary Mention at the Orhan Kemal Story Competition (2011) for his story *Koca Meşe*. Salim Nizam's stories have been published in the literary magazines *Türk Edebiyatı*, *Berceste*, and *Heceöykü*, and have also been translated into English.



SOKOL ÇUNGA

Albania

Sokol Çunga is an Albanian historian, translator, and archivist. Since 2008, he has been a member of the staff of the Central State Archives of Albania. Çunga has contributed to the presentation and promotion of the documentary heritage preserved in Albanian archives. Sokol Çunga is also known for his work in translation and urban studies. He is one of the six main contributors to the Zhargonisht blog. He has helped enrich Albania's linguistic culture and document spoken language, providing a valuable resource for researchers, students, and the wider public. Through his work as a historian, translator, and archivist, Sokol Çunga has made a significant contribution to preserving and promoting Albania's cultural heritage, as well as documenting contemporary developments in the Albanian language.



MAJLINDA RAMA

Albania

Majlinda Rama completed higher studies in Albanian Literature and Language, (Tirana). In 2012, she graduated from the Faculty of Political Science with a degree in International Relations. In 2014 she received the title of Master of Science in Political and Legal Sciences. She is the author, screenwriter, and show manager for social, cultural, and political. She works in the Municipality of Fier and is the executive director of the Cultural Foundation “Harpa”. She is the founder and director of the National Book Fair “Fieri”. She has published “Perandorët”. Her literature has been translated in several countries, such as: Germany, Macedonia, Montenegro, France, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Spain, etc.



DURIM TAÇI

Albania

Durim Taçi studied philology and cinematography in Tirana, and philosophy in Milan. A bilingual author, he has also translated numerous works into Albanian. His novel *Codice Kanun* (2016) was awarded the Montefiore Prize. This was followed by the “Reading Trilogy” with the novels *Extra Time*, *Your Second Self* (2019), *Extra Time*, *La tua seconda persona* (2020), *A Presence in Fading* (2020), and *Una presenza che sfugge* (2021). His book *The Lake in the Middle of the Sea* (2022) received the Fishta Prize in 2022. Taçi also won the 2021 National Literature Prize with the short story collection *From Another Door* (2021), later published in Italian as *Da un'altra porta* (2023). Since 2024, he has lived between Tirana and Bergamo, Italy, where he first emigrated in 2000.



XHENSILA DAUTLLARI

Albania

Xhensila Dautllari holds a degree in Communication Sciences. She is a writer, poet, and journalist. Xhensila began writing in childhood and published her first poetry collection at the age of 15. Later, she experimented with other genres, including long-form prose and playwriting.

She is one of the recipients of the 2025 Young Writers' Literary Fund, with her novel *Anahera: The Secret in the Fifth Building*. Her play *In the Memory Lane* was among the projects presented at the Sarajevo Theatre Showcase 2025. Xhensila is the founder of the cultural and artistic website udheskronje.com, which focuses on culture, literature, theater, and the arts.



KLEDI BUKAÇI

Albania

Third-year Bachelor's student in Language and Literature at the Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana. Has a particular interest in Literature, Literary Theory, Anthropology, Ethnography, and Semiotics. Highly motivated to develop and apply strong research, communication, and analytical skills. Has a strong inclination toward reading, research, and the study of literary and linguistic topics, with a continuous commitment to expanding knowledge and enhancing intellectual and professional skills. His academic background, combined with his experience in artistic and cultural activities, has contributed to the development of strong interpretive, communication, and creative skills. As an active member of the Drama Club of the University of Tirana and a participant in the annual "RinArt" festivals, he has been awarded the title of "Best Actor" in the competition several times.



SARAH BAKA

“Myslym Keta” High School, Tirana

Chair of the Culture and Books Committee in the Albanian Students’ Parliament.



KEISI MUÇA

Picar 9-Year School, Vorë

Member of the European Integration Committee in the Albanian Students’ Parliament.



SIBORA XHAFERAJ

“Myslym Keta” High School, Tirana

Member of the Students’ Parliament and leader of the Reading Club at her school.



EMANUEL MURATI

*“Asim Vokshi” School, Tirana – French Lyceum
liceu Francez*

President of the Students’ Government at his school and member of the Students’ Parliament.



KEJSI SALIU

*“A. Z. Çajupi” High School, Tirana
liceu Francez*

President of the Students’ Government at her school, member of the Students’ Parliament, and involved in the Artistic Talent Development Committee.



IRENA TOÇI

Albania

With an experience of 30 years in the field of publishing, she holds the position of the Executive Director of the Institute of Book and Promotion and Toena Publishing House (publishing company, printing house and bookstore). Constantly guided under the principle of valuing tradition, yet promoting innovation, Irena Toçi is a compiler of publishing and promotional policies of both the Institute and the publishing house, expanding this way not only the reading culture across Albania, but also promoting these values outside the borders through being part of multiple collaborations and projects. She has collaborated with organizations, institutions, national and international cultural centers as a project manager for the editions of the Youth Literary Festival and “Tirana Gate” co-financed by the Albanian Ministry of Culture, the City Hall of Tirana and the Balkan network intercultural READ. She is an initiator and project manager of more than 48 figurative artists’ colonies, held all over in Albania, Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. Under her direction, the Toena Publishing House has developed an important expansion of publishing policies, creating new initiatives, and moving onto the continuation of tradition and the genesis’ history and value its name holds today. Under the principle of trust in the author’s freedom, Irena Toçi has re-dimensioned the publishing house, developing publishing policies of integration, where each book is integrated with the next book, believing that this course of action, the dialectic intervention and invisible thread that links each book with the other is the circuit that gives meaning to the only cultural publishing house, the author’s freedom. Under her direction, the Toena Publishing House is part of “Creative Europe” and Balkan projects, whilst the Institute of Book and Promotion is part of an intercultural Balkan network called READ for years already, supported by the European Union. Irena Toçi is honored with international and national titles and medals, among others are the title “Peace Ambassador”, given by the Universal Peace Federation and the “Golden Medal of UNESCO”, given by Greece UNESCO (Branch of Piraeus and of the islands).



ANJA LEVANAJ

England

Anja Levanaj is a literature student, English language teacher, and writer with an academic background in English Literature and Comparative Literature, as well as experience in education, cultural projects, and international literary initiatives.

She holds a BA (Hons) in English Literature from the University of Liverpool and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Comparative Literature at King's College London. Her academic background is complemented by advanced skills in analytical, critical, and creative writing, as well as experience in the analysis of both contemporary and classical literary texts. She has also completed the CELTA professional teaching qualification in London, qualifying her to teach English in international contexts.

Alongside her studies, Anja volunteers with the Orwell Youth Prize, where she contributes to the reading and critical assessment of essays, provides detailed feedback to emerging writers, and supports the selection process for winning entries. This role has further developed her skills in editing, literary evaluation, and creative mentorship.

Anja is also involved in the cultural sector and digital communications. As an intern at EShareLife, she has contributed to article writing, communication campaigns, online platforms, and the organisation and promotion of cultural events.

In 2024, she participated in the international activities of EURAG (European Federation of Older Persons) in Tirana, working as a translator and presenter. In this role, she addressed topics related to ageing policies and social challenges in Albania and the United Kingdom.

Anja Levanaj is the author of *A Painting of Flowers and the Moon* (2025).

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LITERARY FESTIVAL
“TIRANA GATE 2026”
the 12th edition



Wednesday, 7 October 2026

Vila 31 x Art Explora
Conference Room

- **Time 10:00-10:30**

Welcome to the Festival. Opening ceremony.

- **Time 10:30-11:30**

Panel 1:

THE BODY SPEAKS, THE WORD UNFOLDS

The female body as language, memory and expression

Who has written the history of the female body until now? And what happens when a woman takes up the pen? Literature gives women the opportunity to speak from their own bodies, in their own words. To write about desire, motherhood, sexuality, violence, ageing, beauty, illness or trauma, not as figures described by others, but as authors of their own experience. A conversation about the body as an experience, memory and language, and about the power of literature to change the way we see, describe and understand the female body. Sometimes, writing about yourself means writing a story that no one else can tell.

Participants: Rita Petro (Albania), Raluca Nagy (Romania), Flutura Ačka (Albania), Majlinda Rama (Albania)

Host: Maniela Sota

Language: Albanian, Romanian

- **Time 11:30- 12:00**

Authors read

Raluca Nagy (Romania), Rita Petro (Albania), Flutura Ačka (Albania), Majlinda Rama (Albania)

- **Time 12:00-13:00**

Dertliu High School Tirana and Fier reads

New words, new voices.

Students from Dertliu High School in Tirana and Fier bring their poems and creative work to the festival, giving voice to a generation that seeks to be heard and express its world through literature.

- **Time 12:30-13:30**

Panel 2

THE ARCHIVE OF THE FORGOTTEN

Who decides what remains and what disappears? Archives, libraries, official histories, families, literature and their role in collective memory.

Libraries and archives are among the most important spaces of collective memory. They preserve not only the works that have shaped literary history, but also testimonies, languages, memories and stories that help us understand societies in all their complexities. What happens to the voices that have had fewer opportunities to be heard? What happens to the stories of communities, languages, cultures and individuals that have not always been at the centre of attention? In this process, libraries, archives and literature can create space for a more diverse and inclusive memory. A book can preserve an individual's voice; a collection can preserve the history of a community; a library can become the bridge through which a marginalised voice reaches future generations. The panel explores the role of memory institutions and literature in preserving, transmitting and bringing marginalised voices back into view. Can literature become an archive for voices that deserve to be heard by future generations? Here, literature becomes memory: it restores people, stories and experiences that have remained outside archives and dominant narratives.

Participants: Ismet Kallaba (Montenegro), Dritan Sulçebe (Albania), Salim Nizam (Turkey), Sokol Çunga (Albania)

Host: Majlinda Bami

Language: Albanian, Turkish

- **Time 13:30-14:00**

Authors read

Salim Nizam (Turkey), Dritan Sulçebe (Albania), Maklena Nika (Albania), Eduart Bardhi (Albania)

- **Time 14:00-16:00**

Break

- **Time 16:00-17:00**

Panel 3

INHERITED SILENCES: FAMILY MEMORY, TRAUMA AND INTERGENERATIONAL NARRATIVE

Some stories are never told, yet they pass from one generation to the next. Silences are inherited, memories remain within families, and wounds surface even in those who did not experience them firsthand. Literature gives these silences a language. What happens when one generation decides to tell what the generation before it could not? Can what has never been spoken be written? A conversation about family memory, trauma and the stories that travel from one generation to the next, until someone decides to tell them.

Participants: Ben Andoni (Albania), Damir Karakas (Croatia), Liridon Mulaj (Albania), Fatma Memalli (Albania)

Host: Eris Rusi

Language: Albanian, Croatian

- **Time 17:00-18:00**

Authors read

Damir Karakas (Croatia), Liridon Mulaj (Albania), Rumena Buzarovska (North Macedonian)

- **Time 18:00-19:00**

Panel 4

ANONYMOUS WAS A WOMAN

“Anon was often a woman,” wrote Virginia Woolf. (“Anon, who wrote

so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.” - Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929)

Women once wrote without names, without signatures and without the right to take their place in literary history. Today, they have names. They write, publish, speak and sign their own stories. For a long time, the absence of a name did not mean the absence of a voice. On the contrary, it could signify a woman who had no opportunity to be published, remembered or credited as the author of her own work. What does it mean to have a name in literature? What changes when a woman is no longer an anonymous voice, but an author who chooses what to tell, how to tell it and from where to speak? A conversation about literature, identity, the body, desire, the voices that once remained anonymous and those that now refuse to remain silent.

Participants: Rumena Buzarovska (North Macedonia), Diana Çuli (Albania), Anja Levanaj (Albania)

Host: Maklena Nika (Albania)

Language: Albanian, English

Thursday, 8 October 2026

Vila 31 x Art Explora
Conference Room

• **Time 10:00-11:00**

Panel 1

CAN I WRITE YOU?

Writing from Another Perspective: Imagination, Experience and the Limits of Representation

Where does a writer's freedom to enter another person's experience begin? Literature has the opportunity to place us inside lives that are not our own, make us see the world from another perspective and create characters beyond the author's own experience. How far can this freedom go? This panel opens a conversation about writing from another person's perspective: how well must a writer understand an experience to make it convincing in literature? When an author writes about an experience they

have not lived, what makes the narrative honest, sensitive and literary? In the end, the question remains: how far can a writer enter another person's own experience without replacing their voice?

Participants: Besnik Mustafaj (Albania), Emiliou Solomou (Cyprus), Ersi Sotiropoulos (Greece), Sokol Çunga (Albania)

Host: Maklena Nika (Albania)

Languages: Albanian, Greek

- **Time 11:00-12:30 / 📍 Workshop Room**

**Creative Writing Workshop with Ivana Trajanoska
FROM IDEA TO NOVEL**

When an idea wants to become a story, what must happen next? A workshop on the creative process of writing a novel, from the first spark to the moment the story begins to come alive.

Language: English

- **Time 11:00-12:00**

Authors read

Emiliou Solomou (Cyprus), Besnik Mustafaj (Albania), Ersi Sotiropoulos (Greece)

- **Time 12:00-13:00**

Panel 2

WRITING HOME FROM AFAR

Diaspora, Distance and the Literature of Belonging

What happens to a writer's relationship with their literary homeland after leaving it? Do diaspora writers remain part of the literary culture from which they came? Are they read, published, translated and valued in their country of origin in the same way as authors who live there? And does distance offer a different way of seeing and writing about the place they left behind? This panel examines the relationship between diaspora writers and their country of origin: literary belonging across borders, the

way literature circulates between homeland and the wider world, and the perspective created by distance. Sometimes, leaving a country does not mean ceasing to write about it, but seeing it through different eyes. Do diaspora writers write about the home they left behind, or about the memory of it? What can you see from the outside that you cannot see while you are within it? Sometimes you have to leave in order to see home differently.

Participants: Merita Isufi (United Kingdom), Flori Kasaj (Albania), Xhensila Dautllari (Albania), Durim Taçi (Albania)

Host: Liridon Mulaaj

Languages: Albanian

- **Time 13:00-14:00**

Authors read

Flori Kasaj (Albania), Xhensila Dautllari (Albania), Kledi Bukaçi (Albania), Durim Taçi (Albania)

- **Time 14:00-16:00**

Break

- **Time 16:00-17:00**

Panel 3

WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY?

Who tells the story?

In literature, whoever holds the pen also chooses the perspective, the voice and the way a story tells itself. This panel centres on the relationship between authors and the stories they choose to tell: can we write convincingly about an experience that is not our own? What happens to a story when the voice telling it changes? And how far can a writer's freedom go in entering another person's life, world and imagination? A conversation about perspective, voice, character and the power of literature to see the world through another life.

Participants: Antonio Caiazza (Itali), Namik Dokle (Shqipëri), Alfredo Villaverde (Spanjë), Eris Rusi (Shqipëri), Arbër Selmani (Kosovo)

Host: Erenestina Halili (Albania)

Languages: Albanian, Italian, Spanish

- **Time 17:00-18:00**

Authors read

Namik Dokle (Albania), Alfredo Villaverde (Spain), Antonio Caiazza (Italy), Arbër Selmani (Kosovo)

- **Time 18:00-19:00**

Panel 4

LITERATURE UNBOUND

The Literature of Different Bodies and Experiences: Voices of Disabled Authors

How far can the power of literature go in changing the way we see the world? This panel centres on disabled authors and their literature as a powerful space for creativity, imagination and expression. It is not about literature which is defined by disability, but literature born from the author's freedom to write what they wish, create the worlds they imagine and move readers in unexpected ways.

A conversation about the power of their words, the perspectives they bring to literature and the emotions their works awaken in us, seeing each author through the imagination, language and literary world they create.

Participants: Adivije Hoxha (Albania), Dritan Thomaraj (Albania), Jamarbër Hoxha (Albania)

Host: Anila Kruti (Albania)

Language: Albanian

Friday, 9 October 2026



Vila 31 x Art Explora

Conference Room

- **Time 11:00-12:00**

Panel 1

YOUTH & BOOKS: YOUNG PEOPLE SUGGEST - YOUNG PEOPLE ACT - YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE AN IMPACT

With the participation of members of the NATIONAL YOUTH READING

CLUB, a structure established under the National Centre for Books and Reading (QKLL).

Is it true that young people today read less than they did in the past?

Is it true that books are now difficult to regard as a passion?

What can help bring attention back to books?

A book is a form of communication, an invitation to reflect and a way to understand ourselves and the world around us better. But at a time when technology competes for the youth's attention more and more each day, how can their connection with reading be restored?

A conversation with the youth about what a book can still offer us and how reading can once again become part of their lives. At first glance, a book may be only an object. But as soon as you open it and begin to read, it becomes a world.

Participants: Sarah Baka, Keisi Muça, Sibora Xhaferaj, Emanuel Murati, Kejsi Saliu

Host: Arta Marku (Albania)

Language: Albanian

- **Time 12:00-13:00**

Authors read

Ivana Trajanoska (North Macedonia), Martina Hefter (Germany), Anna Kove (Albania)

- **Time 13:00- 14:00**

Panel 2

WHEN SILENCE SPEAKS

Silence can be a sign of repression, fear, exclusion, and erasure. But there are also silences that conceal, silences that protect, and silences that remember. Silence can be a language of intimacy, resistance, and reflection. Sometimes the most powerful stories begin where language ends. Sometimes silence itself is the story. Sometimes the most powerful stories begin where language ends.

A conversation about the power of literature to make audible even what has not yet found its words. Sometimes, what remains silent is not without a voice.

Participants: Anja Levanaj (Albania), Ivana Trajanoska (North Macedonia), Martina Hefter (Germany)

Host: Anna Kove (Albania)

Language: Albanian, English, German

- **Time 14:00-16:00**

Break

- **Time 18:00- 19:00 / 📍 Workshop Room**

WORKSHOP with Merita Isufi

“HAP LIBRIN, HAP BOTËN: Të rritemi së bashku përmes tregimeve.

A bilingual family literacy workshop with children’s author, Merita Isufi
What happens when a parent and child open a book together?

A story becomes a conversation.

A language becomes a bridge.

A child’s imagination becomes a voice.

“Open the Book, Open the World” is an interactive bilingual family literacy workshop led by children’s author Merita Isufi. Through her Dea series, parents and children will explore the joy of reading together, bilingualism, imagination and identity. Children will be encouraged to move from readers to storytellers by creating their own characters and stories, while parents will discover simple ways to make reading a meaningful part of family life.

The workshop celebrates books as a bridge between generations, languages and cultures.

📍 **VILA
31
ART
EXPLORA**



PROGRAMME OF BOOK PROMOTIONS
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LITERARY FESTIVAL
“TIRANA GATE 2026”

**Promotions - Meetings with the invited authors – Conversations -
Book Signings
Meet the Authors**

Tuesday, 6 October



**National Library of Albania, “Sotir Kolea” Center
/ French room**

• **Time 17:00–18:00**

Raluca Nagy, **Teo nga 16 në 18** (TOENA Publishing House)

Panel Raluca Nagy, Majlinda Bami, Maniela Sota, Anja Levanaj, Irena Toçi

Thursay, 8 October



Vila 31 x Art Explora / Workshop Room

• **Time 12:30-13:30**

Rumena Bužarovska, **Toni** (KANDRRA Publishing House)

Panel Rumena Buzarovska, Dritan Sulçebe, Maklena Nika, Sheila Rexho

• **Time 13:30-14:30**

Damir Karakas, **E kremtja** (TOENA Publishing House)

Panel Damir Karakas, Liridon Mulaj, Eris Rusi

• **Time 17:00-18:00**

Ersi Sotiropoulos, **Çfarë mbetet nga nata** (ONUFRI Publishing House)

Panel Ersi Sotiropoulos, Bujar Hudhri, Maklena Nika, Besnik Mustafaj

Friday, 9 October

• **Time 16:00-17:00**

Antonio Caiazza, **Intrigë ndërkombëtare** (TOENA Publishing House)

Panel Antonio Caiazza, Diana Çuli, Eris Rusi, Alessandro Ruggera, Irena Toçi

• **Time 17:00-18:00**

Emilios Solomou, **Mbaje frymën** (TOENA Publishing House)

Panel Emilios Solomou, Kristo Pulla, Besnik Mustafaj, Liridon Mulaj, Anja Levanaj



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