

Speech for the Opening Ceremony of
Frankfurter Buchmesse 2018
Juergen Boos

– Embargoed until 6 pm on 9 October 2018 –

Honoured High Representative of the European Union Federica Mogherini,
Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze,
Prime Minister Bouffier,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Mayor Feldmann,
Esteemed Federal-State- and Local-Government Representatives,
Nino Haratischwili, Aka Morchiladze,
Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

In his treatise *Zum ewigen Frieden (Perpetual Peace)*, Immanuel Kant called for recognising a right to hospitality, a "right of visitation", which everyone enjoys. It is a right, he wrote, that all people can claim given their "common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse". That means: we cannot avoid encountering our fellow human beings, no matter how much their attitudes might diverge from ours.

The idea that we are not only citizens of our own nation but also members of a global community was posited two and a half millennia ago by Socrates. Since then, we have been trying to work out the rules for coexisting together. In his *Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari describes how the earth's societies have become increasingly interdependent over the centuries; in his *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, he soberly notes that the pressing challenges of our time can only be solved on the global level – and today rather than tomorrow.

The global community knew that 70 years ago and in 1948 it put a set of rules in place – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights originated in the western world's darkest hours, against the background of the ruins created by its wars. As Hannah Arendt wrote in 1951, "The right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain whether this is possible." Human rights, as an expression of the hope that we are indeed capable of interacting civilly with each other...

The Universal Declaration is a fragile construct. It requires more than mere ratification. The real work begins afterwards, when we have accepted it as the basis of our shared existence. We have to engage with it dialectically, examining

how we can reconcile this call for universal rights with the cultural and religious differences found in the many regions of the world. Recognising the value of "diversity" is easy enough. Soon, however, trenches have been dug and the parts do not conjoin, at least immediately, to form a whole.

Frankfurter Buchmesse is like a magnifying glass for the global community, a place where viewpoints come together in all their complexity. We guarantee the "hospitality" that Kant desired, the "right to have rights". Dialogue is, for us, the precondition that allows democratic societies to function, one that turns diversity into a vibrant, lived reality.

To convey our position, we, the German publishing industry, together with television broadcasters arte and ZDF and *Der Spiegel*/magazine, and supported by Amnesty International, the United Nations and many other like-minded individuals and organisations, have launched the campaign "On the Same Page". We want to support human rights and use them as the springboard for all that we do. Behind me you can see our logo, which you will encounter in various locations and during various discussions at the fair.

Frankfurter Buchmesse is a place of freedom. Those who make use of our stages must understand that they can do so only because we as a society grant them that freedom. Frankfurter Buchmesse is a place of mutual respect. If people try to abuse our stages or instrumentalise the fair to advance positions that endanger this freedom, we will contradict them – immediately and vehemently! Please note that the emphasis here is on "diction", speaking, speech. After all, violence begins when speech stops. And since we are active not only in Frankfurt, but around the world, it is a stance we will take everywhere and without reservation.

I'm looking forward to the interactions that will take place over the next few days. In the light of that: welcome to Frankfurter Buchmesse!



Georgia
Made by Characters
Guest of Honour
Frankfurter Buchmesse 2018



Embargo date: OCTOBER, 9, 2018, 6.15 P.M.

Aka Morchiladze /ENG

The only reason for my being here now is to grant my timid voice in support of a culture that has the honour to be present at an important platform like the Frankfurt Book Fair, particularly as it is represented here with the status of the guest country of honour.

There are forgotten cultures. There are dead and forgotten cultures that live in universities due to the efforts of individual researchers. And there are great cultures that no one needs as an example, as they have reached very high standards and it is so obvious that they are unattainable that you usually find yourself in awkward situations.

Among many such deaths and lives and simplicities and sophistications, there are ancient cultures that are either absolutely unknown to the present-day world or known to individual well-wishers. They have not died and have survived to the 21st century thanks to some supreme miracles.

It is a blessing to represent such a culture and to be able to say a couple of words about it.

The remote and unfamiliar culture may mean nothing for most people in the world, but it means not only "something", but also life for Georgians, because the history of Georgia that is equally unknown and mostly viewed in terms of politics has known centuries, when its existence or inexistence was determined precisely by its culture. The culture is stubborn, strange, and extremely humanist. It has been distorted many times, but it has nevertheless continued to be Georgian culture.

This is our history - ancient and full of blood and hardships, a story of sustaining oneself and surviving. Culture, together with other non-material assets, has been its positive side.

To put it short in order not to make you weary of the drama, we have Georgian literature here. It is 1,500 years old and it is not a short time to think about what is valuable in it and what is not.

Like any other literature, Georgian literature also focuses on people. The first story that was written by a 5th-century author would be quite understandable and worth of discussion in the present-day world. It is about woman and man, family, fidelity and politics, God, faith, and unswerving honesty.

All this is described in such a manner that it is easy to understand that not much has changed in the hearts and spirits of people over these 15 centuries.

Georgian literature is a part of Georgian culture that has been created with the Georgian alphabet, which is an ancient saviour of Georgia, both its people and culture. This is a great history. It is big luxury to have your own alphabet, none of whose letters is familiar to anyone. This is a major secret and pride. This is entertaining: It is cool to see people looking with astonishment at something written in Georgian. This is a small advantage a small country can have.



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10-14 October 2018
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Guest of Honour Georgia

It is with this alphabet that we write our prose and our history and this alphabet is probably one of the things that make us eternal. However, Georgia is a country of poetry. There is a joke saying that in the times of hardships and wars, it was not easy to write a novel, while a poem could be kept on a piece of paper that you placed on your knee, when writing it.

Even novels were written in verse in Georgia and history would also be preserved in the same form. There were poems everywhere - on the trees, handkerchiefs, drinking vessels, and desks. This is a strange tradition, which needs more work than just telling a story, but it is a standard. Poetry is high and to live in it is more than just to live.

Up to the present time, a poet was a figure in Georgia, who convinced people that their existence was joyful and unique, that their thoughts were genuine and sincere thoughts, and that art was something great.

You were aware that you were unable to do something, but there was a person, who conveyed your thoughts and sentiments for you. He expressed them, because you would never be able to express them to the same extent and with the same skill. A poet was such a person that in the country that had the 20-centuries-old tradition of absolute monarchy, kings were also among best poets. Compared to the concepts, where some lords concealed their being Shakespeares, the Georgian kings' being poets was often better than their everyday royal routine, while they were still alive. However, like everything in Georgia, this is a long and peculiar story, too.

Of course, you can familiarise yourself with Georgia by travelling there.

However, it would nevertheless be better if Georgian literature told you what it has always had to say. It is about love, friendship, difficulties, death and life, war and peace, pain and joy, humour and tragedy, which are inseparable parts of our life like they are of your life and we can speak about and narrate this like not many in the world. We have centuries old traditions of doing this, but they are unknown to the world. Our literature is both our confession and our dream.

And since we are here today, I would also like to say that yes, poets and writers have always been major beloved heroes in Georgia - as they say today, recognisable faces. However, this has rarely made them happy. Their business has never protected them from hardships.

Today, like 70 or 220 years ago, a Georgian author can fall victim to his creation. He may have to search for some non-creative ways out or find shelter abroad. He may receive a puncher or public rage may force him to walk in the streets with his cap covering his eyes. However, despite great historic storms and changes, writers in Georgia continue to be absolutely special figures, who are always at some place, where everyone never is and at the same time, they are always at the place, where everyone gathers.

The spoken word prevails.



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Nino Haratishwili / ENG

It is impossible to talk about people without talking about borders. People, societies, and nations have always defined themselves through borders, as they shape our identities.

However, our world is really obsessed with this concept these days. We are divided in here and there, in right and wrong, and in us and the others. Exclusion has become presentable. It seems to be permissible to discuss whether people should be allowed to be drowned in their bitterest struggle for survival. And that is only possible because there is always a boundary between us and the others. This border is sometimes marked with barbed wire, but it is mostly invisible somewhere between our heads and our ribs.

I am often asked, why I write in German or what nationality I define for myself. I can only say that my identity - and probably those of many others - has become fluid, and when I am asked who I am, German or Georgian, I do not have to decide and, in addition, I do not want to... Because where there are no borders, there is no either-or.

I write in German, because I can write in German, because I love this language, and because I believe that I can tell my Georgian stories in German much more precisely. I do this, because I was given the opportunity to learn the language and become part of this culture. Literature has made an enormous contribution to this. In the books I read in German, I never felt alien. When reading, I was always able to become part of the book and of that new culture.

Yes, I am convinced that literature can build these bridges, because it is not caught within borders. When we empathise with someone else, we can empathise with what it feels like on the other side, and we discover ourselves anew in the relativisation of ourselves.

We also seem to be able to forget the deeply human capacity of empathy. However, good books can evoke it back in us anytime.

When I started to write, I was a Georgian author in public perception. Later, I became a German-Georgian and then German. Strangely enough, the latter was due to a book of 1278 pages dealing with Georgia. I became affiliated by telling a story of a seemingly foreign country.

Over the past 27 years, Georgia has been fighting for its own identity it has claimed since the antiquity and defended against all occupiers throughout the centuries. And even there, many forget that identity is not something ossified within narrow limits, that things and times must change and they do change, and that the richness of Georgian culture grew out of being permeable and perhaps brave, taking in foreign ideas and mixing with its own in its search for novelties.

That is why all those Georgians, who have the courage to question borders day after day, deserve openness and sympathy of others and interest from the middle of Europe, just as Europe may need to be reminded that others are not that different.

And I believe that just as literature became a bridge for me personally, it can also connect countries.



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Georgia has many stories to tell. They are full of tragedy and full of cruelty, but also full of humour, because such was the life over the past 100 years. They are stories of upheavals, occupation, and dead hopes, stories full of longings and prohibitions, stories of improvisation and survival strategies, stories full of confidence, stories of war and loss, sadness and lack of prospects, but at the same time, stories full of courage and optimism, full of laughter, full of comedy, and full of wonderful people.

And so I want to end with one Georgian story:

On the Russian-Georgian border in the Tskhinvali region, South Ossetia, part of Georgia under international law controlled by Russia, there has been a creeping border since 2008. The term describes a situation, where Russian barbed wires secretly advance every month, if not every week. So, for example, a Georgian farmer, who thought he was safe and at home, found himself in an occupied area one day.

The story of that farmer from a border village, who suddenly awakened on the enemy's territory in the morning of a sunny day and refused, despite all the entreating of his family, to leave his house and yard, but above all his son's grave, has deeply touched me.

I can see this farmer in front of my eyes resolved to fight, being aware that it is impossible to win a victory. I can see an old man branded by sun and fieldwork and many privations, who faces a young Russian soldier and explains why it is impossible for him to leave this place, where he has lived his life and buried his son. In my imagination, he explains it calmly and thoughtfully, repeating his words over and over again.

And by not accepting this border and questioning it, he exposes it in all its ridiculousness. And since he remains friendly and perhaps even laughs, simply not abiding by the laws of the border, the soldier may have no other choice but to give up. Perhaps he thinks for himself: "Let him stay, the harmless, crazy grandpa", failing to realise that his rifle and he himself have lost all power.

And without the soldier noticing it, he becomes a character of a story.

I do not know if my version of this story is true, and ultimately, it is irrelevant. I just want to believe in it, because as Chekhov put it:

"People who are right write bad books."

And so I hope that here in Frankfurt, many stories from Georgia may overcome boundaries.

The spoken word prevails.

FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2018
Official Opening, 9 October 2018
Congress Center

Speech by Heinrich Riethmüller,
Chairman, Börsenverein des
Deutschen Buchhandels

– The spoken word takes precedence –

Dear Friends and Colleagues from all over the world,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Almost seventy years ago, on 10 December 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris. Shortly after that, on 16 September 1949, more than 1,000 guests gathered in the Church of St. Paul in Frankfurt to celebrate the opening of the first Frankfurt Book Fair in the post-war era. Seventy years of universal human rights and seventy years of the Frankfurt Book Fair – these are two very good reasons to celebrate. And we intend to do just that at this year's fair under the motto "On the Same Page." However, this year also provides an occasion to scrutinise and reflect upon ourselves and our society. As we all know, human rights are still being violated and disregarded across the globe today. For this reason, we want to take this opportunity to express our firm commitment to human rights and remind ourselves that they cannot be taken for granted. I am "on the same page".

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the publishers and booksellers who make up the Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels, I would like to welcome you to the opening of the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair. Over the course of the next five days, presenters and attendees will be discussing the state of our world today, including all the latest social developments and political controversies. We will also be focusing on the current licensing business, the wide variety of new releases and the simple joys of telling and listening to stories.

I would like to extend a very special welcome to the representatives of this year's Guest of Honour, Georgia. Georgia is a country with a centuries-old history and culture, a nation that is just as diverse and distinctive as the Georgian language's unique alphabet – those 33 letters or "characters" that run like a red thread through the programme organised by our guest country this year. I am very much looking forward to gaining deeper insights into the literature and culture of this multifaceted country and to many fruitful conversations with our friends from Georgia. I believe that our two countries are bound by something very fundamental; I believe that we, too, are "on the same page".

As a common idiom, the motto marking the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – "On the Same Page" – thrives on its double meaning. On the one hand, we could translate the phrase into German to mean "we are in agreement" and "we are standing on the same side". On the other hand, a strict literal translation of the phrase would refer to this page not as a "side", but instead as the pages of a book; of course, seeing as we are all book people, this last interpretation is naturally the closest to our hearts. And tonight I would indeed like to interpret this motto in its literal sense. What do the pages of a book contain? Stories, of course. Whether it's a novel, a work of non-fiction or a travel guide, every text and every page tells a story. And not just every text, but every utterance, every attitude and every activity is either part of a narrative or helps to create a new one.

With this in mind, I would like to ask all of us here tonight the following question: What kinds of stories do we want to fill our pages with? What kinds of stories do we want to tell our contemporaries, our children, ourselves? Do we want to spin tales that degrade people and things that are foreign? Tales that deny individuals their humanity and deprive them of their rights and dignity? Tales that refer to asylum seekers as people "immigrating into our social system"? Tales that insist Germany faces the threat of "Islamisation" by accepting Muslims into its cities and towns? Tales of "asylum tourism" told by a Bavarian Minister President that depict our fellow human beings' flight from persecution and war as if it were a Sunday outing rather than a life-and-death situation?

Or do we want to foster a narrative that speaks of humanity, respect and the appreciation of diversity? Stories, for example, that call attention to the thousands of people taking to the streets in many cities to peacefully protest in support of an open and tolerant society? Stories that tell of promising integration projects and how people continue to work together – in spite of all existing problems and challenges – on solutions for immigration in cities and municipalities that can help us move forward as a cohesive society?

The first line of Article 1 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". This sentence proclaims a specific narrative, and the declarations subsequent 29 articles continue that narrative: they include the right to life, liberty, equal treatment, education, work, social security, protection against discrimination and torture as well as the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, artistic production, opinion and expression. This declaration adopted 70 years ago has since been signed by 147 countries, and it tells the story of freedom, equality and respect. It forms the foundation of peaceful coexistence in a free and democratic society. However, a quick glance around us in the world today is enough to show us that we are often very far removed from this story. We need to urgently revisit human rights. We have a responsibility to actively defend them every day.

Tonight, we will be hearing from Nino Haratischwili – an author whom I admire tremendously – as a speaker for our Guest of Honour, Georgia. Haratischwili is someone who knows about the strength and the power of stories. In fact, she possesses the great gift of being able to convey world history in the form of stories, thereby sharpening and even changing our view of a part of the world. In her novel *Das achte Leben* (tr: The eighth life), she sketches the lives of one single family, thereby creating a panorama of her entire homeland during the Soviet era, which she describes as a century that "cheated and deceived everyone". Indeed, all of Haratischwili's figures are swindled and betrayed: cheated of their freedoms and dreams and their hopes for lasting happiness and any sense of humanity. But there are also small stories that inspire hope – stories of friendship, love and solidarity.

We are "on the same page" – but what "side" are we on? I can say with confidence that I want to stand on the side that tells stories of hope, diversity and respect. I want to stand on the side of human rights. And I am sure that many people in our business feel the same way. As a book industry, it is our duty and our responsibility to contribute to a free and democratic society and to live out our commitment to human rights.

Of utmost importance to all of us working in the realm of culture and the media is Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrines the right to "freedom of opinion and

expression" including the "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". Were it not for this article and its related human rights, this book fair would not be permitted to take place. Without these freedoms, it would be impossible for us to gather here to showcase and discover books of all shapes and colours, to listen to the opinions of a wide range of individuals and to debate controversial themes. The Frankfurt Book Fair is the world's largest marketplace for content and ideas. And books continue to be the most outstanding instrument we have in our quest to give form to thought, to create stories and initiate social debate.

This status of books has not changed to this day. In fact, the large survey of book buyers we published this year shows that people continue to value books very highly, but that many respondents have lost contact to books because they are being bombarded mentally by other media in their everyday lives. As we all know, the constant availability of information and the rapid pace of life resulting from social media only serve to increase the stress and pressure placed on individuals. In spite of these forces, the interest and even the longing for books is definitely present; many of the respondents longed to be able to engage more deeply with books and their content, and thereby experience a "deceleration" and a "break" from everyday life. We can help to awaken this yearning and make it even stronger. Today, it is up to all of us to bring people back into contact with books and re-establish that deep connection.

In Germany, we are in the very fortunate position of having access to almost all of the books in publication today. This is a privilege. Although the freedom of the word is an essential human right, it is also one of the human rights most often violated in the world to this day. So far this year, 60 journalists and media professionals and 10 bloggers and citizen journalists have been killed, while 155 journalists, 19 media professionals and 142 bloggers and citizen journalists are currently in prison. These numbers are drawn from the organisation known as Reporters without Borders. And these are just the numbers for journalists, and only those who have received a bill of indictment.

We continue to be particularly concerned with the situation in Turkey – a country with which Germany has had a special relationship for decades. Roughly 3 million people with Turkish roots live in Germany. And please allow me to add one name to that list: Deniz Yücel, who was released from prison in Turkey this year, but who is still charged with propaganda in support of a terror organisation and inciting the public to violence. And another name, that of Aslı Erdoğan, who was also released from prison but continues to face life imprisonment and today lives in exile in Frankfurt. Only last week, an appeals court upheld the life sentence of journalist and author Ahmet Altan. He is still in jail, alongside hundreds of other cultural and media professionals and seven individuals with German citizenship. In this matter, regardless of President Erdoğan's wishes, we are still very far from a normalisation of the relationship between Turkey and Germany.

Turkey was one of the first signatories of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Today, however, large sections of the UN declaration are no longer valid in that country. For this reason, all of us in the book industry would like to make the following urgent appeal: President Erdoğan, if you stand on the side of human rights, you must immediately release all of the authors, journalists, publishers, cultural professionals and political prisoners in jail in your country. You must stop the persecution of critical voices and dissenters. This appeal goes out to the president of Turkey, but also to all of those

despots across the globe – in Saudi Arabia, China, Russia, Nicaragua and the US – who attack human rights and interpret them solely for their own benefit.

We are “on the same page”. Indeed, pages are our core business. Pages are what we are good at. Pages are what we love to do. I urge all of us to utilise our abilities and our active commitment to generate stories and share narratives that convey our view of the world: stories that serve to include rather than exclude, stories that celebrate diversity and respect for those who enrich our lives. Human rights must forever be strengthened, filled with new life and carried forward into the future. On our pages and on our side.