

# MANIFESTO FOR THE EUROPEAN WRITERS' CONFERENCE 2014



For me, Europe is a continent of stories.  
Every place, in the center as well as at the peripheries, the magic of storytelling is present in different ways.  
The novel is Europe's collective memory.  
Its future is its own fantasy and imagination.

## **Michal Hvorecký**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Doris Kouba

Europe is a solitary field of reality, a glass boundary of dream – box inside a box through the mirror of history, echo of my unborn children – time inside my unbuilt home.

## **Nikola Madzirov**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Benjamin Langer

As a child and young woman, "Europe" meant European literature to me. The ideal Europe, the real Europe one could believe in, despite the real Europe of Nazism and Bolshevism, a Europe I actually lived in. For me, poetry was truth, despite all the realities. The promise of a better world.

## **Ágnes Heller**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

We stopped telling moving stories to each other. Instead, we nourish ourselves and the world around us with conspiracy theories (which are always about the big and powerful, instead of the small and humane), sensationalist stuff, and crime or horror stories. In doing so, we are at the peril of stepping away from inmost European sensibilities, one of which has always been and continues to be the legitimacy of opposing narratives, attitudes, and memories. Human beings are incomplete without one another.

## **Leonidas Donskis**

Maybe that's the biggest dream: a continent reconciled with itself, because every citizen of every village, in every province, in every country has made peace with itself and its history. And tells it. In its own language.  
If *t h a t* would be Europe, how nice that would be!

## **Mely Kiyak**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

In 1987, when my grandmother, a simple woman from the village, was lying sick in bed with cancer, and felt her time was coming to an end, she suddenly said to me. "What do people in Paris look like? I hope, my child, at least once in your life you will be able to see grand Europe. I probably never will." She ended the conversation as suddenly as she had started it and became absorbed in her thoughts.

At that time, I was a 16-year-old high school student, surprised and frightened by her thoughts that she had confided to me so close to the end, I continued stirring the "Qumështor," until the creamy pudding cake slowly began to boil, and did not answer. In the circling white mass, I tried to create a picture of Paris in my mind. In vain. Where is Europe? Geographically, I knew it, yet it was as far away as a different planet. I, and many Albanians, could only dream of it.

This scene slumbered long in my memory, and eight years later, in 1995, it was vividly reawakened at the passport control, where I had to show my passport. It was being carefully scrutinized by the officer, until he was convinced it was: no false passport, no bought visa, not a dangerous guy. Go ahead!

I did not walk in the Paris my grandmother had secretly dreamed of, but at least I wandered the streets of a European city. And I did not have to transform into a bird to cross the border as Ismail Kadare wrote, where in a sealed off Albania, "...only the birds cross the borders". I had finally made it to the place my grandmother only silently had dreamed of. Bemused by the flood of European impressions, by the indifferent people running around, clean streets, an infrastructure that worked perfectly like a Swiss clock. Ostentatiously affluent, it seemed as unshakable as a fortress. It silently rejected me, but it was unmistakable. This is Europe, I took a deep breath! I had entered, but certainly had not arrived! That's how it was back then!

Today this Europe is for me a reality that I experience daily, but somehow it seems to have still remained a dream. Especially, in the last few years. And not just for me. And perhaps today more distinctly than ever!

### **Lindita Arapi**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

Europe is a matter of human affairs. The future of Europe lies in taking care of one another, sharing the pain, protecting the environment and making sure we do not neglect each other's sorrow.

### **Lal Laleş**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Mely Kiyak

The idea of Europe, at the very least, is for me a form of cultural and civic refuge, just as a forest or a lake might be a refuge to a nature lover. This refuge offers diversity, cultural riches, linguistic, ethnic and historical complexity, a vision of the future that might, if we are lucky, become truly ecocritical and respectful of the environment and of social justice. Whether these possibilities belong only to an idea remains to be seen, and I take it as given that every actual state is corrupt, but if we fail to imagine ways in which ideas can be made to transcend the interests of actual states – and the financial and power interests who control them – then we condemn ourselves to live without honour, as isolated, contingent and craven interest groups.

### **John Burnside**

The mere thought that our continent's namesake had been abducted from present-day Syria, should make us pause and reflect on how we, here, deal with conflicts and its victims.

Europe started with the deceit and theft by a horny god-king, not a happy founding myth. And it is, also, certainly a warning to the gullible and self-righteous against having cultural arrogance. Lucid contemplation over the meaning of our existence began here on this continent, but it was also here that more sinister atrocities were committed than any poet could imagine. We need to preserve this as our legacy.

The idea of Europe will not rid the world of evil. But it can, and will, encourage those who are trying to preserve what is good, because they know one has to act as if it would be possible; that one must think as if it is a rational problem; and one has to write as though the imperatives of an education of the heart were universally valid. This, too, is a European tradition, seen closely it is the very best.

### **Tilman Spengler**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

If the European project meant the opening of borders for my generation, breaking down the walls, the expansion of the world, i.e. freedom, then nationalism is nothing more than a voluntary return to a lack of freedom.

**György Dalos**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

My early experience of Europe – a long wait at the borders;  
My new experience – the borders are open, but Europe is closed.

**Maja Haderlap**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

Europe should stand for a safe home for all Europeans rather than being a sadistic tool for imposing unachievable standards and tasks by the rich and powerful to (economically) weaker countries; moreover, Europe should never forget that it is not a state of mind (of the few), but a continent.

**Vladimir Arsenijević**

There are two categories of states in Europe: the small ones, and those which have not yet understood that they are small. And only together can they become bigger than they actually are.

**Richard Swartz**

Europe. So much chatter, so many wasted words, regulations, agreements, memos...nobody seems to remember the ideas that inspired Altiero Spinelli and Jean Monnet and laid the foundation for the Treaty of Rome – the vision of an independent Europe, of solidarity and mutual support.

I have my own story about Europe, one that to my mind is a fitting symbol of this fragile union, a union that seems to have been created only to be betrayed. Right after the Civil War, in a Greece that was devastated and politically oppressed, some parents gave their daughters names that expressed their unfulfilled wishes, their hurt feelings or their hopes. If it was possible to change the world with a name, they were ready to do it. So among a few muses – Calliopi, Melpomeni – and many Marias, there appeared some small Laokratias (People Power) and Eleftherias (Freedom).

Several years later, at my elementary school in Patras, a new student showed up in our class, a dark, skinny girl. All the other kids made fun of her name – “Europa”. Her family had crossed the border twice, so they had lived doubly stigmatized lives: first as exiles in Bulgaria after the Civil War and then as refugees in their own country. Who knows what dreams her parents had when they gave her that name? I still wonder.

**Ersi Sotiropoulos**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Doris Wille

“Europe” originated from a deep desire to prevent further terrible shedding of blood and slaughter of souls as have been seen in the Great World Wars – and that should remain the light by which it functions.

**Anneke Brassinga**

What people have lost in their countries due to poverty, discrimination or an undemocratic system, they hope to recover in Europe. Europe is the final frontier for these people.

**Şeyhmus Diken**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Hüseyin Yıldız

My father had to answer a questionnaire to have a future in Europe.

Date of arrival in France, with or without permission:

7.IV.1959, without permission.

Original Occupation:

Auto electrician, driver.

Language skills (underline first language):

Croatian.

Why did you come to France?

My brother is here, this is a developed country, and I hope you will allow me to stay here.

Under what conditions (work permit, illegal, pass)?

Illegal.

Why don't you want to return to your homeland?

Because of the Communist politics in Yugoslavia.

What personal documents do you have?

The Yugoslavian international driving license.

A short time later, my father received political asylum in France. Worked in a junkyard and in a slaughterhouse. Fell in love with a German woman, went to Germany, became a father, German, aircraft technician working abroad for Lufthansa. His son grew up in Yugoslavia, Sweden, Greece, Russia and Germany, was the first in the family to study, and is now a father of two sons born in Berlin and named Ljubić. These are the stories that make Europe what it is today. Stories of escape and asylum, opportunities, and faith in possibilities. Europe must remain open to such stories; otherwise it will lose its identity.

**Nicol Ljubić**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

Europa is a destiny.

An island where somebody left us.

People still die for Europe on the island that no one sees.

**Alhierd Bacharevič**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

This is how I imagine Europe: there is a musical score that consists of the Constitution of fundamental laws and rights; there is a story, but it is not complete and it has not been written who performs it. The way this Europe sounds will change, depending on which instruments perform it; and yet it will always remain the sound of Europe.

**Carolin Emcke**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

My first association with the word Europe is of a geographic area that I knew from the school Atlas. But more importantly, Europe is a large cultural space with similar or different languages, with similar or different customs, myths and stories. Today, the term Europe is associated with the European Union, and we from the Balkans stand across from it on the poorer side with the border secured by a barbed wire. A united Europe represents a kind of heaven on earth for us. Until recently, we needed visas to enter this paradise, now we don't need one, so we should consider ourselves lucky that we have moved up from third-class to second-class Europeans. My primary identity is that of a Balkan and if part of it should be a European identity, then I am also European.

**Faruk Šehić**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Brigitte Döbert

One can't talk on the decline of Europe until Europe boasts people ready to die for democracy, for rule of law, and for human rights, as it's been on Kyiv Maidan this winter.

**Oksana Sabuschko**

Europe – this is the Russian myth of human life.

**Michail Schischkin**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

**EUROPE**

You take aim at the sneering face of the winter sun  
and you shoot. It hasn't rained in months – have you noticed?  
Even the skies are giving up on you. And yet you shoot, that's all you do.  
You're mistaken, Europe. You've grown old ungraciously, you've unlearned humility.  
It's not at the sneer that you shoot, not at the winter,  
not even at oddity, or despair.  
You shoot at the light.  
You can throw anything at our faces, Europe: bombs, words, budgets.  
You can even throw a member of parliament, a summit, at our faces.  
But your children don't want neckties. Your children want peace.  
Your children don't want to be spoon fed. Your children want to work.  
It hasn't rained in months – have you noticed?  
The land is dry. Not even in her embrace can we find rest.  
While I'm writing to you, Europe, you're still into your accountancy.  
Who owes. Who lends. Who pays.  
But your children are hungry, tired. They feel frightened in the dark.  
Your children need you to sing them a lullaby.  
I trusted you and you robbed the future from me and my brothers.  
If we are silent it's because, contrary to your gesture, Europe,  
we choose not to shoot.

**Filipa Leal**

Translation: Ana Hudson

Europe begins where human trafficking ends.

Europe begins when East and West, North and South merely refer to points of the compass.

Europe begins when race and gender are nothing but flowing attributes of beauty, like eye color, like hair.

Europe begins where our prejudices end.

**Antje Rávic Strubel**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

Fuck you, Europa

Europa – American Dream

Europe – freedom in instalments

**Nicoleta Esinencu**

Here is what Europe should never become: a worm and comfortable museum of abandoned european values.

**Andrej Nikolaidis**

Europe needs to be subversive for it to be exciting again...

**Florence Noiville**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Samir Sellami

Europe today represents a unique model of civilization that enjoys recognition and admiration in large parts of the non-European world. But the charisma that the European model has for many emerging countries is barely perceived in Europe itself. Are Europeans in the process of squandering the European project and the hopes it awakens from a lack of interest, selfishness, and being oblivious to the world around them?

**Peter Schneider**

Translation: Zaia Alexander

The question, now, is whether we will be able to infuse the European project with hope and give the people a future. Until the end of the 20th century, the European project was mostly turned towards the past as a way of preventing wars on the continent. During the second phase, it used this memory to justify a liberal turn. In the process, the European Union has betrayed many of the ideals for which it was conceived. We have to reformulate those ideals for the 21st century: human dignity, social justice, democracy, and do so by inventing a pedagogic system, a school that teaches political thought to prepare children to inhabit a space beyond identities, nations, and linguistic differences. It means joining forces with a, "migrant Europe", a "cosmopolitan and intellectual Europe" and a "Europe of social and environmental rage", these are the steps towards building a new hope. This horizon is worth fighting for, whether inside or outside of the actual European institutions.

**Camille de Toledo**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Samir Sellami

Europe is the rich uncle from Berlin and the pretty aunt from France. Europe is the eccentric cousin from Amsterdam. Europe is evidence to the contrary (usually in intimate encounters) a stereotype. The center of Europe is in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Crimea and Ukraine.

**Ivana Simić Bodrožić**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Brigitte Döbert

Europe, you can only see it from across the ocean. You can see Europe clearly from Beijing, Buenos Aires or even Kinshasa. But you can't see Europe from Berlin, Ljubljana, Odessa or Sarajevo, because there is just too much Germany, Slovenia, Ukraine and Bosnia standing in your way. That is why people in Europe do not have the slightest idea what Europe looks like; they don't know where it begins or where it ends; they don't know who these famous Europeans are, or what are they like, or what they are supposed to be. That is why Europe is still Europe's biggest mystery.

**Goran Vojnović**

Translation: Zaia Alexander, Ann Catrin Apstein-Müller

Dear World,  
Kiss a European;  
They need it.

Dear Europe,  
Kiss the world;  
You need it.

**Janne Teller**

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