

## **1011 Translations**

### **An analysis of the Creative Europe literary translation programme, 2014-2015**

The agency that executes the Creative Europe programme has lately complemented the results of the selection results of the 2014 translation grants with a few more publishers. The adjusted score of that year is translation grants to 498 books written by 397 authors.

In 2015, the second year of the current seven-year period, the number of supported translations grew to 513 books of 364 authors. This shows certain concentration: fewer authors but more titles. Concentration is usually welcome; this time, however, it is not necessarily an improvement. The examination of the list reveals one more step away from what in my eyes could be the most important aim of the programme.

Before specifying this critical statement, and telling what else the Budapest Observatory found at examining the combined list of 1011 books from 675 authors, let us identify the conceived functions of the Creative Europe literary translation programme:

1. Reward publishers that publish European literature in translation
2. Reward literary translators
3. Increase the diversity of the literary offer on European markets
4. Help literatures in less spread languages to the mainstream
5. Give sense to the European Union Prize for Literature

There is little to add to the first three items. They are important and useful for celebrating the cause of literary translation. The grants help maintain, or even newly establish reciprocal literary connections between smaller language communities in Europe. Furthermore, rewarding publishers is also a boost to an important segment of the cultural industries.

We shall dwell somewhat longer on the remaining two functions.

#### **A prize for emerging writers**

Certain misunderstanding prevails around the European Union Prize for Literature. The outsider may take it for a kind of Oscar, an award given to the year's best literary work selected through multiple steps. Instead, it is a promotion tool, offered annually to a dozen books by emerging authors selected by their national communities. At first BO was sceptical about the impact (and critical about the lack of clarity about the true nature of the prize), but the Creative Europe literary translation programme has been justifying the initiative.

The programme offers priority to the holders of the prize, even years after it was bestowed. So far, so good. The prize may lack the desired glamour but the preference that the winning titles enjoy at the translation programme is a substantial bonus.

The list of approved translations in the second year, however, is dominated by prize winning books to such a degree which hampers the diversity of the selection. EU prize winners represent as many as 30% of translations in 2015. While in 2014 no writer had more than five translations, the 2015 list is topped by seven such authors, all of them thanks to the EU prize; two of such titles will be translated into eight different languages.

This is why one cannot welcome the concentration that occurred in 2015. Chances for the rest of the literary offer are reduced, including books that are valued really the highest on the respective literary communities. Not to speak of recent and older classics.

### **Access to the limelight**

Helping smaller spread language communities to gain direct access to one another's literary production is indeed an absolutely essential service that the Creative Europe programme should and does render. No matter how unconventional the following selected examples from these two years may look, they constitute the very essence of European cultural cooperation.

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Number of translations</b>
Finnish	Slovenian	4
Danish	Macedonian	3
Catalan	Croatian	2
Catalan	Slovenian	2
Estonian	Bulgarian	2
Lithuanian	Slovenian	2
Maltese	Macedonian	2

These examples, however, are smaller in number than cases where the necessity of European funding is less obvious, no matter if we know that producing quality translation of a quality work is often an enormous burden to a niche independent publisher in an otherwise affluent country.

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Number of translations</b>
Swedish	Finnish	5
English	German	4
Norwegian	English	4
French	English	3
Swedish	English	3
English	Dutch	2
English	Finnish	2

But even these items are a minor segment of the 1011 translation cases of the two years. The huge majority is books born in the centre and translated to the readers in the peripheries. In such a dimension this is dysfunctional, a reinforcement of historic intellectual imbalances,.

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Number of translations</b>
English	Bulgarian	20
French	Bulgarian	20
English	Serbian	17
German	Italian	16
English	Macedonian	14
English	Slovenian	14
Italian	Albanian	13
French	Serbian	12
German	Bulgarian	12
German	Hungarian	12
English	Albanian	11
English	Spanish	11
French	Albanian	11
Italian	Macedonian	11

Notwithstanding that a considerable part, perhaps the great majority of publishers on the geographic margins use the opportunity of the EU grant to raise high the level of translation of carefully chosen quality literature, the proportion of this centrifugal effect in the total of 1011 translations is an exaggeration.

This is especially true and painful if we look for the opposite direction, the translation of works born on the peripheries into the centre of attention. With due respect to the vigorous and powerful literary markets in France and Germany, these days the shortest way to the mainstream is an introduction into the English language market. I mean the market, and not just the English language, which no doubt is the primary condition. Yet unless the translated works are professionally marketed and distributed in the English language market, the impact is close to nothing.

Browsing the lists of the two years, altogether fifteen instances appear to meet the requirements that warrant a modest access to the international readership. Fifteen out of 1011, and frankly, only one or two of them suggest chances of competitive presence on the European literary arena, most certainly the Gallegan volume to be published by a multinational house. (We noted that some books published in Slovenia have arrangements to be distributed in the UK as well as in the global sales networks.)

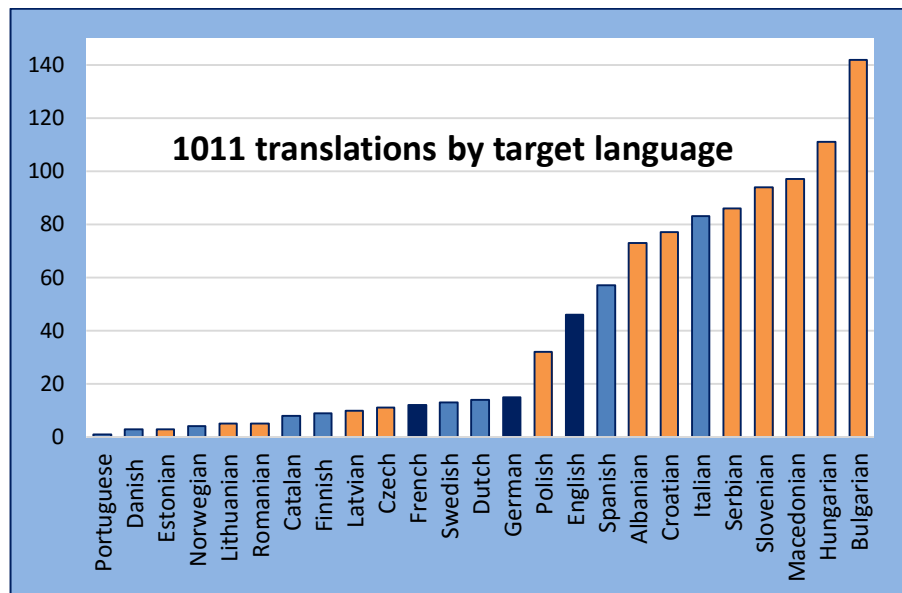
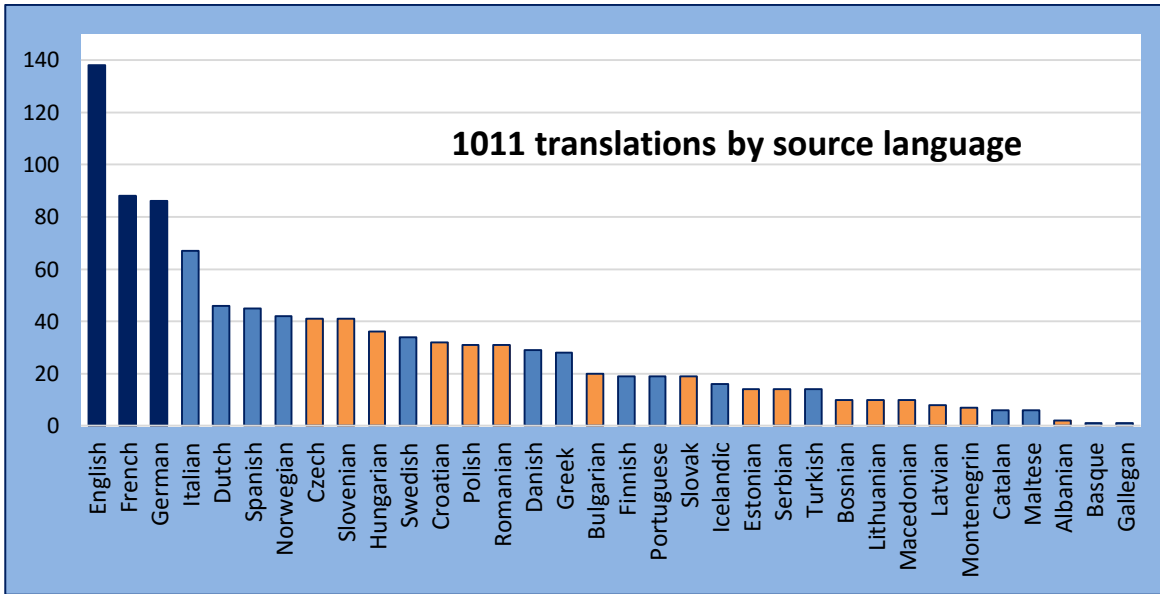
<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Into</b>
Anton Baláž	Tábor padlých žien	Slovak	English
Gabriela Babnik	Sušna doba	Slovenian	
Dimitar Baševski	Bunar	Macedonian	
Muharem Bazdulj	Giaour and Zuleika	Bosnian	
Laslo Blašković	Madonin nakit	Serbian	
Yana Bukova	A as anything	Bulgarian	
Daša Drndić	Belladonna	Croatian	
Jela Krecic	Ni druge	Slovenian	
Josip Murn	Topol Samujoč	Slovenian	
Ioana Pârvulescu	Viața începe vineri	Romanian	
Manuel Rivas	As voces baixas	Gallegan	
Dušan Šarotar	Panorama	Slovenian	
Faruk Šehić	Knjiga o Uni	Bosnian	
Jani Virk	Zadnja Sergijeva skušnjava	Slovenian	
Goran Vojnovic	Jugoslavija, moja dezela	Slovenian	

Indeed, the resources of the Creative Europe programme should be geared better to bringing works of smaller literary communities to the limelight. This may not deduced from the basic documents of the programme – nevertheless common sense legitimates. The emphasis can and should be switched accordingly within the constraints of the prevailing terms of reference in order that the opportunity was not entirely missed.

### **The full panorama**

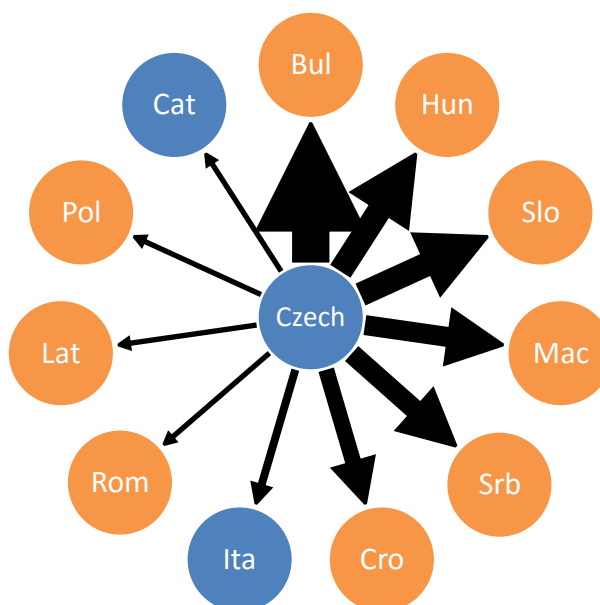
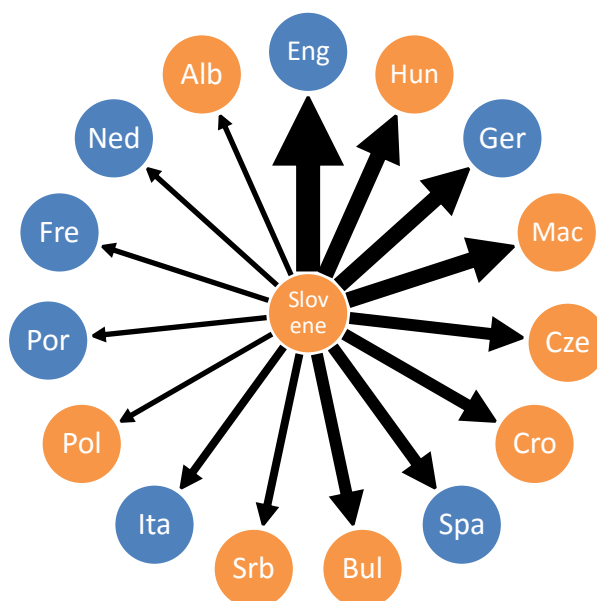
We should have started the analysis by presenting the broader panorama of the 1011 translation grants in 2014-2015 ; now here it comes.

The pair of graphs expresses the main character of the translation programme. The European Commission spends the most on translating western, especially English books into the languages of the eastern member states. Into Bulgarian, ahead of everyone else.



Compared to its size, Slovenia is excelling both in applying for grants to translate literature into Slovenian, and in achieving the translation of its authors into other languages. Moreover, the spread of 40 translations from the Slovene language shows a healthier balance than the 41 instances from Czech. These two literatures were selected for translation in the greatest number from the eastern member states.

The thickness of the arrows is in proportion to the number of titles translated into the respective foreign language.



**The most successful authors**

Among the 675 authors there were 75 from whom at least one book was selected in both years. The list is led by two ladies with ten translations each. (Source language in brackets.)

Marica Bodrožić	(German)	10
Ioana Pârvulescu	(Romanian)	10
Milen Ruskov	(Bulgarian)	9
Gabriela Babnik	(Slovenian)	8
Karl Ove Knausgård	(Norwegian)	8
Evie Wyld	(English)	8

The real champion of the literary translation programme is nevertheless Karl Ove Knausgård from Norway. His full record is the most diverse among all translated writers in the course of the two years (even if we conclude that 3 of the 5 titles are volumes of the same autobiographic novel).

Karl Ove Knausgård	(Norwegian)	5 titles	8 translations	4 languages
László Krasznahorkai	(Hungarian)	3 titles	6 translations	4 languages
Peter Terrin	(Dutch)	3 titles	5 translations	5 languages
Colm Tóibín	(English)	3 titles	4 translations	4 languages
Drago Jančar	(Slovenian)	3 titles	4 translations	4 languages
Emmanuelle Pagano	(French)	3 titles	4 translations	4 languages
Alessandro Baricco	(Italian)	3 titles	3 translations	3 languages
Arnon Grunberg	(Dutch)	3 titles	3 translations	3 languages
José Saramago	(Portuguese)	3 titles	3 translations	3 languages

The fact that the literary translation programme of the European Commission has remained largely unchanged since 1997 when it began as part of the Ariane Programme proves the importance and popularity of the initiative. We wish its potential could be geared more consciously and effectively towards enhancing a greater diversity in European literature, by reducing the centrifugal tendencies for sake of helping more authors in smaller languages to centre stage. That aim does not necessarily require changing the criteria, a shift of emphasis in the selection procedure could also considerably improve the balance.