

5. TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

for a future strategy for Bulgarian literature in translation

This final part of the analysis outlines a possible strategy for introducing Bulgarian literature to foreign audiences. It identifies a number of specific challenges, as well as general strategic approaches, offering a list of tools compiled based on the interviews and the analysis of good practices in other European countries.¹

The recommendations are aimed mainly at the public bodies whose mandate should be to lay the groundwork for cultural development and growth in Bulgaria. At the same time, we hope they will galvanize and engage a broader range of institutions and individuals directly or indirectly involved in the circulation of Bulgarian literary translations.

5.1. Strategic obstacles to Bulgarian literature taking it place in international literary exchange

Translation and the distribution of Bulgarian literature in translation are:

- I. negatively affected by a **failure to support the natural mediators** in the process of promoting Bulgarian literature (especially translators and foreign Bulgarian philologists) and by the unwillingness to **expand** their range (to include immigrant authors, journalists, editors, literary agents, etc.);
- II. restricted by the **lack of sufficient funding or a vision** for a foreign cultural policy, a national cultural strategy, or a connection between the two;
- III. burdened by a **“minor literature” complex** which automatically brands Bulgarian literature as needing assistance, as a part of a “minority” community. Instead of an equal partnership, this suggests a need for special incentives, ultimately driving isolation;
- IV. **isolated** due to: 1) their exclusion from the promotion for other arts abroad; 2) a fragmented approach to the various initiatives; and 3) the lack of established partnerships with key international events, institutions, and bodies in the industry;
- V. driven by the tacit **requirement** for the supported works and authors **to be “nationally representative”**, and the expectation to have a single strategy and, ultimately, a single **centralized** body. This approach fails to account for the plurality of audiences, expertise and interests of the various players and organisations (of writers, researchers, publishers, translators; “national branding” entities, etc.) in the book and literary industry. It is also why the role of modern managerial and promotional approaches in book marketing is generally overlooked.

5.2. Possible strategic approaches

Any foreign literary policy in Bulgaria and even individual initiatives in that field, however small, should take into account and address the five areas of concern listed above.

¹ The finer points of a possible initiation of such a strategy (such as coming up with a strategic concept and programme, financial characteristics, performance evaluation, control and assessment metrics, etc.) are not within the purview of this text.

Support for mediators is crucial. As this paper clearly shows, Bulgarian literature in translation is dependent – too dependent even! – on its translators, their tastes and motivation. So dependent in fact, that in some languages, one single person changing the course of their career can result in a translation void for years to come. Taking care of translators as mediators would involve paying greater attention to Bulgarian philology departments abroad, efforts to enhance translators' motivation and to ensure continuity between generations. At the same time, support for mediators should extend to other natural partners, such as Bulgarian authors writing in other languages², foreign authors and journalists writing about Bulgaria³, the Bulgarian diaspora, especially professionals in the fields of culture, advertising and the media. Those figures occupy a special liminal space between cultures and their plural identities allow for interpretation on the Bulgarian side, too. Any success of authors of Bulgarian origin writing in other languages acts as a catalyst.

Rather than a minority complex, strategies to support translations from Bulgarian should be based on a shared understanding of the need for publicly funded **mechanisms that complement and offset the market logic in the publishing sector.**

Any successful, efficient and visible effort to promote Bulgarian literature in translation must **reject all attempts to co-opt it** solely for the purposes of national marketing, or branding. Naturally, some literary texts could act as national “ambassadors” or be incorporated in branding strategies, but then they would fall in the remit of foreign, not cultural policy, which should be sensitive to the complexity of its field. In other words, instead of asking “How would this particular translation help boost Bulgaria’s or Bulgarian literature’s image?”, specific strategies and selection principles should follow the question, “How does this translation contribute to global (European, regional, genre, etc.) cultural communication?”

To put it in another way, any future policy to that effect should **be designed not to export and peddle a product but to engage in dialogue.** It should be based on efforts to **facilitate access, ensure mutual participation and a way to “fit in”** for Bulgarian literature. A logical continuation of such principles would be a long-term investment in putting Bulgarian authors and issues on the map in broader international contexts, agendas, festivals and forums, instead of relying on isolated “national promotion” stunts. In other words, involvement in **joint international literary initiatives** should be recognized as just as (or even more) important as efforts to promote Bulgarian works and authors to get specific editions in specific languages.

A successful foreign literary policy should move past – or at least adjust – the silent expectation to project a so-called “identity of Bulgarian literature”, for at least two reasons. Firstly, because that identity can never be complete. Secondly, because any such identity would clash with both the diverging local and foreign ideas of it, and the plurality of audiences with their different interests and reading habits. On a smaller scale, the “national identity” approach proves unproductive in the organization of Bulgarian booths at book fairs, too. The organizing professional body’s interests lie mainly – and understandably! – in establishing and strengthening professional contacts in the publishing industry and in book rights deals, while the public funding of these booths comes with an expectation that they would present to the world “the face” of Bulgarian literature and our publishing output as a

² E.g., Ilija Trojanow, Leonie Hodkevitch, Dimitar Dinev, Rouja Lazarova, Kapka Kassabova, Tzveta Sofronieva, etc.

³ E.g., Sibylle Lewitscharoff, Rana Dasgupta, Laurie Graham.

whole. In the past, we have seen this kind of tension between the “national” and industry approaches to book fairs in other small markets like Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia, etc., whose publishers still cannot afford to have their own booths at fairs. However, unlike Bulgaria, those countries’ national booths have managed to find successful and recognizable formulas to **serve the interests of their book industries and showcase their national culture, without mixing the two.**

A national literature’s foray into the wider world starts at home. Literary translation is a two-way street and whether a given literature will exist in translation is directly dependent on its own country’s **literary hospitality**: on its openness to other languages through translation, on hosting book fairs, literary festivals, joint readings, etc.

Breaking out of isolation should also be an objective of a closer cooperation and coordination between public bodies. Even where the promotion of Bulgarian literature abroad is seen as a purely national mission and is relegated exclusively to “national” channels (such as Bulgarian embassies, for example), it must, as appropriate, **coordinate its efforts, partner with and benefit from the symbolic, professional and organizational resources of other programmes** with their own history, experience and recognizable public profiles. These include, for example, funding programmes with supranational purposes (*Traduki* or the European Commission’s *Culture Programme*), professional networks (CEATL, LAF, FEP, FIT, RECIT, HALMA, etc.), book fairs, literary festivals and other events, periodicals in the field of culture, other media. Ideally, this kind of **opening for partnerships** would diversify funding sources as well, and thus, the concepts of literary exchange underlying their various policies.

5.3. Possible tools shown to have an impact on translation dynamics

Setting up an agency to support the translation and promotion of Bulgarian literature abroad. Such an agency should be:

- decentralized, with multiple sources of funding;
- at least at arm’s length from the Ministry of Culture and/or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All similar agencies operating in European countries, except for Czechia and Croatia, are independently governed, even though they rely chiefly on public funding and have various relationships with local programmes supporting translations, literature, reading, and/or libraries (they are either identical, separate entities, or in some type of partnership with them);
- equipped with a broad network of experts and partners to ensure the requisite competing approaches, and providing support for projects by other organizations with different approaches and objectives.

Subsidies to co-fund publishing and other proposals

Targeted subsidies for translation of specific books are a basic tool without which all other well-intentioned efforts become futile. Its main purpose is to offset the market risk of publishing books in translation. At the same time, subsidies work best only in combination with other components of literary promotion and cannot, by themselves, make a tangible impact on translation dynamics.

Support for translating and publishing Bulgarian authors in other languages by co-funding projects should be, at the very least:

- divided into sub-schemes for: *publishing pitches; translators' projects; periodicals (paper-based or electronic)*;
- divided into sub-schemes pursuing various strategic goals (such as translation of representative pieces, essential works of Bulgarian literature, current titles, genre books, etc., depending on the scheme's strategy);
- independent, with transparent application procedures and an adequate schedule (i.e., at least biannual sittings).

For publishing projects, such support should:

- be open to applications for standalone titles or series exclusively for foreign publishers;
- provide for separate funding for justified promotion expenses;
- treat separately any projects to build cooperation between local (Bulgarian) and foreign publishing companies for a broad exchange (through mutual translations, readings, book fair attendance and other communication activities).

Translation and other awards and prizes

Awards are a tool that helps enhance the commitment, visibility and even financial incentive of people and organizations involved in presenting Bulgarian literature abroad. Apart from recognition for excellence, they provide a path to greater publicity for the otherwise "lonely" job of a translator.

They can be awarded for specific works or for overall contribution to cultural mediation: to translators as well as to critics, researchers, journalists, editors, publishers, and other cultural institutions.

"Literary Hospitality" programmes, such as:

Creative residencies, scholarships, mentorship programmes and specializations for translators, researchers, editors, and journalists.

There are a number of good practices and various models for such programmes. Here we would like to emphasize that they should ideally:

- be tied to creating a product (text, translation) either individually or as a team effort;
- include a possibility to work with the author(s) of the text being translated, if living;
- provide for a chance for translators to work jointly on the same text in multiple languages;
- be open to journalists from the mass media or specialized cultural periodicals (such as *Next Page's* 2005 programme⁴);
- plan a long-term development in terms of opening towards the Balkan region and including translators from and to other languages (apart from Bulgarian).

⁴ www.npage.org/article105.html

Literary festivals and joint readings with foreign authors in Bulgaria;

A web-based resource centre for professional profiled translators from Bulgarian offering translators working with Bulgarian into different languages a chance to meet and interact (similar to <http://www.proz.com>).

Mobility programmes

- helping contemporary Bulgarian authors to attend festivals, readings and other events they have been personally invited to;
- mobility for Bulgarian literary agents and managers: attendance of book fairs, conferences and other events to pursue a specific project;
- a more consistent, justified and coordinated presence at international book fairs: creating an overarching concept; prioritizing certain book fairs; building a suitable booth (or components thereof), etc.

Establishing and developing various information channels

Those would create a sufficiently populated, comprehensible, “translatable” context to contemporary Bulgarian literature and leverage the ways books reach publishers.

Such information channels should meet the following general requirements:

- be multilingual;
- use various media flexibly;
- have an awareness and promotion policy in place, instead of passively waiting for the public to find them;
- be divided into groups by “market segment” and by expected audience.

Examples for types of information:

- databases of contemporary Bulgarian books with short descriptions reading almost like ads. It is crucial that the selection be organized in line with publishing rationale, for example by genre (such as classics, contemporary fiction, poetry, mass market books, humour, crime and thrillers, fantasy, etc.);
- up-to-date information on Bulgarian book rankings;
- a list of Bulgarian literary works published in translation around the world, but also lists by language – English, French, German, and Spanish in particular (these are the languages publishers usually read);
- translation sales figures;
- information about awards or nominations (in Bulgaria or abroad); ranking the awards by importance;
- links or files with foreign press notices;
- commissioned summaries as well as reviews of selected Bulgarian books in English, French, and German with the specific audience in mind, and not merely translations of Bulgarian edition reviews;

- sending review copies to translators and mediators;
- translations of excerpts (like those at *www.contemporarybulgarianwriters.com*);
- a list of links to organizations that offer grants or other types of support;
- e-newsletter about the Bulgarian book market for subscribers interested in translations from Bulgarian, such as publishers, translators, organizations. To support the newsletter, a database of foreign publishing houses actively engaged in translations from Bulgarian or from foreign languages in general;
- print materials based on the information above, specially curated for different book fairs or events.

5.4. Some national programmes in support of translation in Eastern Europe: activities and budgets

country	ROMANIA
institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romanian Cultural Institute (National Book Centre department) • Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
annual budget (Euro, 2010)	900,000
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidies for publishers and magazines in three grant schemes with different profiles • grants for translators (residency, seminars, meetings; cultural schedule), a dedicated young translator programme • 10 book fairs in Europe (in 2011–2012, including in Moscow and Bologna) with a booth and catalogues of authors specially selected and translated into the language of the country hosting the fair • readings by Romanian authors and appearances at literary events abroad
partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture); • <i>LiteraturHaus</i> Berlin; • <i>Contemporary Romanian Authors</i> (a database maintained by two large Romanian publishers) • <i>Infocarte</i> (Books-in-Print catalogue for Romania) • The Observer Translation Project (private magazine for literary translations in 7 languages) and multiple media partners • Official <i>Traduki</i> partner for Romania

country	POLAND
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institutions	Polish Book Institute
annual budget	no information available
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidies for publishers • subsidies for translation of excerpts • author database with short bios • information website in 5 languages (including Russian and Hebrew) • <i>New Polish Books</i>, a catalogue published every 6 months in two languages • award for best translation from Polish • award for contribution to the promotion of Polish literature (given to critics, scholars, and event organizers) • translator get-togethers (by language!) • presentations at book fairs • workshops for foreign publishers • HOMINES URBANI – residencies and scholarships for writers, translators, and critics from German-speaking countries, Ukraine, and Belarus • surveys and news of the book market
partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polish cultural institutes abroad • Literary festivals in Poland • Jagiellonian University, Villa Decius, and many others

country	LATVIA
institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latvia Literary Centre • The National Cultural Capital Foundation • Writers and Translators House, Ventspils
annual budget	no information available
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinating literary initiatives with international guests • subsidies for publishers • commissioning translations of excerpts • translation awards • residencies for translators • special catalogues of authors tailored to the book fair • <i>Latvian Literature</i> magazine, in English • leaflets with contextualizing critical texts by genre and for specific authors • acts as a literary agent of sorts
partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature promotion centres from neighbouring

	<p>countries (Estonia, Lithuania)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Literature Across Frontiers</i> network • The Riga municipal cultural programme • The Latvian Language Agency • The Copyright and Communication Consulting Agency; all professional associations in the book sector • Literary magazines and online platforms • Publishers • RECIT
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country	HUNGARY
institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hungarian Book Foundation • Hungarian Translators House • Milán Füst Translation Foundation at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
annual budget (Euro, 2010)	94,767 just for subsidies for foreign publishers
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidies for foreign publishers • informative print publications relating to specific forums • translation residencies • translation camps

country	CROATIA
institutions	Ministry of Culture, Department for the Promotion of Books and Reading
annual budget	no information available
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidies for foreign publishers • bilateral literary exchange programmes • mobility for authors
partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Flemish Community Culture Department • The <i>Het beschrijf</i> literary society • <i>Literature Across Frontiers</i>, and many other

country	SERBIA
institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Culture, Book Department • International Translation Centre in Sremski Karlovci • House of Writers in Tršić • Chamber of Commerce

annual budget (Euro, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46,500 for subsidies for publishers • 25,000 for translations in German (Leipzig book fair); • support for the translation centre and the House of Writers
activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidies for foreign publishers • residencies for translators and authors • book fair attendances (a total of 10 in 2010) • publicity materials • studying the sector
partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A project with the private publisher <i>Geopoetika</i> to publish English translators locally and distribute them among potential publishers, agents, etc. abroad • <i>Traduki</i>