

Lost in translation: Literary types want EU support

Voice-over 1:

The market in European culture is booming. Book production is leading the way. At the recent Frankfurt Book Fair nearly 400,000 new titles were presented – many made available in languages other than their original so publishers can maximise sales. Great news for translators, one might think. But the irony is translators in Europe claim their working conditions are getting worse rather than better as publishers, like all sectors of the mass media, attempt to cut costs. Interpreters might be well rewarded, but in some EU states literary translation is not even considered a job - more a pastime or a hobby. Publishers are prone to offering a take it or leave it fee, and not even paying that within the EU's standard ninety day delay for economic transactions. Into the fray has stepped Literature Across Frontiers. It's funded by the European Union and its main aim over the past couple of years has been to promote the translation of literature, especially that written in minority languages. But now even the founder of Literature Across Frontiers is warning aspiring translators to be wary of choosing it as a career.

Alexandra Büchler:

What we can tell them is that it's a very tough life. You know, you have to do something... It's really like being a writer. You have to love it, you have to feel that this is really what you need to do, and unfortunately you have to accept that you will not be, you know, paid so well to be able to survive depending on the language you translate from. Most translators cannot really make a living as translators, literary translators, and they have to do another job.

Voice-over 1:

2008 is to be the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue. It's being seen as the perfect opportunity for the EU to boost the importance of literary translation. But critics like MEP Guy Bono of the European Socialists insist the EU never puts enough money into cultural projects.

Voice-over 2:

One can't consider culture as a product like other products. We must accept that it costs more, but that's a question of political choice.

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