

# MAPPING TRANSLATED LITERATURES FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS (2015-2020)

*A summary of six reports on the state of translations  
from the languages of the Western Balkan countries.  
Data, comments and policy recommendations*

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### **Summary of the country reports:**

Aida Čengić and Next Page Foundation team



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# Introduction

Our starting question when embarking on this research journey on literary communication was a simple one: *How do literary works written and published in any of the languages of the Western Balkans get to be published in translation elsewhere in Europe?* We were interested in finding out which are the channels and who are the main intermediaries or agents of change who play a role in the process. The studies further aimed at identifying examples of international success in literary translation as well as general tendencies in the translation flows from the recent years.

The current Summary is a synopsis of the six country reports<sup>1</sup> – for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia, produced in the period 2021-2022 for each country by local expert teams of bibliographers, literary scholars, translators, book activists and cultural policy makers. For the first time ever, the country reports present bibliographies of translations published in any other European language in the period 2015-2021. In the largely underexamined field of literary “export” from Balkan languages, the studies contain not only a wealth of data and statistics but also invaluable information and observations on the overall literary and translation landscape in the researched countries. The texts of the six reports can also be read as mirroring the standpoints, the concerns and the priorities of the local literary

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<sup>1</sup> All six country reports and bibliographies are available for download in the original languages at the Balkan Translations Collider project section at <https://www.npage.org/en/page?id=258>

and academic experts on the subject of the promotion of literature abroad.

As tempting as it may be to compare the “achievements” of the six countries in literary translations or to look for one’s favourite authors in the top 10 lists, comparisons or rankings were never the studies’ aim. Statistics provided in this Summary shall be read along with the accompanying notes and reflections as what we learned from the country reports cannot be summed up in a single chart. There also isn’t any distinctive tendency to be highlighted. Yet, there seems to be a number of factors that, when in accord, do play a role in the visibility of a “small” literature. These include a viable and strong local publishing market as well as a diverse and lively local literary scene. These include also having internationally recognizable author(s), and a literary context that is transparent and “translatable” to outsiders. Last but not least, having public support for international cultural presence, including for literature in translation, is essential.

This English-language Summary will be of interest to anybody in book and literature, in international cultural exchange and in cultural policy. Publishers, translators, cultural and literary organisations from the Western Balkans and the EU member-states may find data on published titles, names of literary translators, and information about active organisations and platforms. Academics and scholars will find a wealth of issues regarding the formation of national literatures and the role translations play in cannon formation. Public policy makers in the Western Balkans and in international exchange are the main addressee of the policy recommendations in Chapter 10. Finally, the Balkan Translations Collider studies

are for all organisations and individuals that are committed to better visibility of “small” languages literatures and to international cultural exchange in Europe.

We at the Next Page Foundation and the Balkan Translations Collider partnership are immensely grateful to the national expert teams and to the author of this Summary for their commitment and diligent work in that pioneering endeavour.

Next Page Foundation



# Scope and Methodology: gaps and issues

The six country reports were prepared by local expert teams, based on common Terms of Reference (ToR) that set the scope of the studies and criteria for bibliographies. While the criteria for bibliographies and the research were set beforehand, **the final outputs are different from country to country**. This is not surprising because the contexts are quite different in each of the countries, and each team brought their own interests and expertise to the whole process. This created a bit of a challenge because we wanted to provide similar type and depth of information for all six countries. Therefore, we excluded some of the bibliographical entries that did not completely match the baseline criteria. Furthermore, the expert teams put emphasis on different aspects related to the translation from the languages of the Western Balkans. Some reports put more stress on historic aspects, others paid more attention to criteria used when selecting books for translation, and third provided policy-oriented documents. While the individual country reports may look like an uneven read, we think that this summary report gained from the different viewpoints provided by them.

The report's ToR defines the scope of the bibliographies as including **only literary works** (all types and genres), **originally written in the languages of and published** in Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and published in translation into any other

European language **in the period Jan 2015–Dec 2020** in any book format, paper or digital. Work originally written in one of the minority languages, such as Romani or Turkish, of the countries were also to be taken into account. Anthologies are to be included, but not translations published in periodicals. Translations published anywhere, including in the country of the original, were also eligible for the bibliography as well as translations done from an intermediate or “bridge-language”.

The bibliographies were compiled after painstaking work combing data from different databases, catalogues of national libraries and publishers, online platforms, desk research, and interviews with publishers and translators. Although the period of interest was relatively short, **most experts’ teams express reservations for bibliographies being exhaustive.** Lack of one focal point (agency or database) where one could find a complete and accurate list of translations meant a possibility of some titles, even some writers, had fallen into cracks and remained unaccounted for, was relatively high. The absence of Tanja Stupar-Trifunović’s translations is one such example that is completely omitted in the bibliography. The final statistics in Bosnia-Herzegovina bibliography do not include her although she has received EU Prize for Literature in 2016 and, consequently, her award-winning book has at least one translation in the period (Sofia: Colibri, 2017). Yet, this effort in identifying translations from Balkan languages was greatly appreciated and was recognized as a significant first step, regardless of possible shortcomings.

Final bibliographies, although following the same methodology, are rather different in scope and apply different criteria. Serbian team, for example, identified over 1000 entries. However, after addi-

tional selection when the expert team removed all entries which they deemed irrelevant because the translations had been done by various associations of citizens, the final bibliography consisted of 704 titles. Similarly, the team compiling the bibliography for Bosnia and Herzegovina included literary magazines and writers writing in **adopted languages, and publishing abroad**. Therefore, after removing these entries which clearly were not eligible by the preset criteria, the final bibliography came from originally 260 as listed in the bibliography to 208 entries used for the further statistical analysis in this summary.

Identifying indirect translations proved even more difficult as most of the available data does not allow search by this criterion.

Another challenge has to do with the **“identity” of the writers and the languages of the original works**. The Terms of Reference avoids to give any instructions in that respect, other than related to the country of publication of the original work. Still, when looking closely at Top 10 Lists of most translated authors, one can notice that some names appear in different lists. For example, Ivo Andrić appears in the lists of both in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Same goes for Andrej Nikolaidis (Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Luan Starova (Albania and North Macedonia). What is the reason for this? In search for the answer, we need to go back to early ‘90s when the dissolution of Yugoslavia happened. With the bloody disappearance of a common country, the Yugoslavian cultural space also disintegrated and the very “Yugoslav literature” was gone. Same happened to the language that was spoken by the majority in Yugoslavia – Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. Instead, we have Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian Herzegovinian, Montenegrin,

North Macedonian, and Kosovar literatures. At the same time, the language split into Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian, and it is only occasionally mentioned as Serbo-Croatian (mainly by foreigners out of habit). Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović were both born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the place was a major inspiration for their works. However, they lived in Serbia for most of their adult life and died there before the '90s. Their work is still very relevant, and translations are frequent. They wrote in Serbo-Croatian. As a result, their novels appear in the bibliographies of both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. After cross-referencing, we even found a few translations mentioned in both bibliographies.

Similarly, contemporary writers get to be mentioned in two bibliographies. Most often this is the case with writers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian are official languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, as mentioned in the introduction to bibliographies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the criteria for including a writer in the bibliography was either place of birth or place of residence and contribution to the literary life of the country. Hence, we have several writers that appear in two bibliographies. Furthermore, Luan Starova is included in two bibliographies because he wrote in both Macedonian and Albanian. These examples show that the issues of language and literary affiliation in the Western Balkans are sensitive and complex ones.

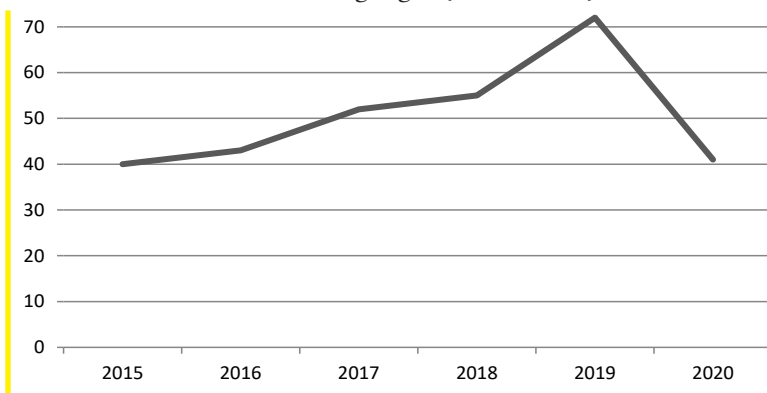
# Country profiles: ALBANIA

**Population (2019):** 2.837.743<sup>1</sup>

**Relevant state institutions:** Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Albania, National Library of Albania, National Book and Reading Center

Based on extensive online research, as well as direct search in the different national libraries (Albanian and Romanian), Library of Congress, and direct communication with publishers, authors, and translators, the research team identified 313 different titles translated in 19 European languages. However, the statistics presented in the country profile use 303 entries.<sup>2</sup> The scope of the bibliography of translated works includes poetry, essays, short stories, and novels as well as cultural and linguistic studies.

## **Dynamics of translations of Albanian books into other languages (2015–2020)**



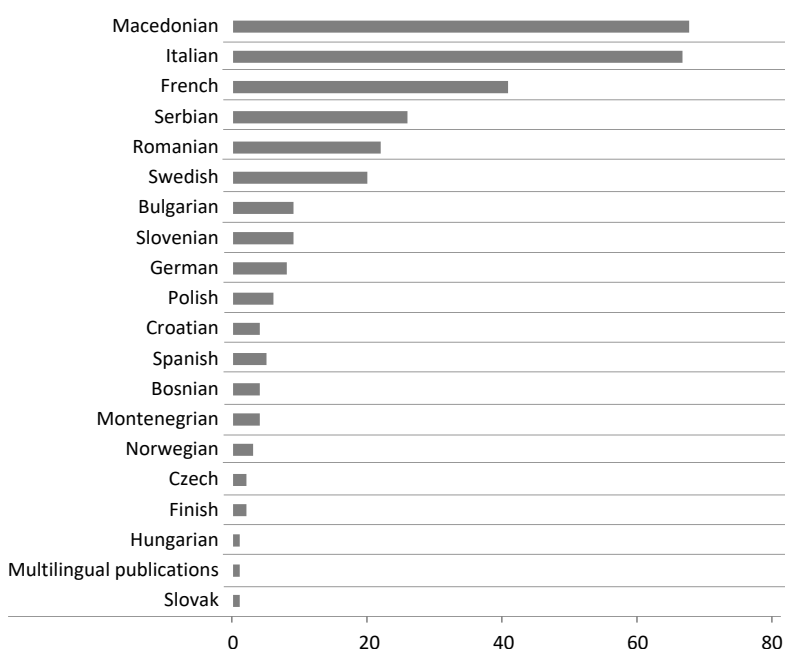
<sup>1</sup> World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022

<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve consistency with statistics in other five countries, further analysis of the bibliographic data gathered during the research will not include 10 entries, since these translations were published in the magazines or otherwise go beyond the criteria set for the research. Furthermore, these 303 entries include 34 ones that are repeated in the Kosovo bibliography provided by the same research team.

In the studied period (2015–2020), there is a stable **increase in the number of the translated and published** – from 40 in 2015, through 43 in 2016, to 72 in 2019. However, this was followed by a steep decline in 2020, when the number returned to 41.

**The two most popular recipient languages of translations of Albanian authors are Macedonian and Italian.**

**Languages and N° of titles**

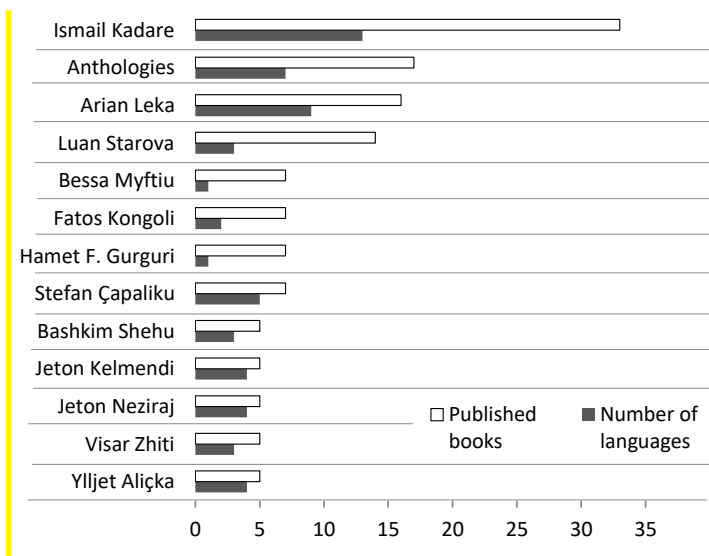


Further analysis shows that the interest of the international publishers is directed at several authors like **Ismail Kadare, Arian Leka, and Luan Starova**. Luan Starova was born in Albania and lived in North Macedonia until his death. He wrote in both Albanian and Macedonian, so translations of his works are present in the country reports of both Albania and North Macedonia. Hamit F. Gur-

guri's seven books were translated into Swedish in 2018, all by the same publishing house – Erik Hans förlag.

Between 2015–2020, 17 anthologies and different collections are published.

### Most translated authors



17 translations are made from a **bridge language**. As can be expected, the most frequent bridge language is English with six titles, but also Finnish (three titles), Italian, French, and German (two titles each), and one translation each from Serbian and Greek as bridge languages.

Some of the **publishing houses that have published more than a few translations of Albanian authors** are Besa muçi from Nardo (Italy) with 21 titles, Samizdat B92 from Belgrade (Serbia) with 11 books, Les éditions Ovidia from Nice (France) with 5 books, Goten from Skopje (North Macedonia) with 4 books.

# Country Profiles: BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA

**Population (2020):** 3.280.815<sup>1</sup>

**Relevant institutions on the state and entity levels:** Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Ministry of Culture and Sports, Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Srpska, National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, National and University Library of the Republic of Srpska

The bibliography offered by the authors of the study is based on extensive research using the local and regional COBISS.NET (Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services), the databank of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, different national libraries in Europe, catalogues of publishing houses, group catalogues like WorldCat, interviewing publishers and translators, and Virtual International Authority File – VIAF.

The authors of the country report included writers born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and such who consider themselves bosnian-herzegovinian authors due to their lifelong living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their taking part in the literary life of the country. The included writers wrote or write in Serbo-Croatian (those who wrote before 1992), Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. In their research, the experts identified 260 bibliographic entries. However, after applying the criteria set up by the project, we had to eliminate translations in periodicals.

In addition, the bibliography covered writers who were born and even published in Bosnia and

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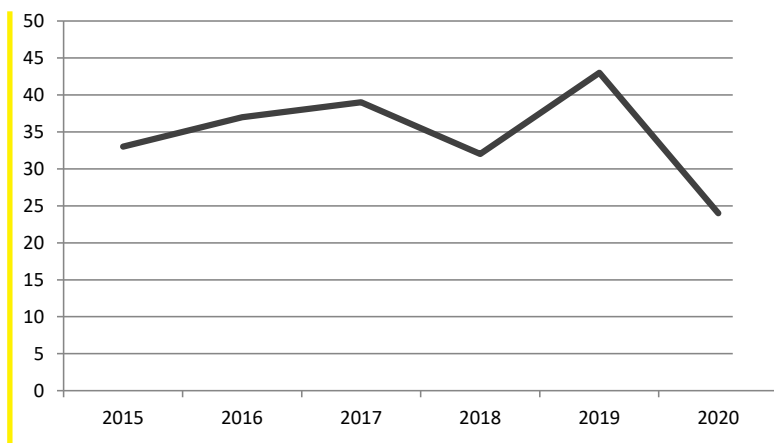
<sup>1</sup> World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022



Herzegovina, but who now write in another adopted language such as Aleksandar Hemon and Saša Stanišić. Hemon was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina but now lives in the USA and writes in English. Stanišić, also born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, lives in Germany and writes and publishes in German. The translations of these two authors are not included in the current summary as far as they are done from their English or German originals. On the other hand, we have decided to keep in the bibliography other diaspora writers who write both in any of the three official languages of the country as well as in another language. The final statistics includes titles by such authors since it is not entirely clear which of their books were originally written in an adopted language. At the end, the final bibliography includes 208 entries.

**In the period 2015–2020, 208 translations** have been published. In the first four years of the period the annual number of translations is almost constant (between 32 and 38 titles) with an increase in 2019 to 43 and a sudden drop to 24 in 2020.

**Dynamics of translation (2015–2020)**

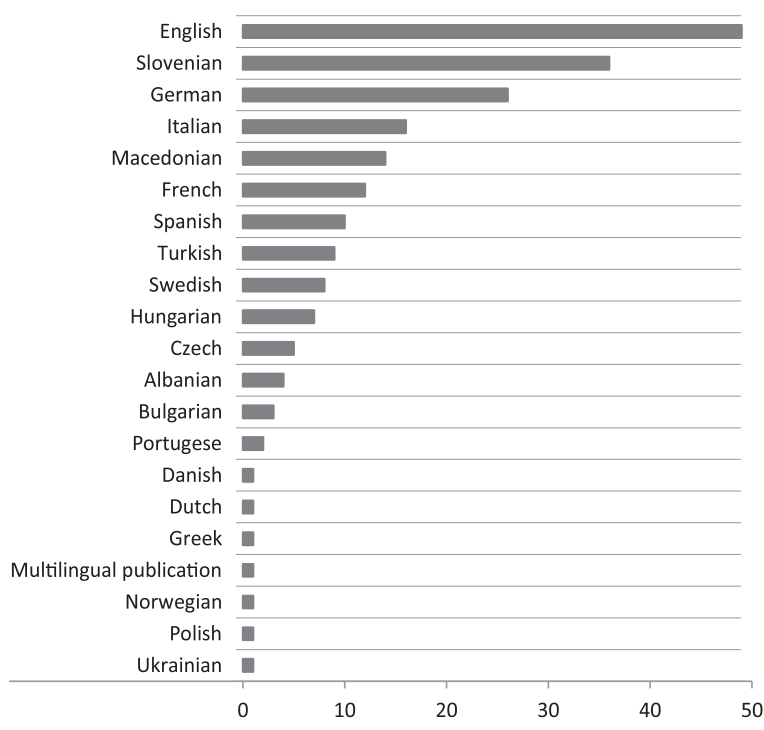


The bibliography covers translations into 20 different languages, **with English being the most fre-**

quent target language, followed by Slovenian and German. In 2020, a book of poetry by Adisa Bašić was published as a tri-lingual edition in Slovenian, English, and Bosnian by Beletrina from Ljubljana

The most translated works are novels, but books of poetry and short stories are also frequently translated.

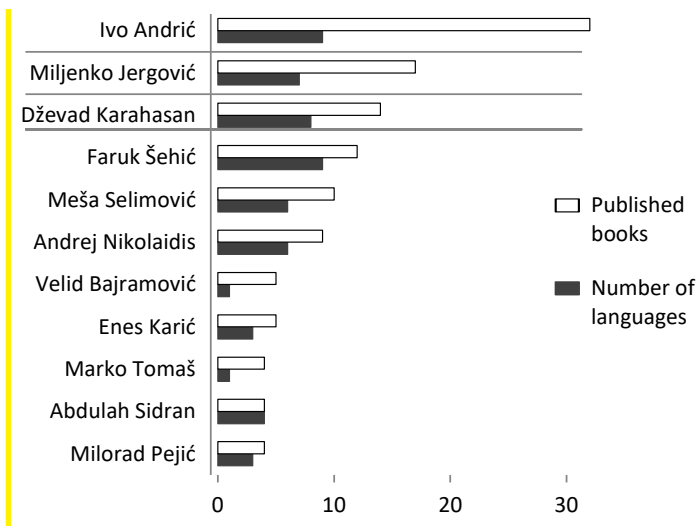
### Languages and N° of titles



Not surprisingly, the **most translated writer is the Nobel Prize laureate Ivo Andrić**. The list of the most translated writers comprises a combination of classics in Serbo-Croatian (by Ivo Andrić and Mehmed Meša Selimović), and contemporary authors some of whom were born in Bosnia and Herzegovina but now live and work in other coun-

tries (Miljenko Jergović, Andrej Nikolaidis, Dževad Karahasan, and Milorad Pejić). Faruk Šehić received the EU Prize for Literature in 2013.

### Most translated authors



There is a great variety in the publishers who publish translations of authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet, Sanje from Ljubljana stand out with 12 books in Slovenian, Bottega Errante from Udine with five in Italian, Suhrkamp Verlag AG from Berlin with four books in German (one translation of Ivo Andrić's novel and three novels by Dževad Karahasan), and İletişim Yayınları from Istanbul with four translations of Ivo Andrić in Turkish. Furthermore, Connectum from Sarajevo published eight translations in six languages. Perhaps the most intriguing is the case with the five Swedish translations of books by Velid Bajramović and published by the author himself.

# Country Profiles: KOSOVO

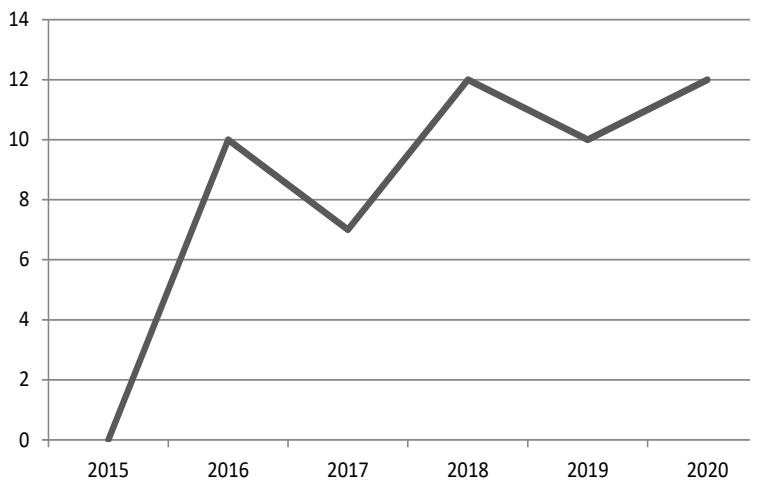
**Population (2020):** 1.775.378<sup>1</sup>

**Relevant state institutions:** Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports; National Library of Kosovo

The researchers identified 51 titles by authors from Kosovo who write in Albanian, and who are translated and published in the period 2015–2020. Most of the books are translated directly from Albanian. However, three books are translated from Finnish as a bridge language, and one via French.

It is necessary to note that out of these 51 entries 34 are present also in the bibliography for Albania provided by the same research team.

**Dynamics of translation (2015–2020)**



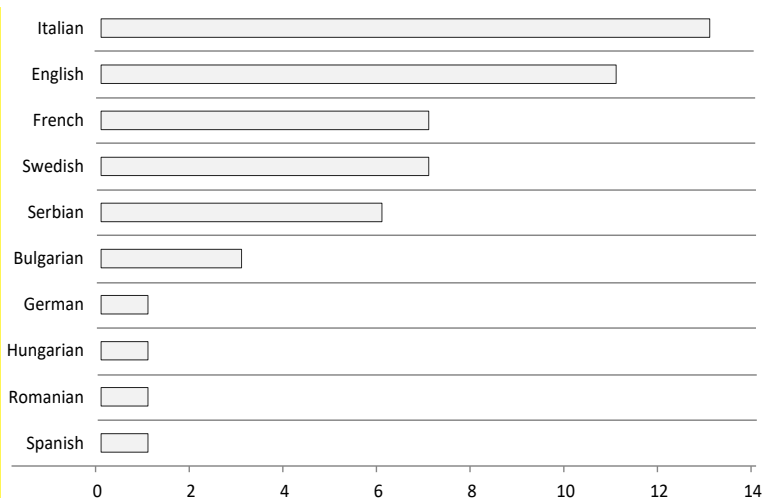
<sup>1</sup> World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022

## KOSOVO

In 2015, no translations of books published by Kosovar authors were published. Since then, **the number of translations published yearly is rather stable at around 10 per year.**

**The most frequent recipient language of translation is Italian with 13 titles, closely followed by English with 11 titles.**

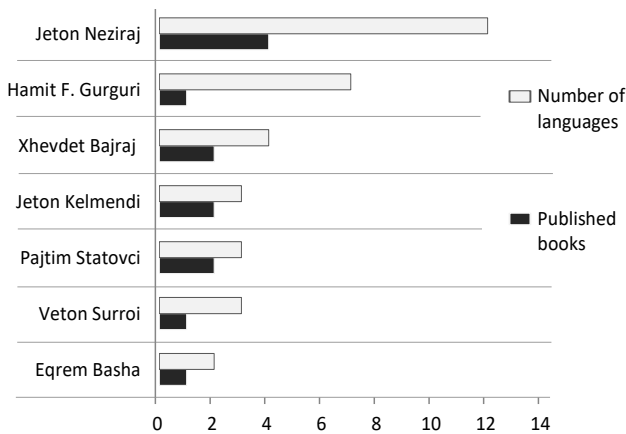
Languages and N° of titles



**Jeton Neziraj** is the most translated author from Kosovo. His plays found their way to the English speaking audience by means of eight publications in English in the observed period, including an anthology of contemporary drama from Kosovo.

Hamit F. Gurguri published his seven books in Swedish during 2018. This makes him the second most frequently translated Kosovar author in the period 2015–2020.

## Most translated authors



In the observed period, 15 translations of novels were published. Thanks to Jeton Neziraj, 15 books of theater plays were translated and published. This is characteristic of the Kosovar literary scene because it is very rare to see drama works published in book form in other countries of the Western Balkans or in general.

With 10 published translations, **Laertes Press is almost the exclusive publisher of English translations of Kosovar authors.** Publishers of translations in Italian show much bigger variety – Kosovo authors are published by 11 publishing houses, including Edizioni Ensemble (Rome) and Editoria & Spettacolo (Spoleto) with two published books each. Erik Hans förlag from Borås (Sweden) published seven works by Hamit F. Gurguri. Three books of theatre plays were published in French in Editions l'Espace d'un instant (Paris). Samizdat B92 from Belgrade translated in Serbian and published three books by Veton Surroi.

# Country Profiles: MONTENEGRO

**Population (2020):** 621.306<sup>1</sup>

**Relevant state institutions:** Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport; National Library of Montenegro “Đurđe Crnojević”

The bibliography identifies 80 translated works by 36 authors. The expert team decided to include writers based on several criteria: place of birth, language the author writes in, place of residence, and, lastly, the author’s stance on citizenship and nation. As the researchers have put it: *“...we want to emphasize that the bibliography of translated books by Montenegrin authors is a project that does not want to be an assimilation tool, but rather a tool that indicates the author’s uniqueness and promotes works by authors who, whether they like it or not, are bearers of segments of Montenegrin culture”*.

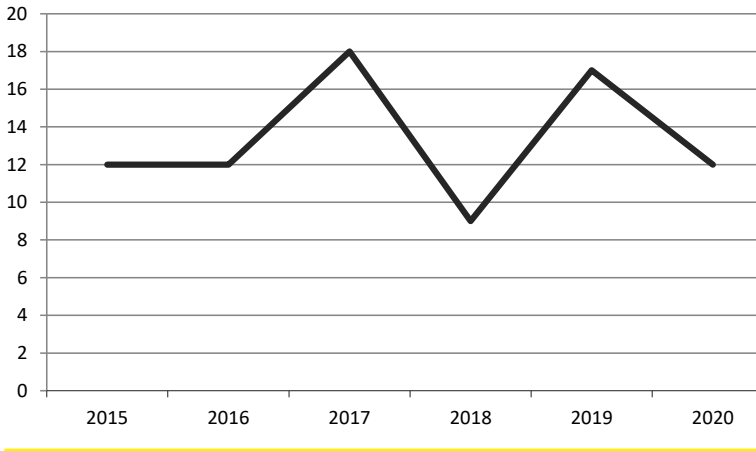
The bibliography is the result of research in all available databases within COBISS NET (Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo), the online catalogue of the Library of Congress, WorldCat, and the online catalogue of the National Library of Croatia. Furthermore, the authors of the report conducted interviews with publishers and translators, desk research, and even made an open invitation to living writers to send information about their published translations for cross-reference.

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022

The number of translations is **in the range of 12 to 18 titles per year**, with the exception of 2018 when the numbers go down by 50% just too quickly return to 17 titles the year after.

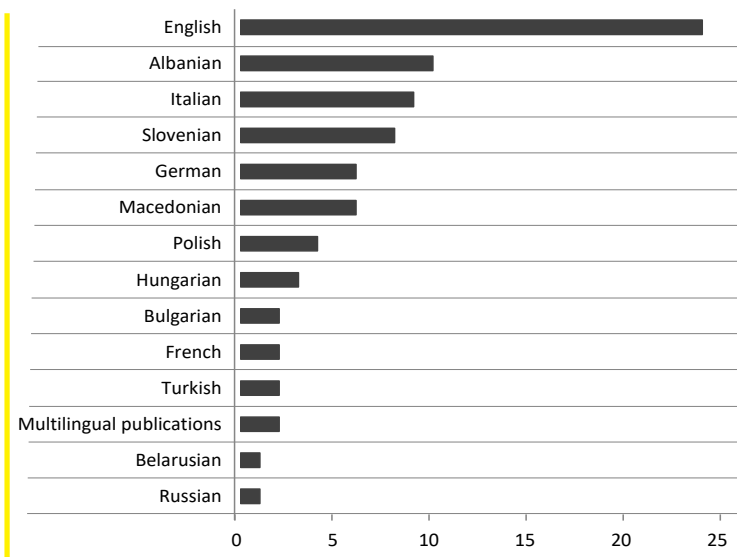
### Dynamics of translation (2015–2020)



The bibliography covers translations into a total of 13 languages. **English is the most frequent recipient language with 24 book translations.** Eighteen titles have been published by local publishers from Podgorica, Nikšić, Cetinje, Ulcinj, Budva, Pljevlja, and Bar. **Istros Books** (London) published three works by Andrej Nikolaidis.

Two titles are multilingual publications, both published in Montenegro itself. One is a book of prose by Sreten Vujović, published by Otvoreni kulturni forum from Cetinje in Montenegrin, Albanian, French, Macedonian and Russian. The second is a collection, edited by Dragomir Rašović and Čedomir Perović, and published by the Foundation “Priateljstvo” from Podgorica in Montenegrin, French, and English in celebration of the 85<sup>th</sup> birthday of the poet Sreten Perović.



Languages and N<sup>o</sup> of titles

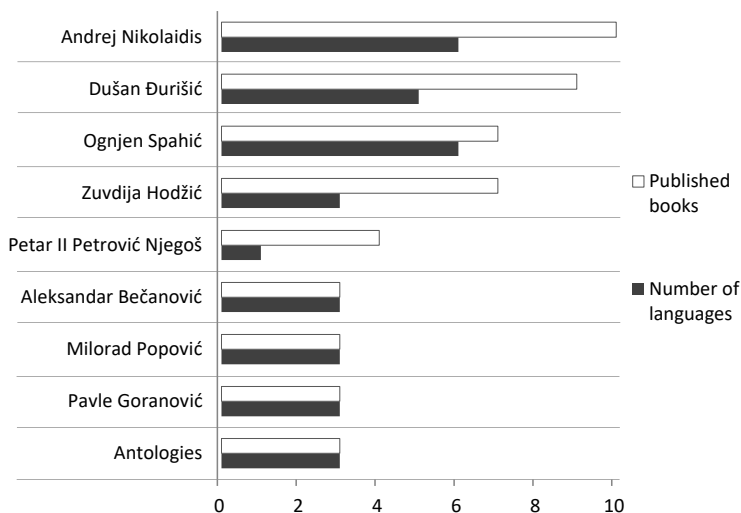
**Andrej Nikolaidis is the most translated Montenegrin author in the period.** He has 10 translations in six different languages. Works by Dušan Đurišić are translated into Belarusian, Macedonian, English, Turkish, and Bulgarian.

Almost all most translated authors are contemporary writers, with the notable exception of Petar II Petrović Njegoš whose seminal work was published in four different volumes – all in English and all by publishing houses from Montenegro.

Andrej Nikolaidis, Ognjen Spahić, and Aleksandar Bečanović received the EU Prize for Literature in 2011, 2014, and 2017 respectively.

## Most translated authors

MONTENEGRO



Out of the 80 titles translated in the period 2015–2020, **25 titles or about 30% of all translations are published by publishers from Montenegro.**

When talking about international publishers, **Besa mucì** from Nardò (Italy), **Leipziger Literaturverlag** (Germany), **Napkút Kiadó** from Budapest (Hungary), and **Istros Books** from London (UK) were most prolific with three published titles each.

# Country Profiles: NORTH MACEDONIA

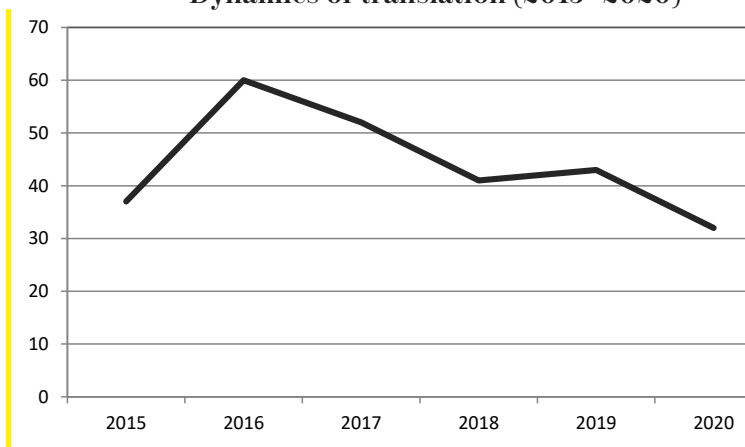
**Population (2020): 2.072.531<sup>1</sup>**

**Relevant state institutions:** Ministry of Culture of Republic of North Macedonia, National and University Library “St. Kliment of Ohrid”.

The bibliography refers only to the works written originally in Macedonian. This means that it includes also Macedonian authors of Albanian nationality that write in Macedonian, such as Luan Starova, whose works are originally written in Macedonian or Albanian. It also includes authors living abroad and writing in Macedonian.

The bibliography **covers 265 entries by 106 authors**. The number of translations almost doubled, from 37 to 60 between 2015 and 2016, but after that suffered a steady decline finally arriving at 32 translations in 2020.

**Dynamics of translation (2015–2020)**

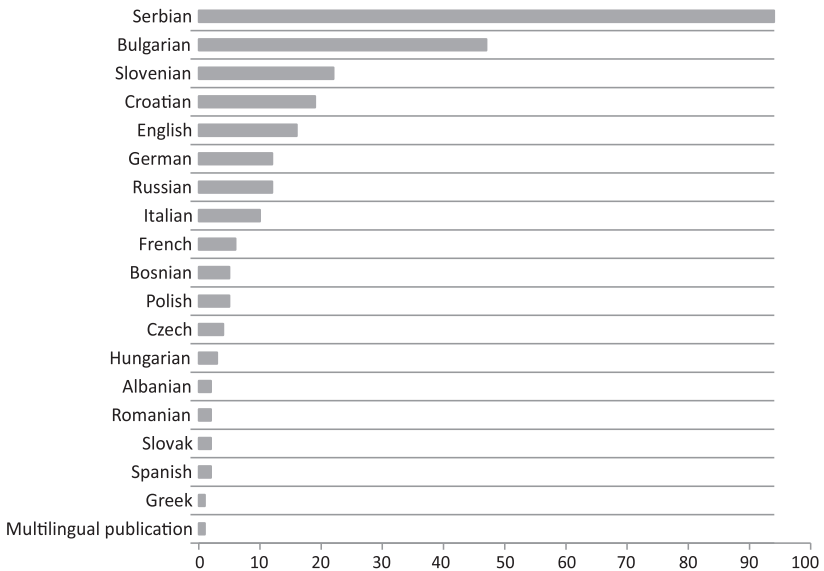


<sup>1</sup> World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022

These 265 translations were done in 18 languages, with one multilingual title published in Macedonian, Slovenian and English by Beletrina from Ljubljana (Slovenia).

**The top recipient language for Macedonian authors is Serbian (90 titles) followed by Bulgarian.**

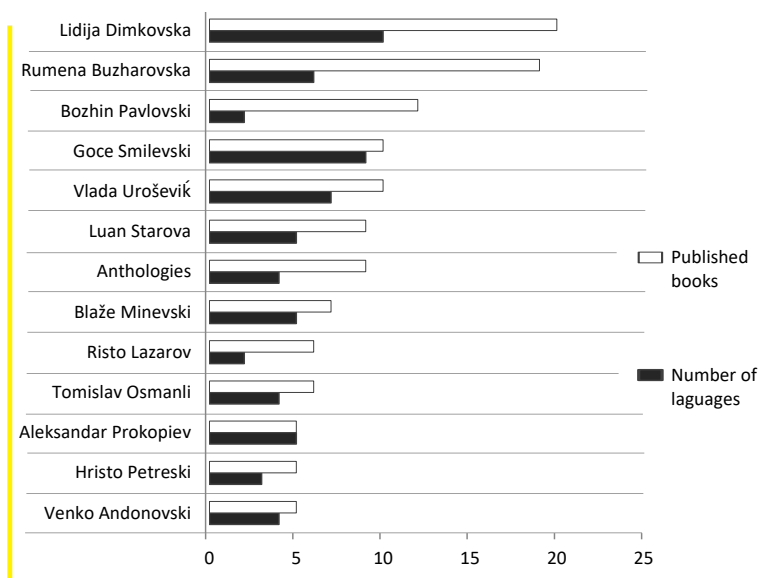
### Languages and N<sup>o</sup> of titles



Publishers show most interest in translations of contemporary Macedonian authors. **Lidija Dimkovska**, a poet, novelist, essayist, and translator living in Slovenia, is the most translated author between 2015–2020 with 20 translations into 10 languages. She is closely followed by another female author, **Rumena Bozharovska**, with 19 titles into seven different languages.

Goce Smilevski and Lidija Dimkovska received the EU Prize for Literature in 2010 and 2013, respectively.

## Most translated authors



There are about 20 organisations in Serbia that publish translations from Macedonian. However, many of them are civic associations or cultural centers, with no more than one or two titles from Macedonian in their catalogues.

**Booka** from Belgrade is the publishing house with the most titles published between 2015–2020 eight titles in total. Other prominent publishing houses are *Agora* from Novi Sad and *Laguna* from Belgrade. **Persei from Sofia** (Bulgaria) published 13 translations from Macedonian in the period concerned. Cankarjeva založba from Ljubljana (Slovenia) published six titles, the same as V.B.Z from Zagreb (Croatia). The group of publishing houses from EU countries showing interest in Macedonian literature is very diverse and some of them have published 3-4 translations in the last six years (**Toczka from Kraków**, **Leipziger Literaturverlag**, etc.)

# Country profiles: SERBIA

**Population (2020):** 6.908.224<sup>1</sup>

**Relevant state institutions:** Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia, National Library of Serbia

The statistics presented are based on the research and bibliography compiled by the experts. The team used the databases of European national libraries, authors' and translators' archives, and the databases of the Ministry of Culture, foreign foundations, and different cultural institutions. Furthermore, the team received 22 filled questionnaires, which were used for research purposes.

Initially, the collected bibliography consisted of more than **1000 entries**. However, after applying some exclusion criteria, the team reduced the entries to 704 books.

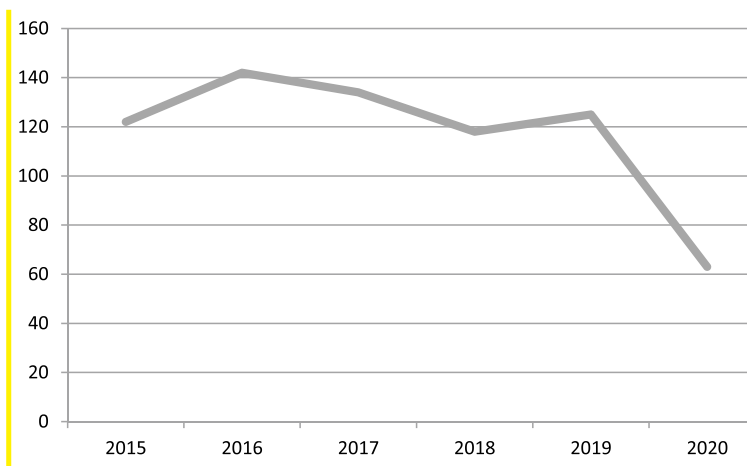
The research shows that works written in Serbian language were translated **into 27 languages** in the period 2015–2020. The annual breakdown demonstrates that between 2015–2019 **the number of translations varies between 118 and 142 per year**. However, 2020 marks a sharp decline with only 63 outgoing translations.

**Macedonian is the top recipient language of translations with 146 titles** published in the period in question. **English follows closely, and is the second most popular recipient language** with 140 translated books.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) – accessed March 2022

## Dynamics of translation (2015–2020)



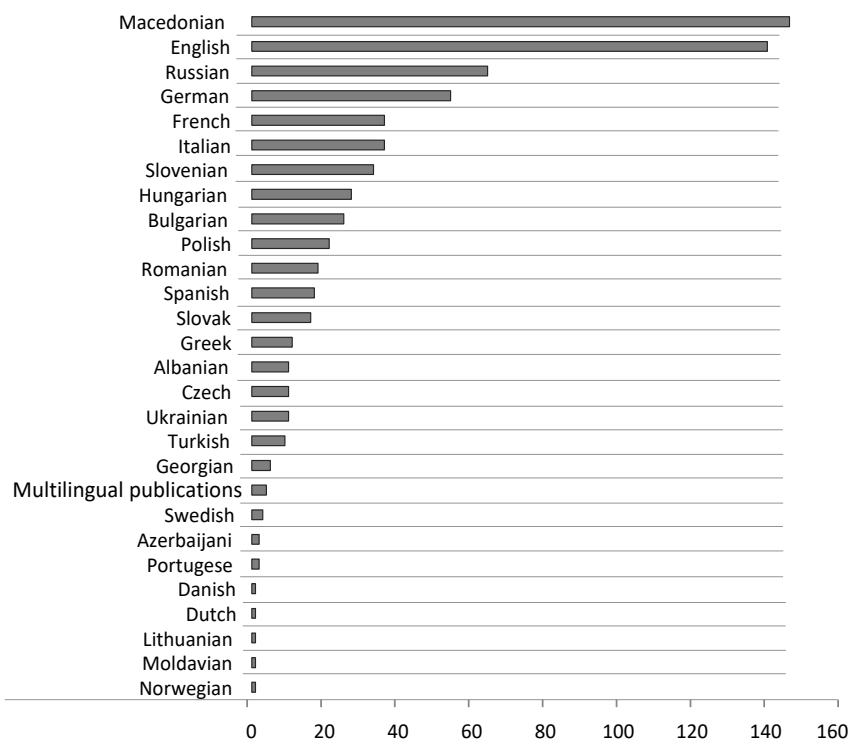
Four publications are multilingual:

- The Studenica Monastery published two multilingual editions of Saint Sava's work *Žitije Svetog Simeona* (Life of Saint Simeon) – one Old Slavonic, Serbian, Italian and Chinese, and another Old Slavonic, Serbian, French and German;
- Third multilingual book is a play published in Serbian, Russian and English;
- The forth is a book of poetry published in Serbian, English, French and Spanish.

It is to be noted that Russian appears in the statistics as №3 of the most frequent languages of translations.

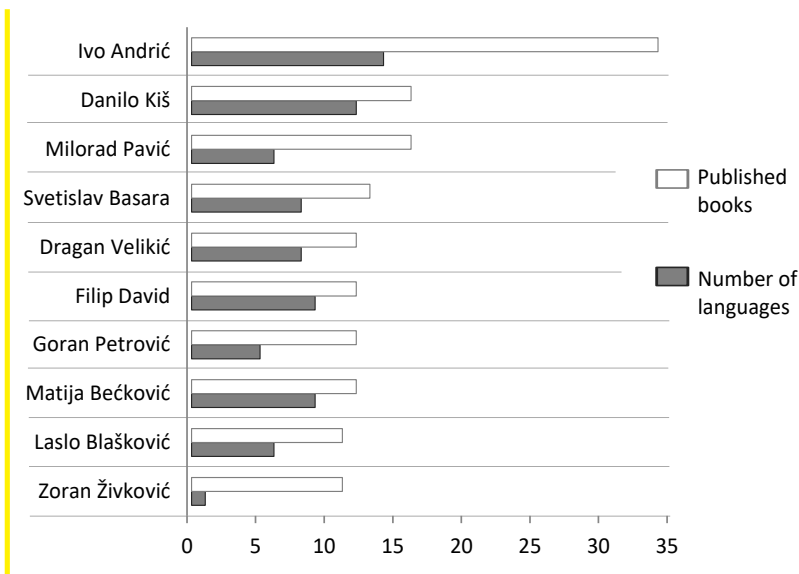
This is a notable fact as far as **Russian does not feature so prominently in none of the other countries top 10 recipient languages.**

## Languages and N<sup>o</sup> of titles



**Nobel Prize laureate Ivo Andrić is the most translated author in the period 2015–2020 with 34 titles.** Translations of his works are published by both local (Dereta, Forum, Sezam Book) and European publishing houses (Bottega Er-rante (Udine), Cavalo de Ferro (Lisbon), İletişim Yayınları (Istanbul), Suhrkamp (Frankfurt am Main), Head of Zeus (London), etc. **Danilo Kiš and Milorad Pavić** follow with 16 translations each. Adelphi edizioni from Milan published three titles by Kiš, C. Hanser from Munich published his two novels.



Most translated authors<sup>1</sup>

Milorad Pavić has seven works translated to English, all by Dereta Publishing House from Belgrade. Intelekti Publishing from Tbilisi published three books by Milorad Pavić to Georgian.

These classics are followed by contemporary writers: Basara, Velikić, David, Petrović, Bećković, Blašković, and Živković. One book of poetry by Matija Bećković is translated into nine languages between 2017–2018. The publisher for all nine editions is listed as Hamburg; Suvi Do; Beograd: J. Veljković. Zoran Živković has his 11 books translated into English, seven of them being published by Cadmus Press from Fukuoka (Japan).

Most frequently translated are **novels**, followed by books of poetry and short stories.

<sup>1</sup> The graph presented in this summary differs slightly from the graph in the country report. The reason is unclear since the graph in the summary is completely based on the bibliography compiled by the Serbian expert team.

Out of the 704 translations in the period 2015–2020, **182 or nearly 26% are published by the publishers from Serbia.** These works are published in 12 different languages. The publishers vary from peace building non-governmental organisations, organizers of literary events, writers' associations, self-publications, associations of national minorities, to publishing houses like Dereta or Geopoetika from Belgrade.

The list of international publishing houses that are most actively publishing translations from Serbian includes: **l'Espace d'un instant, l'Harmattan, Fayard and Gallimard in France; the UK-based Head of Zeus, Peter Owen Publishing and Istros Books; Iztok-Zapad Publishing House, Perseus Books, Svetlana Yancheva – Izida Publishing House from Bulgaria; Goten and Tri from North Macedonia; Schöffling & Co. (Frankfurt am Main); Leipziger Literaturverlag, etc.**

# Observations beyond statistics

The six country reports are indeed a pioneering endeavour and, the difficulties in obtaining bibliographical data notwithstanding, provide rich information on the state of literary translations from the studied Balkan languages into other languages. Importantly, the texts of the original reports give **a picture of the issues that people of the book in the six countries see as important**, of their concerns and viewpoints.

There is a shared concern in the reports about the insufficient presence of literature from the Western Balkan languages at the international market. There is, however, also a frustration, most detectable in the Albanian-language report, that literary translations into other languages “create a false impression” of the source literature as they are made without consistent quality criteria in mind and out of “extra-literary” reasons. These observations in the reports suggest a particular stance on outgoing translations, namely that the sum of all translations should somehow mirror the source language literature in its entirety and at the same time, that translations should represent “the best of” the source literature to the international reader. All other possible considerations at the recipient side such as the editorial policy of a publisher, commercial considerations, readers’ interest and the like, are rarely discussed in the reports. Curiously, some of the policy recommendations in the reports go as far as to suggest the creation of a single authority in the source language country charged with

the responsibility to decide which books are of sufficient quality and worth the attention of the international reader.

## Publishers

When talking about publishers, one can distinguish four categories. First one is the category of **samizdat or self-published** books. Very few of them have any significant reception, their distribution is very poor, and as a rule they do not reach the international audience. Situation is somehow better with the second category – of entities which are **not publishers** *per se* such as printing houses, associations, NGOs. They translate and publish occasionally, as part of a larger project or even as stand-alone publications. The reasons for translation of a particular book may be different, but rarely are they purely literary ones. The publishers in these two categories are almost exclusively from the same country as the writer. The distribution abroad is almost non-existent as these translations are mainly used as promotional tools for the organisation and its mission, or for the writer. Therefore, these publications do not contribute to a better intercultural exchange.

Last two categories are more important for the subject of this report. These include local publishers and publishers abroad. Majority of the **local publishers** have foreigners living in or visiting the country as a target audience, and very few of them pay attention to distribution of their translated titles abroad. One of these few is Geopoetika from Belgrade. This publishing house not only translates Serbian authors but also plays a role of an intermediary between authors, translators, and foreign publishing houses. And finally, there are publishing houses

abroad. Big foreign publishing houses are usually uninterested to risk and publish works of emerging authors writing in one of the languages from the Western Balkans. Combined data from all the six reports highlights **independent publishers** in different countries that frequently and consistently show interest in authors from the region - *Peter Owen, Istros Books, Dalkey Archive Press, Laertes Press, Pushkin Press, Wieser Verlag, Leipzig Literaturverlag, Besa muci, Bottega Errante, Napkút Kiadó, M.E.O. edition*, etc.

When analysing the frequency of translation, some patterns become obvious. Foreign publishers show more interest for some literatures than for others, depending on **already established cultural or other ties** such as historic connections and geographical proximity (Albania-Italy), significant diaspora (Macedonian diaspora in the USA and Australia, Bosnian-Herzegovian diaspora in Germany and the Scandinavian countries), or traditional interest for a certain literature (Serbia-France).

Further analysis of the translated authors reveals that **the publishers show the greatest interest for contemporary writers**, mainly for novels and poetry, a little bit less for short stories, while plays are rarely translated. However, among the translated works we can find about a dozen writers who were active before the 20th century, but these are usually published locally, in the source-language country.

Publishers show **constant interest in renowned authors who were active in the last century**. These authors have gained acclaim from academic and literary circles; some - such as Ivo Andrić who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961, hold international awards. There is an inherited interest in their works. As a result, the publishers translate their works regularly or

make reprints. Some of these authors include the already mentioned Andrić, followed by Danilo Kiš, Meša Selimović,

Miloš Crnjanski, Borislav Pekić, Ismail Kadare etc. Their books are mainly translated by international publishers, but also very often by local ones<sup>1</sup>.

The third, and the largest, group consists of **contemporary writers of different generations**. They reach international audience in different ways. Majority of writers have built their reputation in their local literary scene first and gradually became internationally known and, thus, potentially interesting for international publishers. Nevertheless, there is also a small set of writers who had their works translated either by some organisations which do not have literary publishing as their main mission or as self-published titles. Most of the writers represented in the analysed bibliographies still live in the Balkans. However, a significant number of authors live in diaspora. Very often, they publish both in their native and adopted languages. This is notable for the writers represented in the report for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Translators

Crucial role in the whole process, of course, is the one of the translators. They are the “silent heroes” whose role does not end with the creative act of translating. Very often and especially when

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in Serbia, Publishing House Dereta from Belgrade translated works by Ivo Andrić and Milorad Pavić in the observed period; Branislav Romchevich translated and published three most important works by Petar II Petrović Njegoš in 2018 and 2019 in Belgrade; Connectum from Sarajevo published seven works by Dževad Karahasan; Publishing House Obod from Cetinje published seminal work by Petar II Petrović Njegoš (*Gorski vijenac* / *The Mountain Wreath*) in 2015 and 2018.

translating from/to so-called „small“ languages, they function as selectors, agents, and promoters. Publishers, usually not very familiar with the literary scene in the Balkans, do **rely heavily on the expertise of translators** when they want to publish new titles, especially if the writers are not already recognizable for their target audience. In the six countries in question, translators meet different challenges; they are expected to translate for readers who very often do not know the culture and context in which the source language functions; consequently, the publishers are rather reluctant to translate books which will need additional effort for promotion and have smaller chance of gaining profit; budgets for translation in the Balkan countries are, generally, modest; overall political and cultural framework in the said countries is complicated and does not favour translation and cultural exchange in general; translators are considered more like technical staff than creative partners of the overall process; and finally, their remunerations do not reflect the complexity and responsibility of their work. Those that are ready to face all these hurdles, and do that with enthusiasm and grit, belong either to academic circles, have fascination for the region and its culture, have personal ties with the language, or are the writers themselves who venture into translating their own work hoping they would be best suited to do their work justice.

### **Organisations, funding, initiatives**

When talking about the **support that countries provide for “outgoing” translations**, we need to go back to the early ‘90s again. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia many of the mechanisms for promotion of culture, including literature, disappeared. Unfortunately, newly formed countries did not establish new ways

of promoting contemporary literature. Unlike, for example, promotion of film production, promotion of contemporary literary production did not receive attention from the new states. At the moment, **none of the analysed countries has a fully functional, sustainable and publicly funded agency for promotion of literature abroad.** Closest to a such an agency is to be found in Albania and its National Book and Reading Center<sup>1</sup> established in 2019 by the Ministry of Culture. A core mission of the Center is, among other things, to support promotion of Albanian literature in Europe and worldwide.

Although not far-reaching as a strategic support to translations, there are some noteworthy examples of attempts to bring Balkan literature to European readers. **All six countries, except Kosovo, do have some kind of programs for support of translations into other languages but these often lack strategic focus and coherency, continuity and sufficient funding.** The six countries analysed have different approaches to financing translations of local literature. In Albania, the National Book and Reading Center supported translators for translation of 5 books in 2020 and 6 in 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo do not have funds dedicated for the support of translations of local writers. The Ministry of Culture of North Macedonia supports publishing in general. While some additional funds are available through other budgets, the most important instrument for support of translation is the **fund available to international publishers.** The Ministry of Culture funds translations of representative and quality works of Macedonian literature in the following areas: fiction, drama, poetry, essays, children's literature (without picture books and textbooks), and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://qkll.gov.al/>



anthologies. Books eligible for the support should be published in North Macedonia in Macedonian or in the languages of ethnic minorities living in the country. In Montenegro, there is no specific budget dedicated for the support of translation and promotion of books from Montenegro. The Serbian Ministry of Culture has allocated funds for translation which is distributed through the open competition for representative works of Serbian literature. In the period 2015-2019, this fund supported the translation of 374 titles, in the total amount of over 500.000 euro.

Further to sheer grants-distribution, there are certainly other instruments for support (see also the chapter *Recommendations*). Serbia, for example, has organised participation to different international book fairs as Guest of Honor (Sofia 2010; Leipzig 2011; Minsk and Teheran 2018). This initiative, according to interviewees participating in the Serbia report, demonstrates that the institutions understand the importance of promotion of local literature abroad. On the other hand, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina has implemented the project International Affirmation of Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2010. Sixteen titles have been published or selected for translation so far. The books are mainly translated into English, with two translated into French. The Ministry of Culture of North Macedonia regularly supports publishers' participation at international book fairs. The possibility to use the focus country mechanism at major book-fairs was also discussed in North Macedonia but never actually took shape due to lack of resources.

Fortunately, all six countries are eligible for participating in the European Commission's *Creative Europe Programme* which provides significant support to publishers interested in

translations and to other partner initiatives in the field of books.. Furthermore, *Traduki*, since its inception in 2008, has proven to be an important factor in supporting translations and exchange in Southeastern Europe.

One of the most important elements of promotion of translation are **language departments** where young people could get introduced with the languages and cultures of the Balkans. Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin can still profit from the network of language departments in different countries established during the former Yugoslavia. Although newly formed countries do not pay much attention to maintaining and enlarging the network, the tradition of learning languages previously known under the umbrella name „Serbo-Croatian“ is still present in different European countries. Macedonian language can be studied at different universities in Europe and even in the USA and Canada. The Albanian language is taught at the University of Belgrade.

In addition to universities where the languages from the Balkans are taught, there are different **seminars and summer schools** which play a significant role in widening the networks of translators. The Albanological Institute in Prishtina has been organising an Albanology Seminar since 1982. The seminars are attended by researchers, translators, and writers from all over the world, some of whom have been translating literature written in Albanian for years. St Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje have been organising the International Seminar on Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture since 1967. The Seminar is in charge of, among other things, organisation of summer and winter schools of Macedonian language and tutorials of Macedonian language, literature history, and culture area.

And finally, **residencies for writers and literary translators** are one more way for translators to deepen their knowledge of language, culture, and society. The residencies are not that numerous in the region. Poeteka, a literary and culture magazine from Tirana, has organised the residency for writers and translators „Tirana in Between.“ Another example is OKF from Cetinje which organised with the support of Traduki a literary residency for writers and translators who translate from Montenegrin to German, Slovenian, Macedonian, Albanian, Romanian, and Bulgarian. Goten from Skopje organises, again in partnership with Traduki and others, a residency for writers and translators. The residency started in 2013, and 230 writers and translators have participated in the residency since then.

Translators and publishers – they have a crucial role in the effort of making bridges between cultures and languages. However, in order to achieve this they need a whole supporting infrastructure that facilitates flow of information. Those are **book fairs and literary festivals** (for example: Pro-za Balkan in Skopje; Struga Poetry Evenings; Bookstan in Sarajevo) that enable meeting of publishers and writers' (and occasionally, translators) direct contact with audience; platforms (such as Versopolis) and literary magazines give opportunity to young writers to publish and reach audience faster and more directly, and to translators to present emerging authors with one or two poems or short stories; local and regional literary prizes help promoting writers and their works.

General consensus among experts and interviewees in all six countries is that possibilities for developing contacts for translation of the local literatures are underutilised. All activities during the fairs and festivals are organised around writers

and publishers and their promotion without strategic thinking aiming to improve translation of these same writers' works. Exceptions may be big international book fairs like Belgrade Book Fair where writers and publishers can meet international literary agents.

Local and regional **literary awards** create an interest of critics, literary festivals' organisers, and audience for the author, which may lead to better chances for translations. However, real potential for more translations have international prizes, especially the *EU Prize for Literature*. The EU Literary Prize puts a real spotlight on the authors who receive it and first translations of the awarded work usually follow within a year or two. Another cross-border award is *Balkanika* - a regional prize for writers from the Balkans, more precisely Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Romania, Greece, and Turkey. It was established in 1996. Yet another award proved to be instrumental in putting a genre author in the Top 10 for Serbia. Namely, Zoran Živković received the World Fantasy Award. This award is one of the three most coveted awards in the field of speculative fiction and it brought attention to Živković who has 11 titles translated in English in the period 2015-2020.

It has been proven over and over again that a translation in English can be the most direct way for a work written in one of the languages of the Balkans to reach new audiences abroad. In this case, the English translation can be a mediator, be it as a bridge to a third language, or as a source of information. Perhaps that is the reason why many countries are most willing to do translations in English. We have already mentioned the initiative of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in 2015 there was also an initiative of the Albanian Ministry of Culture with

the title „Albanian Books.“ The idea was to make an online catalogue which would bring together the most representative authors of Albanian literature for international publishing houses. Furthermore, in 2018 the International Book Fair in Podgorica made an agreement with Istros books and the translator Will Firth to do sample translations of parts of the books selected by Will Firth and offer them to different publishing houses. The project is still ongoing, along with negotiations with different publishing houses.

Several international long-term initiatives aim to increase frequency of translations and the improvement of quality of translations in the Western Balkans. Forum of Slavic Cultures runs *100 Slavic Novels*, an international literary programme promoting contemporary Slavic literature written after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The program includes 9 countries (Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia), 108 authors, 108 novels, 53 translators, publishing houses.

*Traduki*, a European network of foundations, institutions and ministries connecting the countries of Southeast Europe and German-speaking countries, was established in 2008. It supports dialogue between the countries of Southeast Europe and the German-speaking countries as well as within Southeast Europe. It does that by means of translations, residencies, and other literary projects. Traduki broke the well-established patterns in terms of authors whose works were published until then and enabled a new generation of writers to get noticed. Also, it invigorated translation activities between Southeast Europe and the German-speaking countries as well as within Southeastern Europe.

The road from a writer to a reader of the translated book is a winding and complex one and many aspects influence it, including luck. It is especially challenging when the book is translated from a small language into a more dominant language and for a bigger market where it has to compete for attention. Timing may play a role because the interest of the audience may depend on whether a particular country may be in focus due to extraliterary reasons. When published locally, the translations are mostly made for diplomatic purposes or meant for tourists and expats and, therefore, are rarely promoted and disseminated by the usual book channels abroad. Writers who have gained international reputation as classics of the 20th century still may have a better reception than the new emerging writers. Even the winners of the EU Literary Prize usually experience an outburst of attention for some time but that attention is difficult to maintain for a longer period of time. Very few writers from the region have literary agents in the regions or elsewhere, and reception and audiences' feedback is rarely considered. Creating and maintaining international interest is, therefore, impacted by a variety of factors and can only work if sustainable and lively structures are at place and working in cooperation.

# Recommendations

While the six countries included in the reports are different, the issues pertaining to translation from their languages have a number of features in common. In fact, they **share these features with many other “lesser used” or “peripheral” languages across the world that struggle for more visibility and wider presence of their literatures in translation.** Just as is the case with other such “peripheral” languages, international interest in the literature coming from the Western Balkans waxes and wanes, very often due to extra-literary reasons. Therefore, **sustained attention and dedicated support to international promotion is of utmost importance.** Whatever form this support takes and whatever instruments are used, national literatures promotion is to be impactful only if:

- ❶ Is sustainable and continuous;
- ❷ Is backed-up with sufficient financial resources;
- ❸ Abolishes the “supply-driven”, “top down” approach and expectations for national representativeness of the translated works. That is to say, respects the editorial choices of the international publishers, takes into consideration the context of the target language and the variety of reading audiences rather than what is perceived as literary canon in the source literature;
- ❹ Seeks cooperation and mutual learning between public, private, non-governmental and international organisations active in cultural exchange as well as with the promotional efforts in other art forms (film, visual arts, etc).

Despite the common understanding that each of the source literatures' countries is small, unable to set trends or create a "brand", none of the reports takes into serious consideration possible **intra-Balkan cooperation** in promoting translations or joint international presentations. Hence, the future actions and recommendations proposed in the reports concern mostly the national (policy) level, and more concretely include:

- ① Better **strategic focus** of the publicly funded actions (grants, book-fairs participation, mobility support for writers, etc);
- ② Increase of **financial resources** for international literature promotion;
- ③ Clear criteria and procedures as well as accessibility of the **translation funds** for the international publishers;
- ④ Opening up or supporting existing programs in support of **international literary translators from the source language**. Instruments that have proven impactful are: support for the language departments abroad, local residencies for literary translators, workshops and other forms of capacity-building, regular gatherings of translators in the country of the source language, translation awards, supply of the translators with information and new titles from the source language;
- ⑤ Support for individuals and organisations acting as **literary agents** in their further professionalization in the field, including through support for international mobility to professional events such as festivals, bookfairs and other forums;
- ⑥ More proactive **participation at international book-fairs, festivals and other book forums**;
- ⑦ **Data gathering**, possibly by National Libraries, on translations published abroad;



- ⑧ Opening up or supporting existing initiatives in **hosting international publishers, editors and agents** during local bookfairs, festivals, special invitation programs;
- ⑨ Utilization of the national cultural centers abroad and other channels for **spreading information about existing opportunities** (grants, residencies, local festivals and fairs);
- ⑩ Support for **international** mobility of writers, literary managers, translators, cultural journalists for participation at festivals and professional forums abroad.





This document represents a summary of the results of six studies on literary translations of authors from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, completed within the framework of the project Balkan Translations Collider. The aim of the reports was to provide an up to date “map” of the state of literary translations from a set of Balkan languages into other European languages in the period 2015-2020.

All country reports are available in full-text and for free at:  
[www.npage.org](http://www.npage.org) – Library section



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