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## **Book World Prague 2023 will explore thoughts behind books, honour Iranian women and men for their fight against the totalitarian regime and focus on Ukraine together with the Ukrainian literary star Serhiy Zhadan**

*“Book fairs and festivals focus more and more on what is behind books – thoughts,”* points out Radovan Auer, Director of Book World Prague. For the 28th time, the international book fair and literary festival creates space for ideas and food for thought. Once again, it provides a public forum for authors fighting for various freedoms within the section entitled Literature, or the Voice of Freedom. The Jiří Theiner Award awarded within this section goes to Iran, to Iranian writers and women fighting against oppression. Book World Prague 2023 keeps supporting Ukraine as the aim of the festival is to help Ukrainian refugees to maintain contact with their language and literature. The Ukrainian programme will feature one of the most famous contemporary Ukrainian writers, Serhiy Zhadan, as the main star. He will present himself to the audience as a writer as well as a rocker. This year’s edition will showcase contemporary Taiwanese literature again as well as programmes for young people, focused, among other things, on identifying fake news. Book World Prague 2023 will welcome visitors from 11 to 14 May at the Prague Exhibition Grounds in the newly reconstructed Křižík pavilions while the program part will take place in tents. This year’s theme is **Authors Without Borders**. The guest of honour will not be a specific country but authors transgressing notional borders. Names of main guests and the complete programme will be revealed at the beginning of April.

The theme of the 28th edition is the unique concept of **Authors Without Borders**. It reflects the present time when borders become increasingly blurred. Thus, the guest of honour is not a specific country this time but authors transgressing borders in many different ways. The concept deals not only with national borders or language barriers, but also with social borders across social classes based on different levels of education or economic status, barriers based on cultural differences or sexual identity or in the context of literature, boundaries between different genres, and last but not least, also political borders at which the authors, facing injustice, give their voice to the voiceless. *“The idea of democracy, humanism and freedom of speech has, without exaggeration, been part of the DNA of Book World Prague since its very beginnings,”* reminds Radovan Auer, Director of Book World Prague.

The theme of freedom of speech resonates both with the main concept of “Authors Without Borders” and with the separate section entitled **Literature, or the Voice of Freedom**, which crystallized two years ago as the festival’s commitment to freedom of speech. The dramaturgy of this section provides a public forum to authors who fight against bans or censorship in their country, ranging from political

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dissidents to unorthodox thinkers, from those fighting for gender equality to controversial writers. In 2021, it focused primarily on Belarusian authors and last year on the country attacked by the Russian aggressor, Ukraine. As part of the programme of the 28th edition, Book World Prague will also give voice to a number of guests from countries where freedom of speech is not a common concept and the functioning of society is not based on democratic principles. The importance of providing such a space is illustrated, for example, by texts by Irena Brežná. The Swiss author and journalist originally from Slovakia is one of the guests who accepted the invitation to take part in the “Literature as the Voice of Freedom” section this year. *“Perhaps if more people, especially politicians, read her war reports from the Chechen wars, they would not be so surprised by the brutality of Putin’s current aggression,”* points out Guillaume Basset, Dramaturg of Book World Prague.

The dramaturgy of the “Literature as the Voice of Freedom” section also reflects the current situation in Iran. The **Jiří Theiner Award** therefore goes to Iranian women and authors currently fighting against the mullah oppression. *“Both the repression against the youth in Iran and the attack on Salman Rushdie remind us of what we have to stand for,”* said the festival’s dramaturg. The Jiří Theiner Award forms a traditional part of Book World Prague but it changed last year. Originally, it was awarded for promoting Czech literature abroad but now it honours those who are the voice of freedom, take a stand against censorship and fight for democracy. Last year, the first laureate was the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich, who writes in Russian and who dedicated her award to Ukrainian authors.

**Ukraine** is a recurring theme of Book World Prague also at the festival’s 28th edition. Last year, the festival was the first major international event since the Russian aggression, where Ukrainian literature was presented through a rich program and especially with the participation of writers and other creators associated with literature, which was - and still is - difficult considering the limited possibilities of travel from the war-torn country. At this year’s edition, the festival added one more important task to the support for Ukraine: to help several hundred thousand people from Ukraine, a large part of whom are children, so that they do not lose contact with their culture, language and literature even when staying in the Czech Republic. Thus, the primary purpose of the Ukrainian exposition is the distribution of books in Ukrainian but apart from that there will be a rich Ukrainian programme. The main star of the event will be probably the most prominent figure in Ukrainian literature, **Serhiy Zhadan**. In 2019, the famous American historian Timothy Snyder described this author and performer as *“one of the most important creators of European culture at work today. His novels, poems, and songs touch millions.”* Zhadan has been, as one of the defenders of Kharkiv, heavily involved in the fight of Ukrainians for freedom. His war novel *Internat* is planned to be published in Czech in 2023. Zhadan will also feature at Book World Prague 2023 as a rock star together with his punk rock band Sobaki. All proceeds from the concert will be donated to support Zhadan’s organization of Chartija. This is possible

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thanks to the cooperation with the PPF Foundation, which decided to cover all the costs associated with the presentation of Ukraine at this year's festival.

In addition to supporting Ukraine, Book World Prague continues to showcase **Taiwanese** literature. There will be a workshop focused on the Czech edition of Ling Sing-ťie's book *Chlapec z nočního trhu* (*Night Market Boy*) and the meeting with Taiwanese authors, Liu Ka-shiang and Egoyan Zheng, will shed light on the meaning of the phrase "think as an island". The 28th edition also includes **a programme for schools**. The students will learn to navigate the endless flow of news at a workshop focused on identifying disinformation.

*"A book is not a way to kill time, it is a way to kill old thoughts, oppressive thoughts—oppression. It is a way to liberate the mind,"* says Guillaume Basset, Dramaturg of the festival. Visitors to the international book fair and literary festival Book World Prague 2023 will find books and their authors that prove the said words from 11 to 14 May at the Prague Exhibition Grounds. The exhibition part of the festival will be presented in the newly reconstructed Křížík pavilions and the programme part will be housed in tents and surrounding areas. Tickets for World Book Prague 2023 are available at [www.svetknihy.cz](http://www.svetknihy.cz).

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