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THE FIRST YEAR OF VISEGRAD EASTERN PARTNERSHIP LITERARY AWARD

Literatures of the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EP) do not belong to frequently and plentifully read ones in Central European countries. Causes for the marginality of these literatures are numerous and they are not always easy to detect or clarify, let alone eradicate. It is highly positive that one can find initiatives aiming at the change of such a situation. In 2014, The Department of Russian and East European Studies (Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia) initiated the creation of The Visegrad Eastern Partnership Literary Award project (VEaPLA), which is supposed to become a platform for cooperation among intellectuals working in the field of literature of the post-Soviet area and in the V4 countries. The Head of the Department Doc. Mgr. Ľubor Matejko, PhD. and his colleagues managed to form the team of scholars including the partners from the V4 countries (The Czech republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia) as well as from the countries of the EP (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldavia, Ukraine) who would contribute to the presentation of the authors of poetry, fiction and non-fiction literary works from the countries of the EP to readers from Central Europe. On the 4th of July 2014, the first VEaPLA jury meeting was held in Bratislava. The main goal was to choose the winner of VEaPLA and thus to support an outstanding personality and popularize his/her works as well as his/her country. There were two main criteria to meet: 1) the nominated book had to be published within the last three years; 2) the book was supposed to have an exceptional response of the public and a particular impact on the life of the country. The nominations (supported by short justifications, added reviews and critiques) had been submitted by the current project partners from the countries of the EP, namely from Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine. Unfortunately, no nominations came from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldavia. Armenian partners nominated two young authors: a fiction and non-fiction writer Aram Pachyan (born 1983) for the book *Goodbye, Bird* (Yerevan: Antares Publishing House, 2012) and a writer, actor and playwright Hovhannes Tekgyozyan (born 1974) for the book *The Fleeting City* (Yerevan: Antares Publishing

House, 2012). Both authors, although each by different means, attempt to present the contemporary world as an unstable, incomprehensible, “fleeting” and hostile entity causing the feeling of isolation of the individual (Tekgyozyan does this by the means of fantastical cartoon-animated descriptions, echoing voices; Pachyan by creating a complicated puzzle-like-text balancing on the verge of reality, imagination, recollections, thus erasing the borders between them). Belarusian partners nominated three authors: a philosopher, essayist and literary critic Valiantsin Akudovich (born 1950) for *A Book About Nothing* (Minsk: Logvinau, 2012), a poet, prose-writer, translator and philosopher Ihar Babkou (born 1964) for the book *A Minute* (Minsk: Logvinau, 2013) and a writer and translator Alherd Bakharevich (born 1975) for the book *Hamburg Account of Bakharevich* (Minsk: Logvinau, 2012). The last nominations came from Ukraine: Lina Kostenko (born 1930) for her book *Diary of a Ukrainian Madman* (Kiev: A-ba-ba-ha-la-ma-ha, 2010), Yuriy Vynnychuk (born 1952) for his book *The Tango of Death* (Kharkov: Folio, 2012). Unfortunately, the book by Lina Kostenko was eliminated, because it did not fulfil the condition of the year of publishing; Yuriy Vynnychuk was not taken into account for the late nomination. The final combat thus took place among Belarusian and Armenian authors. Especially interesting nominations were those from Belarus, not only because of the various genres of the nominated books (Babkou – fiction, Bakharevich – literary essays, Akudovich – a book of philosophy), but also for the extraordinariness and originality of the personalities themselves. The choice was thus enriched by subjective, witty, iconoclastic and destructive assessment of the classical Belarusian literature in the form of over 50 essays (Bakharevich), a book dealing with the metaphysics of absence (Akudovich) and a novel introducing the question of the role of the intellectual in the contemporary Belarusian milieu, his isolation and loneliness and thus creating “the specific zone of thinking” (Babkou). VEaPLA jury, consisting of Lubor Matejko, Mária Kusá, Anton Eliáš (Comenius University, Bratislava), Lajos Pálfalvi (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest), Paulina Olechowska (University of Warsaw, voted in absence – by post) and Tereza Chláňová (Charles University, Prague), decided to award as the Book of the year 2014 Ihar Babkou’s *A Minute*. The jury valued the wide range of Babkou’s activities (including high originality of his philosophical essays), his influence in the Belarusian intellectual milieu, taking into account the fact that several Babkou’s books have won particular attention of the reading public from Belarus and beyond. Last but not least, the members of the jury appreciated Babkou’s cultivated use of language, which, on the top of that, becomes the theme itself – the question of the artistic expression. The consequence of the award does not lie only in the increase of the prestige of the author and the financial prize of €1,300, but also in publishing the book in one of the languages of the V4 countries (this time in Slovak; Ihar Babkov. *Minútka. Tri príbehy*. Translation Ivana Slivková, Lubor Matejko. Artforum 2014). The jury meeting was not restricted only to the discussion about the nominated

books; the present members had the possibility to be introduced into the situation of the chosen literatures of the EP by the post-graduate students of the Department: the current literary process in Armenia was presented by Nina Cingerová, the Belarusian literature by Ivan Posokhin, Kateřina Hřčková concluded by the outline of Georgian contemporary literature. The outlines of Moldavian and Ukrainian literatures (authors: Libuša Vajdová, Irina Dulebová) appeared in the Eastern Partnership Literary Review (Vol. 1 [2014], No. 1), a periodical closely related to the above described activities of Lubor Matejko and his team. This periodical (planned to be published by the Comenius University twice a year) is intended to be dedicated to the literary scenes of the countries of the EP. Last but not least, it is necessary to mention also the project's aim to create a database of authors, literary reviews, publishing houses and literary awards, festivals, competitions and events of the literary life scene in the countries of the EP (in an electronic version). All in all, the first year of the project has demonstrated a great potential and a promising development in the future.