

# Frankfurt Book Fair 2011

Opening ceremony, Congress Center  
Tuesday, 11 October 2011

**Prof. Dr. Gottfried Honnefelder, President of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels**

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President Grímsson,  
Foreign Minister Skarphéðinsson,  
Foreign Minister Westerwelle,  
Distinguished authors Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir,  
and Arnaldur Indriðason,  
Deputy Prime Minister Hahn,  
Mayor Roth,  
Colleagues from all corners of the globe,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

I.

“The Bible is experiencing a slight hiccup in sales”, reported the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* four weeks ago. Last year, 29.9 million Bibles and 9.9 million New Testaments were distributed worldwide. They say the decline of 1.4 million copies compared to the previous year is partially offset by the proliferation of new media. Even the Bible, you might be thinking, the oldest book in the world? Could it have an impact on the Bible? Among the many tools of mankind, wrote Jorge Luis Borges a half century ago, the most astonishing is undoubtedly the book. Today the book is just another link in the vast media chain for content, though still unquestionably a primary link. It still exists, the established chain, the book business – from author to publisher and retailer to reader. But it is no longer the only way for authors to reach their readers. This year, 7384 exhibitors from all over the world are coming to Frankfurt for the international Frankfurt Book Fair. How many media companies will be there? How many of them are publishers? The term “Verleger” – “publisher” – comes from the word “vorlegen” – “to advance”: The publisher advances capital to produce a book and gets it back if and when the book is successful in terms of sales. What is true today was also the case in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – for as long as the book has been distributed into the marketplace. The publisher as salesman, whose economic sense is most essential to a book publisher – at least as a necessary condition. The economy prospers only when it follows its own functional logic, and culture thrives only where resources are readily available to it. But is this more or less a legitimisation of economic exploitation? If homo oeconomicus is only concerned with securing his own survival, will he not be left short of breath? And what will he actually do once he has secured his own survival? Will the need for entertainment be all that remains? As the old party game goes, what’s the one book we’d take with us to a desert island? Or has this old game played itself out with the advent of the e-book, given that we can now upload some 2000 book titles simultaneously to a device for our island visit? Alfred Döblin speaks of the three eyes of the publisher – he keeps one eye on the author, another on the reader, but with the third eye, the eye of wisdom, he keeps an undeterred watch over his wallet. It is this combination that contributes to what we refer to as “book culture”. And it’s this combination – especially since the book functions as the vital first link in a vast value chain for content – that is so important for literature, entertainment, knowledge and information. Who will discover this content? Who will select it? Who has the right intuition? Who will attend to the authors? Who will invest in a project that doesn’t seem economically sustainable at first glance? These types of publishers are becoming rare, but they do still exist. And this has nothing to do with whether we publish printed books or invest primarily in other forms of exploitation in the digital world. More than ever, the publishing world of tomorrow will need publishers with traditional goals with relation to content. They are the guarantee that there will be a publishing industry in the future that is worthy of this name.

II.

Where exactly can you witness the cultural identity of a country in its unfiltered state? What should you do in order to learn something about a country – about its history, its values, the people who live there, or even their nature? You read it in books – this is still the case today. A culture has more or less an open corpus of stories in which the collective memory expresses its identity. It creates this identity

and ensures its continuity by educating about tradition. An appearance as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair can also shed light on this cultural identity. The 2011 Guest of Honour Iceland shows us how writing, publishing and reading can inspire a people. The small country with its 318,000 inhabitants has a long and vast literary tradition. Iceland's fascination with books and its emphasis on reading have already given us a most beautiful preview of the cultural identity, richness and history of this country. We are delighted to have Iceland and its authors and publishers as our guest this year, and wish them all a very warm welcome, President Grimsson.

### III.

Whether it's the United States, Germany or even Iceland – digital publishing has become part of everyday life all over the world. But what has not completely been conveyed online to this point is something that the book trade has now made indispensable to our society. The process of selection and evaluation that has been assumed by the print and publishing industry over the centuries is still in its infancy when it comes to the digital format. Which is why publishers need to ensure that digital media also offer the public this same degree of selectivity, safety and mediation. But what the digital format does technically enable is illegal dealings with published content. And what's more, piracy is taking on serious economic weight thanks to digitisation. In Germany, approximately 60 per cent of e-books used are currently downloaded illegally – and this despite the fact that the market is still very small. Every book that is accessible digitally will also be available illegally at some point. There must be enough readers and media consumers who are willing to purchase content legally. But for this we not only need an outstanding selection of titles from publishers, but also significant punishment for malfeasance. But how seriously is this issue being taken by our society? In the recent election in Berlin, the Pirate Party was able to gather nearly 9 per cent of votes. The federal level forecasts a similar turn of events. Their stated objectives include the abolishment of patent and copyright law. How seriously is our society taking this development? The young party sees itself as a party of the information society. One of its central aims, as I've already mentioned, is to change copyright, since the notion of "intellectual property" -- and thus the justification behind it -- is based on an obsolete notion of how to deal with content. The demands are popular among those who do not make a living from texts, literature or content – so-called intellectual property. What will the consequences be? "After a week of parliamentary work, they have proven that they are different: clueless, but transparent", the *Financial Times* wrote of the Pirate Party in Berlin at the end of September. My urgent advice goes to our current political representatives: To sympathise with a small group of vocal net activists for strategic campaign purposes – out of fear that this new group could cost votes – against the backdrop of these developments in Berlin, is not only shortsighted, but irresponsible. Two years ago, Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke on this very stage at the opening of the Frankfurt Book Fair and emphasized that the federal government would do everything in its power to safeguard copyright protection, the protection of intellectual property, on a global scale. We are taking the chancellor at her word. The book is the medium of the future. For this reason, we need publishers with an interest in content and with the economic boldness to continue making new investments. We also need politicians who are aware of their responsibility toward the cultural and information society.

On that note, I wish you all a successful Book Fair in 2011.