

*[Speech held in German language.]*

**Welcome Address by City of Chemnitz Mayor, Barbara Ludwig, at the award ceremony for the International Stefan Heym Prize on 1st July 2011**

*As delivered.*

Mr Ćosić,  
Mrs Klasić,  
Mrs Heym,  
Members of the Bundestag, the Saxon State Parliament and of  
Chemnitz City Council,  
Members of the Award Committee,  
Mr Pleitgen,  
Dr. Uhlig,  
Dr. Röcher,  
Mr Conzendorf,  
Mayors and Mayoresses,  
Dr. Seifert,  
My dear fellow residents of Chemnitz,  
Honoured guests of this celebration,

Three years ago we awarded the Stefan Heym Prize for the first time. To Amos Oz. A happy decision, with which the jury underlined the prize's high standards. And at the same time, an unquestionably necessary decision. For what would this prize, which bears the name of Stefan Heym, be without high standards?

Stefan Heym was no relativist, no procrastinator, not someone who made himself comfortable somewhere. But it is not just this prize and those who are awarded it that should be measured against the man himself and his works. We must all bring the meaning of this prize to life. It is not merely a matter of honouring an author – with however much justification – for his or her work.

It is above all a question of demonstrating the values for which Stefan Heym stood all his life through his strength of character. And of living these values outside of his works.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted that you are all here this evening to spread the message about the Stefan Heym Prize.

Mr Ćosić,

Thank you so much for joining us in Chemnitz this evening. It is a joy and an honour for us to be able to present this prize to you in person.

My thanks also go to the jury. They carry a heavy responsibility. Their decision is an interpretation of how Stefan Heym encounters us today. And how we should encounter him. My thanks to you, Dr. Lehmann, as President of the Goethe-Institut, Professor Strasser, the President of the German PEN Centre, Herbert Wiesner, Secretary General of the PEN Centre, Klaus Eck and Johannes Jacob on behalf of the publisher Bertelsmann Verlag, Katrin Bornmüller on behalf of the International Society of Human Rights, Mayor Heidemarie Lüth,

Councillors Cornelia Knorr and Petra Zais, Professor Pforte, Chair of the Schiller Foundation and the Freie Volksbühne theatre in Berlin and, of course, my very special thanks to you, Mrs Heym.

The Stefan Heym Prize is awarded every three years. You faced the challenge of finding a winner who meets the required standards. With Bora Ćosić you have succeeded. You are honouring not only an outstanding prizewinner. You are also honouring the prize itself and the man whose name it bears.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I count myself very lucky to have had the chance to meet Stefan Heym personally. It was a meeting that impressed me and still has an impact today. 10 years ago he was made an honorary citizen of the city. In the speech that I gave on the award of the first Heym Prize, I expressed the hope that it might reconcile him with Chemnitz, his home city.

When I reflect on that today, I am not sure whether the choice of the term reconciliation – with a place, a city, a country – was actually the right choice for Stefan Heym.

If you look at Heym's life, he only seems to have had one true homeland: his own convictions. How many times did he stand by his own personal and literary homeland, how many times did he accept conflict and battled with all the consequences – simply in order not to have to be silent, not to have to compromise.

At 18 he was expelled from his school and from the life he knew. The high school pupil Helmut Flieg published an anti-war poem – right in the middle of a nationalistically charged era. He could have kept quiet – as many others did.

His departure for Berlin was the first of many farewells in his life. Farewells from people, places, ties. Berlin only provided sanctuary for him for a short while. The National Socialists' seizure of power eventually made his departure from Germany inevitable.

In 1935 he emigrated to the USA and found a new homeland, personally, politically – and in literature. His début novel, *Hostages*, was a great success. He also wrote his most successful novel, *The Crusaders*, in the USA. But enlisting as a soldier and being decorated for bravery in combat against Nazi Germany wasn't enough for him. Neither would the USA be his permanent home.

Stationed in the American occupation zone and working as an editor, Heym refused to write an anti-Soviet article. This meant his discharge from the army and his return to the USA. As an American citizen and a US soldier, an anti-Soviet article would have been part of the course, nothing special.

Stefan Heym refused when he could have quietly played along.

Like many other individuals at the time, Heym had to leave the USA in 1952 during the McCarthy era.

1953. The year of the workers' uprising in the GDR. Stefan Heym arrived in Germany. Not just as a celebrated writer. His American aroused suspicions. He introduced himself to GDR society with his reaction on 17th June.

He didn't simply condemn; he differentiated. Radical in his conviction that thinking people must be able to find a common way, he sought to engage with the substance, the argument, in enlightenment.

He could have stayed silent, instead of criticising the weakness of the unions or questioning the declaration of western provocation. He could have lived a cosy life, avoided complications. He decided otherwise.

The idea of an actual social community of real freethinking and freely acting people; the ability to think of alternatives was something he kept all his life.

Stefan Heym quickly became dissatisfied with GDR socialism. *5 Days in June (5 Tage im Juni)* – his book about the workers' uprising – was suppressed. A few years later, in 1965, a total publication ban was imposed on him. Four years later he accepted a fine so that he could publish his novel *Lassalle* in the Federal Republic of Germany. For Heym it is thinking that counts, regardless of where it happens. This was what kept him apart from the dogmatism of the Cold War and allowed him to find a balance between the borders of divided Germany.

When he was allowed to publish again at the start of the '70s, he did not want to come to an arrangement with the status quo out of gratitude. He did not bluster against the GDR. He described it in greater detail, dissected it, uncovered its character.

In 1976 he signed a letter of protest against the expulsion of Wolf Biermann. Once more he took the difficult path so as to not betray his political convictions.

Once again he was only allowed to publish in West Germany. But he stayed in the GDR – until the very end.

It was ideas that drove him; he took people up on their promises. I'm thinking of his speech to the Bundestag as president of the German parliament by seniority. In it he invited all parties to join a great coalition of reason, which would precede a coalition of the rational. Parties don't think, don't act. It's the people within them who do that. Heym prevented the individual from seeking refuge in abstract institutions. The responsibility of the individual was a constant, as part of a party, a political system, a society.

Celebrated or ostracised. For Stefan Heym there was no middle ground.

When you look at his life, you almost want to shout at him,

“Don't make your life so hard! It's not always shameful to give in or hush up.” And yet you know that it is shameful to give in or to stay quiet when injustice happens. This is precisely what the life and work of Stefan Heym should remind us of. This prize should remind us of it, too.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Stefan Heym was a political writer and a political man. He used his works to drive politics forward.

My admiration for him is also based on his ability to walk the narrow ridge between politics and art.

Perhaps it was significant that Stefan Heym gave up his parliamentary mandate in 1995, after only a year. Politics is all about compromise. Every politician has to accept that collective decisions can sometimes run counter to individual convictions. The writer, on the other hand, cannot – and should not – compromise. And so Heym left the Bundestag, in order to find his homeland in his convictions, even in old age.

Stefan Heym's life shows that where an artist makes his home always makes a statement – has he been forced there or chosen it willingly? Perhaps you will agree, Mr Ćosić.

Your homeland also provides you with inspiration as a writer – both positive and negative. In 1992 you left your home city of Belgrade – in protest. In your work we can sense the injury, the fury and the uncertainty, too. Under Milošević, you did not call your city Belgrade but always “the city from which the war is waged.”

In your book *Die Reise nach Alaska (Put na Aljasku)*, you describe almost with anger the heedlessness with which towns are abandoned to neglect, how dilapidated ignorance contrasts with soulless new buildings.

You curse your country like a father whose son is throwing away his future.

My dear Mr Ćosić,

These are the standards for which people like you and Heym stand. Society needs individuals, needs artists, needs politically aware citizens, to make demands of us, to demand responsibility from us.

Such demands and requirements are not always comfortable. As Mayor of the City of Chemnitz I can vouch for that at first hand, so to speak. An essay by Bora Ćosić from 2001 in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* bore the title

“Chemnitz – Constructions of the Void”. It concerned his impressions from a visit to our city. Those impressions described

Chemnitz as an empty city, a victim of socialist town planning and a place that didn't mean anything to the author.

I will allow myself to assume, my dear Mr Ćosić, that Chemnitz did not leave you untouched. It was at least worth writing that article about it.

I very much hope that your perception of Chemnitz has also changed in the intervening years. Our redesigned and rebuilt city centre, the art collections, the Gunzenhauser Museum, the cultural centre DASTietz with the petrified forest – these are all examples of how far we have come. And we have many, many hard-working citizens who continue to look ahead and build their city.

But if that doesn't convince you, I hope that you would say so honestly. Because nothing epitomises the idea of the Stefan Heym Prize better than confident and critical honesty.

Stefan Heym and Bora Ćosić. In no way do their works make our lives easier. Quite the opposite – they reproach us for our weaknesses and compromises.

But at the same time, they awaken our courage to take on responsibility, create confidence in the capacity of the individual, demand that we do more than just come to terms with things.

Honoured guests,

today we are awarding the City of Chemnitz International Stefan Heym Prize for the second time.

In doing so, we are honouring both a great son of our city and the prizewinner, Bora Ćosić.