

# PEN CLUB INTERNACIONAL

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ince 1986 I have been attending the PEN Club's international meetings with some regularity. In other words, I have had the opportunity to follow developments in this international organization at first hand, and have realized that it is a lively, concerned organization, open to the winds of change and always in touch with the latest developments. Basically, I think its most recent activities have been marked by a shift in emphasis away from state-wide cultures and, at the same time, by a growing awareness of and attention to national or regional realities. This process has had a considerable boost from the influence of two extremely important and undoubtedly complementary events: the impact of the "perestroika" and the rise of the nationalities.

In Seul (1988), a delegation of writers from the USSR expressed the wish to return to the PEN Club family after more than sixty years of politically imposed divorce. This was to be the clearest indicator of the thaw which Gorbachov had set in motion in the Soviet Union; needless to say, the PEN assembly had long been waiting for this reunion and welcomed the event with open arms. It was the start of a substantial change and was immediately followed by the arrival of new members: the three PEN centres from the Baltic republics –Lithuania, Estonia and Letonia–, and the announcement of the creation of two more centres, in Bielorrusia and the Ukraine, as well as the already existing Russian centre. This proliferation on a national scale in the political area dominated by the USSR coincided with the birth in Spain of the "Euskar PEN Cluba" (1987) and the "PEN Clube Galicia" (1989). And at the same time there is the curious paradox that there is no Spanish PEN Club, or, if there is one, that it has been going through a period of profound lethargy for some years now. This awakening of the national literatures has brought new vitality to the PEN club's make-up and has led to the formation of an assembly



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which, from the European point of view, comes closer to the cultural and linguistic complexity of the old world. As well as the activity and the discussion generated in the assembly of delegates, the energy behind the stateless languages and literatures has been especially noticeable in one of the PEN international work committees, the "Programme and Translations Committee", which has recently had its name extended to "Programme, Translations and

Linguistic Rights Committee" and is now also a platform for analysis, reflection, debate and defence of the minority languages. And it may be worth remembering that the "Centre Català" has played an important part in the committee's new design and make-up. In December 1988 it organized a special session of the committee in Andorra, and is at present preparing another, to be held in Gandia in October 1990. Far from the worries and the haste which are typical of any congress, the Andorra meeting provided an opportunity for reflection and reconsideration as to the scope and the objectives of the committee, and it was there that the decision was taken to extend its field of activities to include Linguistic Rights. Since the last congress (Toronto/Montreal, September 1989), the "Centre Català" has occupied the presidency of the committee. Precisely in the last PEN Club meeting, and to demonstrate the feasibility of the newest ideas, the committee's work centred on a declaration of solidarity and support for two particularly difficult linguistic situations: the Kurdish language in Turkey and Spanish in Puerto Rico. At the assembly, both resolutions were adopted and defended by the Galician and Catalan centres, which took the opportunity to point out the obvious similarity between the problems of Spanish in Puerto Rico, in the face of English, and of Catalan, Galician and Basque in Spain, in the face of Spanish. ■

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