

Turkish Novelist, at Event Honoring His Country, Says Government Abuses Writers

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CORRECTION APPENDED

Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish novelist and Nobel Prize laureate, forcefully denounced the Turkish government for its treatment of writers, speaking at the opening ceremony of the Frankfurt Book Fair on Tuesday evening as the president of Turkey sat listening.

Every year, a nation is chosen to be guest of honor at the fair, an annual ritual of the international publishing industry, and this year it is Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of publishers, editors, agents and authors are gathered here from 100 countries to talk about books and negotiate deals in what has become the most important annual event on the book-publishing calendar.

At Tuesday's opening ceremony in a packed auditorium, Mr. Pamuk spoke quietly but intensely as Abdullah Gul, the president of Turkey, sat in the audience. "A century of banning and burning books, of throwing writers into prison or killing them or branding them as traitors and sending them into exile, and continuously denigrating them in the press -- none of this has enriched Turkish literature," Mr. Pamuk said. "It has only made it poorer."

Mr. Pamuk, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006, was the subject of criminal charges of "insulting Turkishness" after giving a 2005 interview to a magazine in which he condemned the genocide against Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I and the killing of Kurds by Turkey in the 1980s. The charges were dropped, but many nationalists have not forgiven Mr. Pamuk.

"The state's habit of penalizing writers and their books is still very much alive," Mr. Pamuk said in his speech. "Article 301 of the Turkish penal code continues to be used to silence and suppress many other writers, in the same way it was used against me; there are at this moment hundreds of writers and journalists being prosecuted and found guilty under this article."

When he was working on his latest novel, "Museum of Innocence," Mr. Pamuk said, he used YouTube to research Turkish films and songs. Now, he said, YouTube and many other domestic and international Web sites are blocked in Turkey "for political reasons."

President Gul, who spoke immediately after Mr. Pamuk, said Turkey was "really proud" of Mr. Pamuk's Nobel Prize and the fact that Turkish literature was being recognized more generally as well as at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

He did not address Mr. Pamuk's criticisms directly, but said that "today I can state with happiness that in Turkey, thanks to political and economic reforms that have gradually and more intensively been integrated," his nation was moving closer to fulfilling the conditions necessary to join the European Union.

"Although we have not been fully successful and there is a lot yet to be done," Mr. Gul said, "if we compare it to the situation before, we can say that in Turkey there has indeed been a positive development."

Correction: October 18, 2008, Saturday A capsule summary on Wednesday for an article about the Turkish novelist and Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk, who denounced the Turkish government's treatment of writers, misspelled the surname of the president of Turkey. He is Abdullah Gul, not Ful.