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Statements by Members of the Panel Press conference on October 7, 2010

‘Iceland is one of the world’s smallest book markets but incredibly productive. Icelandic authors are fabulously creative and I am eager to be surprised by what the Guest of Honour 2011 has in store for us.’

Juergen Boos, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair

Juergen Boos is a professional publisher and studied business economics in Mannheim. Following many years of activity in the publishing sector, in his last position as member of the management of Wiley-VCH, publishers of academic books, he took over the position of director of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2005.

‘We are very pleased that Frankfurt Book Fair has invited Iceland as Guest of Honour, enabling us to present our rich, versatile culture to an international public. The fact that government aid in favour of the project was not at all reduced in the wake of the financial crisis – as the only part of the Icelandic budget – shows how important this is to us.’

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Minister of Education, Science and Culture

Katrín Jakobsdóttir studied literature and has been a member of the left-green party in the Icelandic parliament since 2003. Since spring 2009 and the formation of the government by the social democrats and the left-green party she has been Minister of Education, Science and Culture. Katrín Jakobsdóttir lives in Reykjavík.

‘Iceland is a nation of literature with eight books per head being sold annually and twice as many books published as in the other Nordic countries. Ever since the 13th century Icelanders have been reflected in their literature, which still plays an essential role for the population’s self-perception. Since our language has hardly changed over the centuries, every Icelander has direct access to medieval literature. This is unique in Europe.

Halldór Guðmundsson, Director of ‘Fabulous Iceland’.

Halldór Guðmundsson was publishing manager of Iceland’s biggest publisher Mál og menning, later Edda, from 1984 to 2003. He wrote, amongst other things, a biography of Halldór Laxness that was awarded the Icelandic Literature Prize, as well as a book in German on the financial crisis ‘Wir sind alle Isländer. Von Lust und Frust in der Krise zu sein.’ (We are All Icelanders. Of the Pleasures and Frustrations of Being in a Crisis) Halldór Guðmundsson lives in Reykjavík.

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‘What is it like to write about Iceland, in Icelandic, from abroad? This is a question I sometimes have to answer as I have had one foot abroad ever since my university years in Dublin. I lived in France for seven years before I finally moved to Berlin. The right distance is important for writing. The old birch trees in front of my study window in Selfoss are my favourite view of the world, but as time goes on they obstruct my view. I can see Iceland best by looking through the spires of Kreuzberg, across the soccer field on the other side of the street.’

Steinunn Sigurðardóttir, author

Steinunn Sigurðardóttir was awarded the Icelandic Literature Prize 1996 for her novel ‘Hjartastaður’, published in German translation under the title ‘Herzort’. Other novels in German are ‘Der Zeitdieb’, ‘Gletschertheater’, ‘Die Liebe der Fische’ and ‘Sonnenscheinpferd’. Her novel ‘Der gute Liebhaber’ (Rowohlt) and a collection of poems (Kleinheinrich) are to be published shortly. Her books have been translated into numerous languages. A movie adaptation was made of her book ‘Der Zeitdieb’ (English edition: Thief of Time) in France in 1999. Steinunn Sigurðardóttir has lived in various places in Europe, mainly in France. Presently she lives in Berlin.

‘WHY ASK? DON’T ASK WHY! The Icelandic nation is known over the world as storytelling, poetry spouting, book loving people that occasionally burst into group chanting of epics they have kept in their hearts and minds through centuries of misery and boredom but long forgotten in the advanced world.

The reasons for this condition are disputed. Some thank the island’s unruly elemental forces that mercilessly beat on this poor folk year in and year out, others blame the white nights, the unspoiled wilderness, the purity of the tap water, and then there are those wise enough not to give a damn, should the question enter their minds, and just move on to the next page of the Icelandic novel or poetry collection they happen to have in their page turning hands...’

Sjón, author

Sjón writes novels, poetry, plays and song texts. His novel ‘Skugga-Baldur’, published in 2003, was awarded the Nordic Council’s Literature Prize and has meanwhile been translated into 20 languages. Sjón is a founding member of the performance-oriented surrealist group Medúsa, has participated in numerous art exhibitions and art events and was involved in the foundation of the publishing house Smekkleysa (Bad Taste). Sjón has written various texts and lyrics for singer Björk, amongst others the lyrics in the film ‘Dancer in the Dark’. He lives in Reykjavík and is presently staying in Berlin.

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‘When reading an Icelandic book one senses the centuries-old tradition and art of narration in which the writers and their characters and stories are rooted. The stories are set in Iceland’s unique landscapes. This mixture of tradition, art and nature makes Icelandic literature in many ways ‘elementary’.’

Thomas Böhm, Programme Manager for Literature – Germany

Thomas Böhm was the Director of the Literaturhaus Köln from 1999 to 2010. From there he changed to the team of ‘Fabulous Iceland’ where he conceives and organizes the literature programme. Thomas Böhm lives in Berlin.

‘Joy in experimenting beyond the media stereotypes, processuality and the exchange of ideas between artists, musicians, designers, writers and movie makers against the background of myth, tradition and globalisation characterize the Icelandic art scene. The studios of Icelandic artists are, to my mind, the real hot springs of this island in the Atlantic Ocean.’

Matthias Wagner K, Curator of the Art and Culture Programme

Matthias Wagner K curated numerous exhibitions on Icelandic contemporary art, fashion and design, photography and film. In 2009 he was the artistic director of the first Nordic Fashion Biennale. In 2010 he curated the first Biennale of International Light Art in the context of the European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010, in which numerous Icelandic artists participated. Matthias Wagner K lives in Berlin.

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'Fabulous Iceland' – Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011

Iceland, the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011, is a nation that defines itself through its literature probably more than any other nation in Europe: from the unique medieval Sagas and Eddas, Iceland's contribution to world literature, to contemporary literature, characterized by its embedment in an unusually creative cross-genre art and music scene.

From autumn 2010, Iceland will present its literature, art, culture, history and the impressive panoramas of its landscapes under the title 'Fabulous Iceland' to an international audience. Apart from a supporting programme, numerous **new publications on the German-speaking book market** demonstrate the impressive wealth of Icelandic literature. Amongst them are works of authors that have already been translated into different languages, such as Einar Kárason, Einar Már Guðmundsson, Hallgrímur Helgason, Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir, Sjón and Steinunn Sigurðadóttir as well as new voices such as for example Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, Auður Jónsdóttir, Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl, Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir, Huldar Breiðfjörð and Steinar Bragi.

There will also be new translations of **modern and post-modern Icelandic classics**, providing the German-speaking public with a comprehensive insight into the development of Icelandic literature of the 20th century. Amongst them are writers such as Nobel Prize laureate Halldór Laxness as well as Þórbergur Þórðarson and Thor Vilhjálmsson.

Anthologies and individual volumes by authors such as Linda Vilhjálmisdóttir and Gyrðir Elíasson present lyric poetry, a genre that is particularly cultivated in Iceland. Naturally, **the grand masters of Iceland crime thrillers** will be there too: Arnaldur Indriðason and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir will present their new publications together with other Icelandic crime novel authors. In addition, several biographies of Icelandic personalities, important non-fiction books on Icelandic history of literature and culture and illustrated books, in particular on Iceland's nature, will be published.

Highlights of the guest country's appearance are the **medieval Iceland Sagas**, to be released by S. Fischer Publishers in autumn 2011 in a comprehensive, commented new translation. The Sagas originate from the 13th and 14th centuries and tell of the life of the first settlers in Iceland. Their role in world literature is unique, as they represent inexplicable examples of realist medieval narration – 500 years before the invention of realist novels.

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As from autumn 2010, 'Fabulous Iceland' in cooperation with the network of literary institutions, the Goethe-Institute, publishers, bookshops, libraries, literary festivals and other partners, presents Icelandic literature in a **diversified programme of events** to the German speaking audience. Apart from readings, lectures and symposiums, special formats have been developed in order to convey Icelandic literature in an advanced manner. This includes a gift of poetry, lyric poetry movies, variations on Eddas and Sagas recited as spoken word poetry.

In the context of its appearance as Guest of Honour, 'Fabulous Iceland' will also present other art forms interwoven with literature and will show a **programme of art and culture** at almost every museum in Frankfurt in 2011. Single positions and theme-related group exhibitions by contemporary Icelandic artists, architects, moviemakers and designers will be presented in a unique combination and density. Thus, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt in cooperation with 'Fabulous Iceland' will show the exhibition 'Crepusculum', in which Icelandic artist Gabriela Friðriksdóttir will include original medieval manuscripts of the Icelandic Sagas that are very rarely exhibited outside Iceland.

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Small Island – Great Stories On Iceland’s literature

Iceland was one of Europe’s poorest countries for centuries. A harsh climate, natural disasters and the peripheral geographical position shaped the life of the inhabitants from the late Middle Ages far into the 19th century. Cities in a central-European sense did not develop; cultural activities and events were insignificant. With one important exception: literature.

Between the **12th and 14th centuries** Icelandic literature experienced its heydays, culminating in the writing of the **Sagas**. To this day, Icelandic identity is closely connected with the texts created in those days – among other things because the Icelandic language has not changed fundamentally since the Middle Ages and the Sagas are thus directly accessible to today’s Icelandic readers.

In the **19th and 20th centuries** Iceland’s literature experienced a second high, crowned with the award of the Nobel Prize in literature to **Halldór Laxness**. With his novels and essays, Laxness established a tradition for Iceland that lasts to our days: writers’ intervention in social issues via literature. Numerous texts, from poems to novels, with which Iceland’s writers reacted to the breakdown of the banking system in 2008, demonstrate that this tradition continues.

Many authors of Icelandic **contemporary literature have been translated into numerous languages** and are treasured and popular for their great narration, stories and characters. Some Icelandic novels gained great popularity by being made into movies. In the field of light fiction, the **Iceland crime thriller** has become a genre apart that is successful all over the world. Bestseller in this field is Arnaldur Indriðason whose total circulation in Germany alone has reached 3 million copies. For their topics and the characters of their novels, the thriller writers draw on the rich arsenal of stories of murder and manslaughter of the Icelandic Sagas – the Iceland crime thrillers of the Middle Ages.

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The Sagas of the Icelanders

2011 will bring us new editions of Iceland's contribution to world literature

As one of the highlights of the Guest of Honour performance at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2011, 'Fabulous Iceland', sponsored by the Kunststiftung NRW together with S. Fischer Publishers will produce a comprehensive, commented **new translation of the 'The Sagas of the Icelanders'** (Íslendingasögur) – Iceland's most important contribution to world literature. Around 40 Sagas or stories tell of the life of the first settlers on Iceland at the times of the founding of the Viking parliament ('Alþing') from 930 to about 1030.

An impressive narration describes the exodus of the Norwegians and Celts, their conquest of Iceland and the subsequent Viking crossings, family feuds and civil disputes. Property and personal honour are central notions of the Sagas. The most comprehensive and famous Icelander Saga is the 'Njals Saga', set for the greatest part in the south of Iceland and presenting a gripping tale of a senseless and endless clan feud that ends in a big fire.

The Sagas were written in the 13th and 14th centuries – around 200 to 300 years after the events they describe. Almost all of the authors remained anonymous, except for a few, which researchers were able to relate. Based on oral accounts that were reliable to a greater or lesser extent, they wrote texts that can be seen as inexplicable examples of realist medieval narration – 500 years before the invention of realist novels. It is striking to note in this context that the Icelander Sagas, unlike Dante's 'Divine Comedy', do not emphasize Christian faith – on the contrary: they are largely free of any metaphysics. Although the authors were Christians, they presented the 'heathen' philosophy of the Sagas' heroes, as shown by their words and deeds, for the most part factually.

Another of the Sagas' particularities is their language. Contrary to the Latin literature of those days, they were written in the vernacular. Since the Icelandic language has not changed fundamentally over the centuries, the Sagas always remained easily accessible to the Icelandic people. At the same time the language also isolated the Sagas – it was not until the 19th century that they attracted considerable interest within European literature.

It is also significant that the settings of the Sagas have been accessible in the whole of Iceland to this day. Many inhabitants of the individual 'Saga regions' make medieval Sagas come alive on site, doing volunteer work by reconstructing Viking farmyards and organising Saga exhibitions. In some regions the inhabitants have also marked the

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most important sites of 'their' Sagas in the landscape. 'The whole country trembles with literary tradition', as Icelandic Nobel Prize laureate Halldór Laxnass once wrote.

The new translation of the Sagas make these important literary and historico-cultural documents accessible to a broad public. The Sagas, which like the Eddas were misused in the Third Reich for the construction of concepts such as 'Nordic Race', are thus shown again as what they are: Iceland's contribution to world literature that was unique at its time and can be rediscovered again and again to this day.

One of the world's biggest translation projects

The Sagas of the Icelanders will be published in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish 2011 will not only see a new translation of the Sagas of the Icelanders in German, but also a complete edition of the Sagas in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. The books will be published simultaneously in four countries, as the Swedish edition will also be published in Finland. This is presently the world's biggest translation project and the biggest one ever to be carried out in Scandinavia.

A team of six editors, a multitude of professional translators and Scandinavia's most renowned scientists in the field of medieval literature are working on this project. Great importance is placed on the accurateness of the translation as well as on the readability of the texts.

In 1997, the owners of the 'Saga Forlag' published the first comprehensive English edition of the Sagas of the Icelanders in five volumes under the title 'The Complete Sagas of Icelanders' (Parts of it have since been republished by Penguin Books). Critics all over the world unanimously praised this publication. The 'New York Review of Books' wrote: 'The recent publication in English translations of the five-volume Complete Sagas of Icelanders, by Leifur Eiriksson Publishing in Reykjavík, erects a milestone on the international publishing scene.'

The methods and materials then developed for the translation of the English edition are now applied to the new translation into the Scandinavian languages. S. Fischer Publishers also used this method for its new translation, which can be useful for standardised translations of the Sagas into any language.

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Hot Springs

On the 'Fabulous Iceland' Programme of Art and Culture

Iceland, the volcanic island in the northern Atlantic Ocean, is famous for its hot springs. Hot springs could also be the term for the contemporary Icelandic art scene, as it does not only boast an incredible density of artists, but also a cross-genre creativity that is unique to this country.

In the context of its appearance as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, 'Fabulous Iceland' will present, apart from Icelandic literature, also the other arts that are tightly interwoven with it. A comprehensive programme of art and culture has been scheduled for 2011 at almost every museum in Frankfurt, presenting single positions and theme-related group exhibitions of contemporary Icelandic artists, architects, movie-makers and designers in a combination that is so far unmatched.

One of the highlights is the exhibition 'Crepusculum' at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. 'Crepusculum' is the title of an artwork by young artist **Gabríela Friðriksdóttir** who will add the medieval manuscripts of the Icelander Sagas to her very own aesthetic canon of drawings, shapes and meanings. The Schirn Kunsthalle will also dedicate a monographic exhibition to one of Iceland's most important artists, **Erró**. One of its specific features is the picture cycle 'Monster portraits', shown in Germany for the first time.

The Frankfurter Kunstverein in cooperation with 'Fabulous Iceland' organizes the first big single exhibition in Germany for Icelandic performance and multimedia artist **Ragnar Kjartansson** (born in 1976). In 2009, Kjartansson's permanent performance at the Biennale in Venice was received with great enthusiasm – he was so far the youngest artist ever to represent a country at the Giardini grounds.

As from September 2011, the Forum Fotografie Frankfurt as a guest at the Frankfurter Kunstverein will present the exhibition 'Frontiers of Another Nature' showing an overview of contemporary Icelandic photography with works by photographers such as **Bára Kristinsdóttir, Einar Falur Ingólfsson, Haraldur Jónsson, Hrafnkell Sigurðsson, Icelandic Love Corporation, Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, Katrín Elvarsdóttir, Pétur Thomsen** and **Spessi**. There will also be works of documentary photography in Iceland from the beginnings to the present.

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Further exhibition projects with the Deutsches Architekturmuseum, the Deutsches Filmmuseum, the Museum für Moderne Kunst, the Neues Portikus Frankfurt and the Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt are on the agenda.

In addition, a musical programme with different rock, jazz, folk and classical concerts is presently in preparation.

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The Book Market in Iceland

Number of inhabitants of Iceland	318 000
	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009
Titles published in Iceland per year and translations	1 453 1 550 1 627 1 637 1 674 397 397 463 420
Number of books sold annually	2,5 Million
Number of titles in print	12 000
Turnover of book publishers 2009 (Retail prices excl. VAT)	4 770 Million ISK/32 Million EUR*
VAT printed books/VAT in general	7%/25,5%
VAT audio books/VAT in general	7%/25,5%
VAT digital books/VAT in general	25,5%/25,5%
Average number of books sold annually per inhabitant	8
Percentage of persons buying at least one book per year	64,5%
Number of outlets (including supermarkets)	150 (Only a small percentage of books is available at all outlets over the whole year)
Number of publishers	170
Members of Icelandic Publishers Association	42
Number of publishers with more than 150 million ISK/1 Million EUR* annual turnover	5
Number of publishers publishing more than 50 books per year	5
Average price of a hardcover book	ca. 4 000 ISK/27 EUR*

*Specification in EUR at the conversion rate of October 2010: 150 ISK = 1 EUR

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www.goethe.de/ins/dk/kop/



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Icelandic Glacial
www.icelandicglacial.com

Förderverein 'Sagenhaftes Island e. V.' (Society of Friends of 'Fabulous Iceland')

The 'Förderverein Sagenhaftes Island' e. V. supports the work of 'Fabulous Iceland'. Its chairman is Ólafur Davíðsson, former Icelandic ambassador to Germany. Honorary president and patron is the former Icelandic president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. Amongst the supporters are renowned Icelanders such as singer Kristinn Sigmundsson, singer Emiliana Torrini and artist Olafur Eliasson, born in Copenhagen of Icelandic descent. Athletes also support the Society of friends, amongst them handball player Ólafur Stefánsson.

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Note to editorial departments:

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A comprehensive insight into Icelandic culture

The homepage of 'Fabulous Iceland' provides comprehensive information on Icelandic culture. Apart from the press section with the digital press folder and current press reports, information on following topics is available:

→ List of authors – Icelandic authors at a glance

Under the heading 'Icelandic Literature'/'Authors' you will find an alphabetical encyclopedia by first names on contemporary Icelandic authors, an 'Author of the Month' being presented every month with a review of his works.

→ Book of the Month

An insight into the current Icelandic literature scene is provided under the heading 'Book of the month', which presents a topical Icelandic book every month.

→ Video of the Month

A journey to the sites of the Sagas, a look at the work of Icelandic artist Elín Hansdóttir, a chat with the band GusGus, an interview with author Jón Kalman Stefánsson or a discussion on Christmas sales with the manager of a book shop – the 'Video of the Month' presents special features and personalities of the country.

On your request, we will be delighted to provide extracts from the films for utilization in other media.

→ Current news from Iceland's world of literature and publishers

The newsletter informs on novelties from the world of literature and publishers in Iceland. It can be ordered online on the homepage or per e-mail to presse@sagenhaftes-island.de.

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