

GOETHE MEDAL 2013 ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY PETROS MARKARIS WEIMAR, 28 AUGUST 2013

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to the Goethe-Institut for awarding me a 2013 Goethe Medal. It is not merely an honour for me, but also an acknowledgement of my love of and loyalty to the German language and literature that has lasted without interruption for almost sixty-five years.

I have barely uttered my first words of thanks, when I have to stop and think. Who else can I thank?

Firstly, I ought to thank my late father, who forced the German language on me. One summer's day he told me I should continue my studies at a German-speaking *Gymnasium*. Until then, I had never met a German person nor heard a word of German.

Sometimes, mistakes can be rewarding. I studied German because my father was mistaken. It was the year 1949 – the beginning of the German economic miracle – and my father was convinced that German would advance to become the international language of business. My father's dream was for me to take over his import firm in Istanbul. That is why I studied at a German-language *Gymnasium*.

My father was mistaken on both counts. German did not advance to become the international language of business and I did not take over his firm. Yet my relationship with the German language was based on these two mistakes and I am eternally grateful to my father for this.

I also owe thanks to my home city of Istanbul; not only because this city was the place in which I encountered the German language, but also because, as the meeting place of diverse cultures and languages, it awakened an interest in me very early for building bridges between cultures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am the child of a mixed marriage. At the same time, I am the child of a mixed marriage of different cultures and languages, and this diversity deeply marked my character, my way of thinking and my worldview.

My final thanks go to the city in which I have lived for almost fifty years: Athens. Athens is the place in which my two languages, Greek and German, merge. Today, I consider myself a mediator between both Germany and Greece and between Greek and German literature and that would not have been possible without Athens.

So, I thank the Goethe-Institut for the Goethe Medal, I thank my father for the German language, and I thank the two cities of Istanbul and Athens for shaping me as a writer and a mediator.