

To the Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Communications and the International Office of the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center

February 27, 2013

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your invitation to take part in the activities of the official Russian delegation at BookExpo America 2013, the international book fair in New York being held from May 30 to June 1 of this year.

I understand how important participation in this kind of book fair is for a writer and for promoting his books in America and other countries. This is a unique opportunity to make contact with American publishers and readers, since the English-language book market remains virtually closed to writers from countries like Russia. Especially since all expenses for traveling to and staying in the United States (and this is no small sum) are taken on by the official Russian side.

Nonetheless, I am declining. Not because “my schedule doesn’t permit it,” but out of ethical considerations.

I have accepted similar proposals from you several times in the past and have participated in international book fairs as part of the Russian writers delegation, but in the last year the situation has changed.

In any self-respecting country, the state, through various foundations and organizations, supports the advancement of its writers abroad, pays for translations, invites writers to participate in international book fairs, and so on. For example, in Norway this is done by Norla; in Switzerland, Pro Helvetia. Naturally, by taking part in an official delegation, the writers represents not only himself personally and his books but also his country, his state.

Russia’s political development, and the events of last year in particular, have created a situation in the country that is absolutely unacceptable and demeaning for its people and its great culture. What is happening in my country makes me, as a Russian and a citizen of Russia, ashamed. By taking part in the book fair as part of the official delegation and taking advantage of the opportunities presented to me as a writer, I am simultaneously taking on the obligations of being a representative of a state whose policy I consider ruinous for the country and of an official system I reject.

A country where power has been seized by a corrupt, criminal regime, where the state is a pyramid of thieves, where elections have become farce, where courts serve the authorities, not the law, where there are political prisoners, where state television has become a prostitute, where packs of impostors pass insane laws that are returning everyone to the Middle Ages—such a country cannot be my Russia. I cannot and do not want to participate in an official Russian delegation representing that Russia.

I want to and will represent another Russia, my Russia, a country free of impostors, a country with a state structure that defends the right of the individual, not the right to corruption, a country with a free media, free elections, and free people.

Naturally, this is my personal decision and has not been made in consultation with other writers invited to New York; each is free to act in accordance with his or her own notions of ethics and reasonability.

Respectfully yours,

Mikhail Shishkin