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Opening of the EFNIL-conference 13/14 October 2003 near Stockholm

Mannheim, Florence, Brussels and now Stockholm: these are the locations, where our informal group developed step by step into the network, that grow into a firmer organisational structure tomorrow. At the end of 2000 - after conferences on related topics in Brussels, Munich, and elsewhere – a circle of representatives of language institutions from nine European states met at the Institut für Deutsche Sprache in Mannheim. This circle was expanded in 2001 at the Accademia della Crusca in Florence. There we discussed and adopted as a kind of first programme the "Mannheim-Florence recommendations for the European standard languages". In Brussels 2002 the Dutch Language Union as our host nearly completed the circle of linguists and language planners from the states of the European Union. There were delegates from 14 states of the Union. In Brussels, we agreed to join together in a common organisation. We named it "European Federation of National Institutions for Language", and this in all our 11 languages. The founding process of our federation is now to be completed here in Stockholm.

We feel united in the view, that the real wealth of our continent does not consist in enormous mineral resources, energy wealth, or agricultural riches, although Europe is fairly rich in these. We see the true wealth of Europe in its cultural and social diversity. And we are convinced that this cultural wealth is essentially based on linguistic variety and diversity. Cultural diversity is not possible without linguistic diversity. By now this conviction is shared by some politicians, who work in their countries or on the European level for the promotion of the various larger and smaller languages, including regional and minority languages, or develop programs for the promotion of individual multilingualism of the Europeans. But EU-politics are still dominated by economical, social, and sometimes military issues. We must not disregard these issues: Culture requires an economical basis and sufficient internal and external security. On the other hand, a fairly peaceful Europe, that functions economically, but is governed by a monotonous, monolingual uniform culture, is not a desirable goal.

A characteristic of our annual meetings was and still is the professional orientation of the participants. We are neither interpreters, translators, foreign language instructors, or other specialists for multilingualism, although some of us come from multilingual countries. We represent institutions with research or planning tasks concerning the dominant language or languages of the various countries. The Institut für Deutsche Sprache, for instance, the Real Academia Espanola; the Nederlandse Taalunie, or the Accademia della Crusca are not institutions for research or maintenance of multilingualism. Also the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland is restricted in its tasks to just the languages within Finland. For the maintenance of the linguistic diversity in Europe and the promotion of individual multilingualism of the Europeans we are – at first sight – the wrong people. But only at first sight. As I said at other occasions, I firmly believe, that in the end we are the right people. It is in the very interest of the individual languages, for which each of us works, that we not only respect the corresponding work of our partner institutions in the other European

countries but also learn from them and support them by exchange of experiences and through joint actions and projects. Part of this collaboration is also to propagate the idea that the citizens in our individual countries should not be satisfied with their national language or languages but decide for multilingualism, which transcends the national borders – if not for themselves, then for their children and grandchildren. This is not the occasion to discuss possibilities and restrictions of active and receptive multilingualism. But we should propagate the idea: whoever wants to care for the development of his own language, should also learn other languages. Who – like myself – has left the best age for language learning far behind, should encourage his children and grandchildren in language learning.

A last, just a brief historical reflection on the value of the European linguistic diversity. Some economists and politicians keep arguing that the many languages in Europe not only cause great costs but make effective communication difficult and thereby hamper economical, industrial, and scientific progress. One uniform language for all Europeans would be less expensive and more efficient. History, however, teaches a different lesson. Europe has always been multilingual, but until the end of the middle ages, it had one common language for sciences, humanities, the church, domains of law and politics. It was Latin, which left its traces not only in the romance languages. This common language, however did not produce scientific, economical, and cultural progress, but rather a dogmatic immobility in many fields and domains. Modern, creative Europe evolved only with the emancipation of the so called vernacular languages from Latin. The great literature of the European nations, renaissance of the arts, modern philosophy, and the many scientific and technological discoveries and developments were not created on the basis of a uniform common language, but evolved out of the multitude of the various European languages. It is absurd to imagine that Dante, Cervantes, Moliere, Shakespeare, Goethe, Andersen had all written in Latin. These and other poets, philosophers, scientists, and scholars wrote in those many languages that from the 15. century on gradually developed into complete languages, that is, languages, in which everything can be said and written, what is known and meant.

Our federation of language institutions of the member states of the European Union wants to contribute to maintenance and development of our languages in their diversity and their wealth, not only in our own interest but also in the interest of a positive cultural and social future of Europe as a whole.

Our conference will treat two aspects of linguistic Europe: First the present situation of several states and languages will be presented, especially under the aspect of the changes and dangers of certain domains. As the second main topic, the legal conditions for language use and development in different countries will be presented and discussed. Tomorrow a general assembly of the members will deal with the organisational matters, that have to be discussed and decided.

Appropriate thanks to our hosts will have to wait until the end of the conference. But I hasten to thank Olle Josephson and his collaborators for the careful preparation of our meeting. The fact that so many of us have come is an empirical proof for the good preparation of the

congress. In the name of all members of our federation I want to thank our guest of honor, Minister Ulvkog, for her interest in our federation and its goals.