

## **Speech in honour of EFNIL's president Dr. Gerhard Stickel**

Dr. Sabine Kirchmeier, Danish Language Council

Dear Dr. Stickel – dear president - dear Gerhard

It is both a pleasure and a hard duty for me to say a few words to you on behalf of the executive committee and all EFNIL members. A pleasure because it gives me an occasion to reflect upon your merits and the many things that you have achieved. A hard duty because during quite a number of years as president and vice-president we have become close colleagues - even personal friends – sometimes maybe a bit like an old couple – so I am very moved and also very sad that your time as president of EFNIL has come to an end.

All EU member states and associated states have institutions who in one way or another are entrusted with the task of monitoring or curating the official language or languages of their country and to inform about language policy, language change and language use. The European Federation of National Institutions of languages has become a forum for all these institutions within which they can discuss their work and exchange and disseminate information and knowledge about language use and language policy in Europe as we did today. EFNIL supports the scientific study of the official languages of Europe and the education in these languages as a mother tongue as well as a foreign language in order to maintain and strengthen the cultural diversity in Europe and to overcome language barriers.

EFNIL was established almost precisely 15 years ago at the first general assembly in 2003 on October 14<sup>th</sup> in Stockholm. Already then, there were 30 delegates. All EU-states were represented as well as delegates from Norway and Iceland who had an observatory status. Some of them are still with us: Pirkko Nuolijärvi, Jean-François Baldi, Ludwig M. Eichinger, Johan Van Hoorde and John Simpson

Before that, in 2000, you Gerhard, invited a secret society representing 9 language institutions to Mannheim. A year later you met again in Florence and after that in Brussels to pave the way for EFNIL as a new organization. So it is fair to say, that you have been involved with EFNIL for at least 18 years, conceiving the idea, maturing it and finally making it fly.

More countries have joined as the EU expanded, and ever since the members of EFNIL have organized an international conference on the languages of Europe, issuing resolutions and recommendations, publishing scientific articles and initiating language policy projects.

There are hardly any European organizations for language in which so many EU-member-states and associated states are represented. Therefore, EFNIL is one of the important contact points for the European Commission and other EU-institutions for themes such as linguistic diversity and language policy.

Since 2003, you have been the president of this organization leading its executive committee – on a

completely voluntary basis. You have played a central role in the planning of the annual conferences and as the main editor of the proceedings that have been published at Peter Lang publishers in Frankfurt since 2007.

Thanks to your personal dedication, it has been possible to bring together on a regular basis almost all EU-states as well as a number of associated states, which means that by now a membership of EFNIL is associated with great prestige, and that EFNIL is regularly being invited to participate in, to cooperate with and to contribute to important European projects and events organized by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

You have been the director of the Institut für Deutsche Sprache in Mannheim for more than a quarter of a century from 1976 to 2002, where you also served as a member of important commissions of the German academic exchange program and the Goethe Institute – all taken together you have acted in a leading position on behalf of language for more than 41 years – 41 years.

As a member of the executive committee, I have had the chance to follow your work and to be impressed by your tireless and intense efforts to strengthen and develop our organization.

I think that your enormous knowledge of languages and long-time experience in teaching and lecturing on language inside and outside of Germany has impressed all of us, and many of us have been blown away by your ability to hold part of your welcome addresses in the language of the hosting countries - even if the language was only vaguely known to you – and sometimes even in more than one language such as you opening address in Helsinki which was held in Finnish and Swedish.

But Gerhard, I believe that the secret to your success with EFNIL and many other projects in your life is not only your thorough knowledge of languages and your skills in linguistics, but also the fact that you in your kind, open and humorous manner and your modest conduct are able to make everyone feel welcome and appreciated in your company.

Dear Gerhard, all good things come to an end – to quote Chaucer who apparently coined this phrase 700 years ago in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Well, you are not that old – yet – and actually when I look at you, it seems that you could easily take on another round of presidency. But we all respect your decision, you have highly deserved to be relieved from your duties, and we thank you from all our hearts for all you have done for EFNIL and for the languages of Europe.

However, we hope that this will not be the last goodbye for you and us. We have decided to award you the permanent title of honorary president of EFNIL, and we hereby invite you to participate in all future EFNIL conferences. We truly hope that you will accept this honor, and we are looking forward to welcome you in our midst again next year.