



## Joint NPLD-EFNIL Position paper on Language and Technology

### Use the technology or lose your language?

**Will new communication tools and welfare robots speak our languages!**

*‘Europe’s vast marketplace is unique in the world for several reasons. This is not merely because of its sheer size – more than 500 million consumers – but also because of its impressive cultural and linguistic diversity...Overcoming language barriers is vital for building the DSM, which is by definition multilingual. It is now time to reduce and remove the language barriers that are holding back its advance, and turn them into competitive advantages’*

**Andrus Ansip**, Vice President of the European Commission, responsible for the Digital Single Market

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On the occasion of the META-NET FORUM 2016 held in Lisbon, 4/5 th July 2016 the European Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) and the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) have written a joint position paper calling the European Union to reaffirm its commitment to linguistic diversity by ensuring that all the languages of Europe are able to benefit from the whole range of digital developments which now are taking place.

All aspects of society are being influenced by the digital revolution; smaller language communities are especially sensitive to the current developments within communications technology. Languages in the future will only be viable if their speakers are able to use digital platforms of all kinds. Many European companies that provide such platforms or communication based products, such as speech controlled cars and welfare robots, have a much better chance to expand if these products can easily be localised to other languages. This is not the case today and this affects not only the development of our industry and commerce but also the speakers of many European languages.

Language technology is an enabler. It helps people to interact socially, to work and do business together and to share knowledge regardless of language barriers. And it also helps new products to interact with people in a much more straight forward way than ever before. However; these new technologies are available only for the very widely-spoken languages of Europe. Language death faces many languages in Europe if they are unable to avail themselves of these new technologies as they will lose their status and ultimately the loss of by their speakers. This is not only true of languages without a state, but is also true of many of the state languages of Europe.

We believe that a continent-wide effort is now required in language technology research to enable the further development of intuitive language- based interfaces which will support vital digital development for all the languages of Europe over the coming decades. Language technology has also become essential for new applications within business intelligence and data mining. The potential of language technology is about to increase in a dramatic way and if Europe wishes to be a world leader, developing and investing in these new technologies is vital. At the same time, the European Union can facilitate a duty of care for all its languages.

There is no doubt that language technology will be at the heart of the new digital revolution. Already there have been significant developments in terms of automated multilingual technologies such as machine translation. Machine translation provides translations quickly and also significantly cuts the cost of multilingualism. However, there is further work to be done and all language communities should be able to share the benefits from these developments.

Languages will also be the key to many future technological developments. The power of the voice and the spoken word will control how new technologies are utilised. Most new devices will have a voice interface because it will be an easier and more sophisticated way to interact with any new technology. This new emphasis is already very apparent through the increased use of digital assistance that can play a very active part in a user's life style. If these are not available in all

languages, these developments will, in the near future, affect many of the languages of Europe, whether they are national, regional or minority languages.

Europe will remain a multilingual society and all languages in Europe need to have sufficient technical support, otherwise many citizens will become marginalized, they will not be able to benefit from digital services and their languages may not survive as a means of communication.

1. The potential of language technology will increase dramatically across the world in the coming years. If Europe wishes to become a world leader and an economic beneficiary from these developments it must invest now in being at the forefront of developing language technologies. Through a focused, concerted, major interdisciplinary LT research effort, Europe can develop a new stronger position in terms of industry and at the same time preserve its precious languages.
2. The basic building blocks for the development of language technology will be vital components for the future developments within the IT revolution. The countries and regions of Europe as well as the European Union need to ensure that the necessary strategies and conditions for new developments are in place for all the languages of Europe.
3. Language technology will also help Europe to ensure citizens' rights, as it provides means for all Europeans to communicate with public bodies and have access to public web services in their preferred language, regardless of what status this language enjoys. Steps have already been taken by the EU in the ELRC-project sharing EU's machine translation technologies with public institutions of member states, but countries need to cooperate more and to develop measures to make sure that all languages are taken into account.
4. Linking a positive and inclusive policy regarding multilingualism and linguistic diversity with strategic investments in the development of language technology for the Digital Single Market will bring about a quantum leap in the evolution of IT; putting Europe in a leading position in a core requirement.
5. Developing the potential of the voice within new technologies will be a key development in the future. All languages should be able to share in these new developments and should be able to benefit equally from this new revolution in terms of communication.
6. In order to fully realize the potential of a single digital space and market place, language technologies, need to be developed for all the languages of Europe - national, regional or minority languages - to encourage the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge and to ensure the spread of goods and innovations to all citizens. Language agnostic technologies must also be rolled out to ensure the inclusion of European languages in technologies which already exist.

The **European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL)** The European Federation of National Institutions for Language is a body consisting of the central or national institutions for research, documentation and policy relating to the officially recognised standard languages within the states of the European Union (EU). The purpose of EFNIL is the collection and exchange of information about the officially recognised standard languages of the EU, the provision of expert advice about language policy in the EU, the preservation of linguistic diversity within Europe and the promotion of plurilingualism amongst the citizens of the EU states. EFNIL also maintains an interest in the minority and regional languages of Europe. EFNIL has published an overview of language legislation and practices in Europe - the European Language Monitor (ELM) which is updated by the member institutions on a regular basis.

More information on EFNIL and ELM can be found on [www.efnil.org](http://www.efnil.org) and [www.efnil.org/projects/elm](http://www.efnil.org/projects/elm).



The **Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD)** The Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is a European wide network working in the field of language policy & planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages (CRSS) across Europe. NPLD includes Governments both national and regional, Universities and Associations as its members.

NPLD's main goal is to raise awareness at a European level of the vital importance of planning for the sustainability of linguistic diversity in Europe. NPLD also aims to facilitate the exchange of best practices among governments, policy makers, practitioners, researchers and experts from all over Europe. The network also wishes to develop new practices as our understanding of how to sustain less widely used languages continues to grow. NPLD believes strongly that the European Union should invest in the future of all the languages of Europe especially in relation to the development of language related technology.

For more information on the work of NPLD go to [www.npld.eu](http://www.npld.eu).

