

## Preface

This volume contains the talks given at EFNIL's 18th annual conference that took place in Cavtat/Croatia on 6th–8th October 2021. The conference was a cooperation between the Institute for Croatian Language and Linguistics and the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL).

The theme of the conference was:

The Role of National Language Institutions in the Digital Age.

Many EFNIL institutions not only cater for the national language but also care for minority languages, regional languages, and sign languages in their country. In many cases, speakers of less frequently spoken languages do not have access to the digital services that are available to users of more widespread languages. This is a problem not only for their participation in the democratic debate and activities in their countries but also for their use of digital public services and efficient use of digital tools.

There is not a one-to-one relationship between frequently spoken languages and national languages in terms of the number of speakers. There are regional languages, Catalan for instance, that have more speakers than national languages such as Lithuanian or Icelandic, and therefore national languages, regional languages, and minority languages are facing the same challenges and need to work together.

The welcome addresses by Radovan Fuchs, Minister of Science and Education, and Nina Obuljen Koržinek, the Minister of Culture and Media, of the Republic of Croatia, both stress the importance of language for the cultural and national identity of individual countries and the cultural diversity of Europe, thereby underpinning the necessity to strengthen the digital presence of all languages on equal terms.

Fortunately, the European Commission is very well aware of the situation for less frequently spoken languages. Head of Sector Multilingualism at DG/CONNECT of the European Commission, Philippe Gelin, presented several projects such as ELRC (European Language Resource Coordination) and ELE (European Language Equality) aiming at paving the way for the inclusion of more and more languages in the digital world.

The first article in this volume describes the ELE (European Language Equality) project and its goal to achieve digital language equality for all European languages by 2030. The next two articles – on the situation for Greenlandic and the Sami languages – illustrate how difficult it is for languages with only 50,000 and 20,000 speakers, respectively, to overcome the commercially motivated barriers created by multinational companies such as Microsoft and Google. Providing

services like spell checkers or machine translation for these languages does not seem to represent a sufficiently interesting business case, and therefore they are simply ignored.

The following articles describe initiatives taken in Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Switzerland as well as the Netherlands and Belgium with regard to language resources and language technology to support language communities and ensure their prevalence in the digital sphere. They all stress the role that national institutions for language play in this context.

Finally, this volume contains a report based on a survey regarding the situation of European languages in the public space (ELIPS). The survey, which is the first of its kind in Europe, was conducted by a project group composed of EFNIL members with the aim of collecting information about how public institutions communicate with their citizens. It features an extensive analysis of the initiatives that are taken in various countries in terms of legislation, tools, methods, and best practices to improve public communication, and represents a huge pool of inspiration for everyone who is interested in creating good and clear information for all citizens. This aspect is also relevant for digital communication and language technology as experience shows that clear language and consistent terminology have a direct impact on the quality of digital tools.

We believe that this volume represents important knowledge about the digital language situation in Europe and we thank all speakers and contributors to this volume. Finally, we are deeply grateful to the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics for introducing the topic and hosting the conference.

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**Bibliographical information**

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